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Citation Details

Cross, Terry L., Pauline Jivanjee, Abby Bandurraga, Barbara J. Friesen, L. Kris Gowen, and Cori Matthew. "Native American Young People in the Transition to Adulthood: Perceptions of Challenges and Supports." The 26th Annual Children's Mental Health Research & Policy Conference, March 4, 2013, Tampa FL.

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Native American Young People in the Transition to Adulthood: Perceptions of Challenges and Supports

Terry Cross, Pauline Jivanjee, Abby Bandurraga, Barbara Friesen, Kris Gowen, Cori Mathew

26th Annual Children's Mental Health Research & Policy Conference
March 4, 2013



Overview of Presentation

- Project purposes
- Review of project context and history
- Relational WorldView (RWV) as a theoretical framework
- Phase 1 Practice-Based Evidence findings and development of the NAYA Assessment Tool (NAT)
- Phase 2 Finding Our Way study methods
- Findings: Young people's perceptions of challenges, needs, and supports
- Expansion of NAT to address transition domains
- Next steps

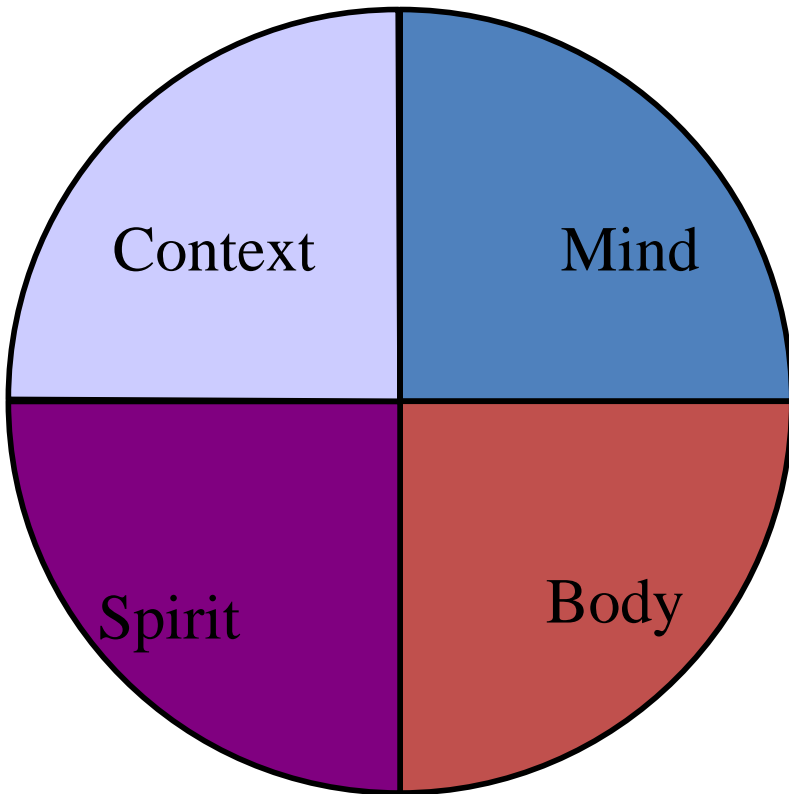


Project History

- **Phase 1: Practice-Based Evidence (PBE) (2004-09):**
 - Five-year collaborative effort between the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), and the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health (RTC); (2004-2009)
- **Purposes**
 - To develop strategies for documenting the effectiveness of NAYA’s services
 - To develop a process for conducting evaluation based on known “good outcomes” of community-based programs
 - Response to increasing state and federal requirements for using evidence-based practice

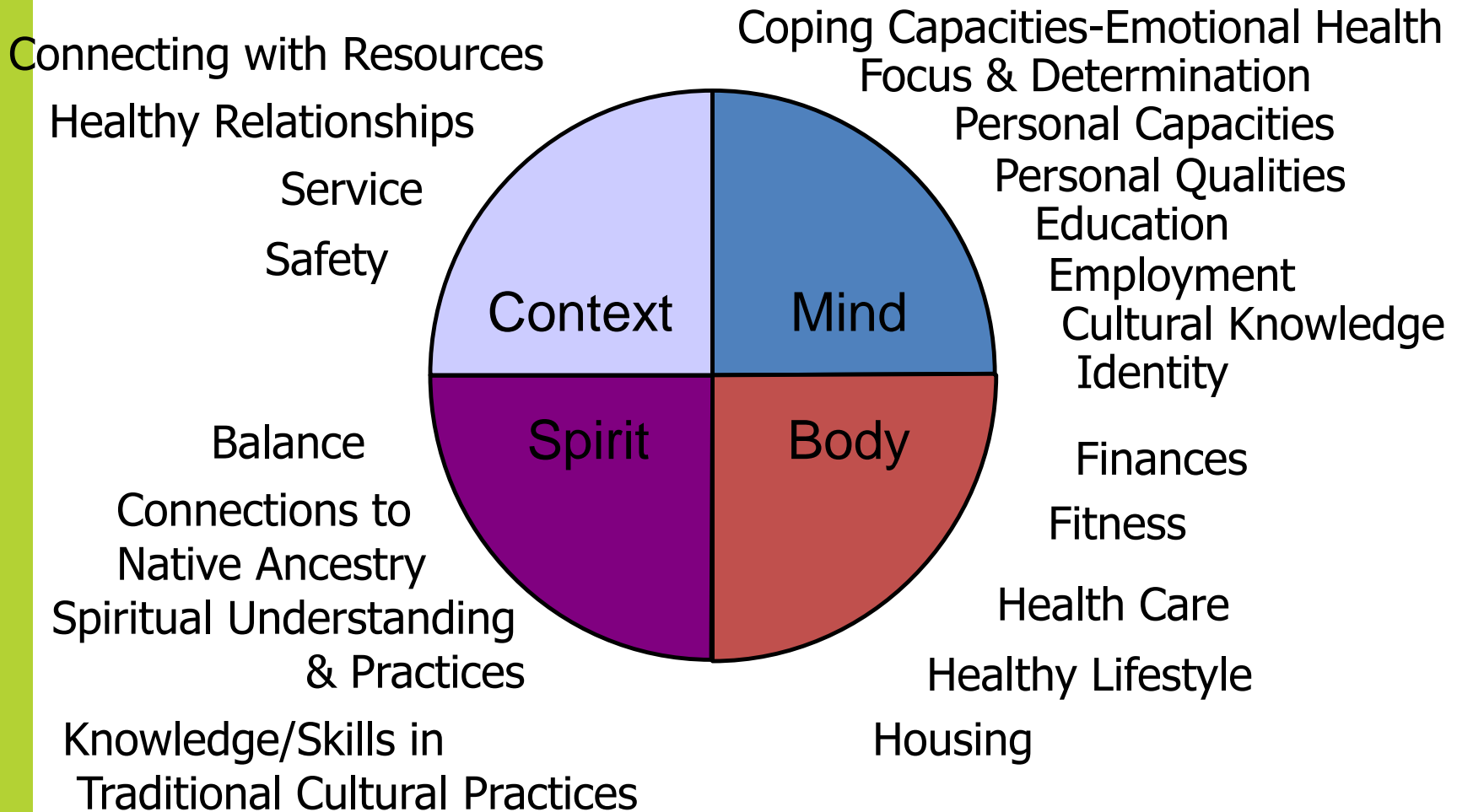


Relational Worldview as a Theoretical Framework (Cross, 1995)





Phase 1 Findings: Youth Success in the RWV Context (Cross et al., 2011)





PBE Outcomes

- Created the NAYA Assessment Tool (NAT)
 - Culturally based measures for youth assessment
 - Also can be used for program evaluation at NAYA
- Development of the NAYA Outcomes Planning Protocol (NOPP) to guide case planning
- Analyzed data from 126 youth that have taken the NAT



Examples of NAT Measures

- Community resilience
- Cultural resilience
- Individual resilience
- Relational resilience
- Community mindedness
- Depression
- Suicidality
- Substance use
- Hope
- Traditional spiritual involvement
- Participation in traditional activities



PBE Findings

- There is a ***significant relationship between strength based and cultural measures and youth risk and protective factors;***
- ***Higher scores on the strength based and cultural measures*** were associated with ***lower risk factors & increased protective factors***



PBE Findings

| Strength Measures | Alcohol use ever | Alcohol use past 30 days | Drug use ever | Depression | Suicidality | Condom use last intercourse | Substance use last intercourse |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Relational Resilience | | | Less likely | Less likely | Less likely | More likely | Less likely |
| Community Resilience | | | Less likely | | Less likely | More likely | Less likely |
| Individual Resilience | | | Less likely | | Less likely | More likely | Less likely |
| Cultural Resilience | | | | | Less likely | | |
| Hope | Less likely | Less likely | Less likely | Less likely | Less likely | More likely | Less likely |
| Feeling Calm & Peaceful | Less likely | | Less likely | Less likely | Less likely | More likely | Less likely |
| Participation in Traditional Activities | | | | | Less likely | | |



Current Status

- Phase Two: Finding Our Way (2009-present)
 - Purpose
 - To gather information about young AI/AN people's needs in the transition years
 - To adapt the NAT and NOPP to address specific transition issues
 - To develop, test, and refine training, supervision, and coaching protocols for those providing services to AI/AN youth in transition



Background

- Transition to adulthood is challenging for AI/AN youth
 - Higher rates of poverty (US Census Bureau, 2011)
 - Experience above average rates of trauma (Mmari, et al., 2010; Pavkov, et al., 2010)
 - Disproportionate representation in foster care (Bussey & Lucero, 2013)



Research Questions

- What are the transition needs and experiences of AI/AN young people with and without foster care experience and/or experience with the formal mental health system?
- What do AI/AN young people in transition see as necessary and helpful to successfully engage in adult life?



Methods: Data Collection

- Five focus groups with AI/AN youth in transition (3 groups of former foster youth and 2 groups with no foster care experience who reported experiences with mental health difficulties)
- Individual interviews with 12 youth (6 former foster youth and 6 with no foster care experience) who self-identified as having experienced mental health difficulties
- Focus groups and interviews gathered information about transition issues faced by the youth



Sample

- Focus groups, n=23
 - 12 females aged 17-22 with foster care experience.
 - 11 participants (7 males, 4 females) ages 18-23 with mental health experience.
- Individual interviews, n=10
 - 3 males and 3 females ages 19-23 with foster care experience
 - 2 males and 2 females ages 18-20 with mental health experience
- Total n=30; All youth self-identified AI/AN



Interview/Focus Group Questions

1. What were the most important things that you had to learn and think about when you were getting ready to leave school and become independent?
2. What were some positive experiences that you had as you began to become more independent?
3. What were the most difficult things that you experienced as you began to move toward living independently?



Interview/Focus Group Questions (cont'd)

4. What helped you prepare for becoming independent?
 - Who helped you?
 - What did they do?
 - What helped you the most?
 - Were there things that weren't helpful?
 - Was there help that you needed that you couldn't get?
5. What advice do you have for NAYA staff as they work to help young people prepare to transition from youth roles to independence?
6. What advice do you have for young people preparing for the transition to independent living?



Methods: Data Analysis

- Two team members analyzed focus group and individual interview notes using content analysis.
- Data sorted into RWV.
- Codes reconciled thru negotiation and reviewed by research team.
- Initial findings were reviewed with youth participants to ensure their experience is accurately reflected.

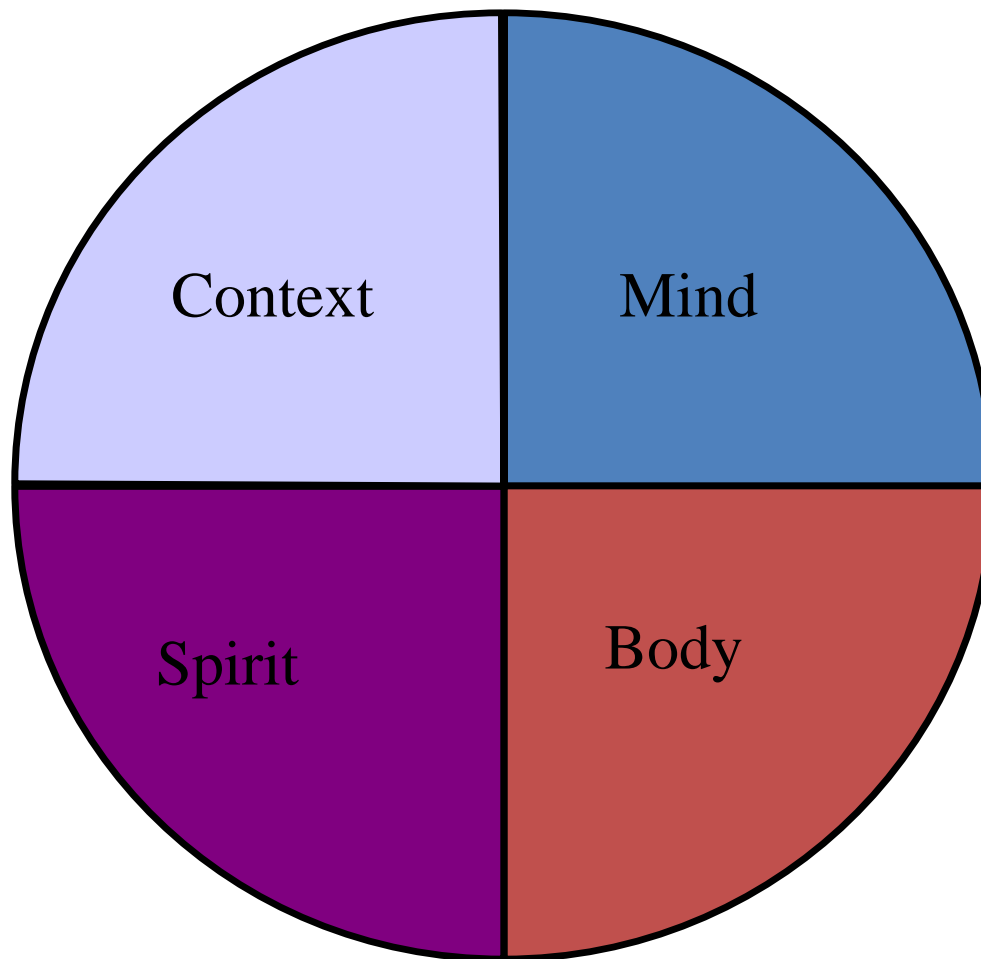


Methods: Application of Findings to Instrument Development

- Reviewed findings with NAYA staff and youth advocates/case managers.
- Identified areas of reported youth transition experience not in the NAT.
- Reviewed established culturally appropriate measures to identify items for inclusion in NAT-T (Transition)
- Identified measures with Likert scales that capture transition needs for NAT revision and added them to NAT-T.
- This presentation will focus on findings related to youth needs in the transition years.



Relational World View Model





Findings: Context

- Family’s belief in youth’s ability to succeed
 - “I wish I had more support from my parents. I wish they would have been harder on me and pushed me to stay in school.”
- Renegotiating relationships with parents (foster youth)
 - “I had to sit and think and contemplate. She’s my mother, you know, but then I was like, ‘I don’t need to listen to her putting me down and I don’t deserve that. I’m a good person. I had to decide I can either have her in my life or be happy.’”
- Parenting
 - “When you have a kid, you realize you can’t be a kid no more because you have to raise that kid into a man or woman.”
- Negotiating positive supportive relationships with peers
 - “You will have to cut people off that aren’t good for you.”



Findings: Context (cont.)

- Getting support from community
 - “If I had better guidance from an adult, I probably would have come out of the other side [of transition] a little better.”
- Consistent relationships with support professionals
 - “Not explaining [moving on] leaves kids feeling abandoned when they’ve already been abandoned.”



Findings: Mind

- Self-sufficiency/discipline/efficacy
 - “My goal is to be able to provide everything for myself. I don’t want to live off the state, live off food stamps. I just want to be able to depend on myself.”
- Self-esteem/confidence
 - “Getting a job made me more confident and less helpless. I felt more mature and responsible.”
- Feeling responsible
 - “I wanted to gain that feeling of responsibility.”
- Gender roles as a young adult
 - “My grandmother showed me what it is to be a woman and step up.”
 - “For a man, the best thing is to have a woman that cares about you.”



Findings: Mind (cont.)

- Knowledge and skill development
 - “I wish my foster parents would have made me save money, or that anybody would have made me get a bank account.”
- Help-seeking
 - “It’s a continuing challenge between how much I put on myself and when to ask for help. Like, ‘Do adults do that?’ I always have to try to balance self-sufficiency with getting help when I need it.”
- Working through fear of transition
 - “A couple of months after [moving into first apartment] it set in that I was an adult and it got scary, like ‘I can’t go back.’”



Findings: Spirit

- Balance
 - “Becoming an adult means increased freedom. Just take care of yourself. It’s scary, but if you can find a good balance between well-being, finances, and emotional self you’ll be fine.”
- Spiritual beliefs
 - “Having spiritual beliefs for me has helped out.”
- Cultural pride/connection
 - “My culture is sometimes what keeps me going.”



Findings: Body

- Basic needs
 - “It took three to four months to find place that would take the rent assistance I get.”
 - “People would say, ‘Just get a job.’ as if it was easy and you already have a bunch of applications out already.”
- Self-care
 - “Making sure you have everything you need before you get out [on your own] – but that’s hard because sometimes you don’t know what those things are in advance.”
 - I “had to find the inner strength to get sober and take care of my mental health.”



Concepts not reflected in NAT

- Parenting (Context)
- Self-sufficiency (Mind)
- Knowledge and skill development (Mind)
- Help-seeking (Mind)
- Self-care (Body)



Methods

- 13 transition related items adapted and added to NAT
 - Items converted to three point Likert-type scale (1- “Not like me;” 2- “Somewhat like me;” 3- “Very much like me”)



Examples of Items Added to NAT Transition (NAT-T)

- I know how to find out what classes I need to graduate and get the diploma I am working toward
- I talk about my education plans with teachers, employer, or counselors
- I can find financial aid resources to further my education
- I know where to find information about job training



Examples of Items Added (cont'd)

- I am able to manage my time to complete tasks (at work)
- I know how to learn about housing options and make a plan for housing (where, who I'll live with)
- I know how to do activities to reduce stress and take care of my mental health (for example, counseling, support groups, exercise and relaxation)



Next Steps

- Achieve appropriate n to assess psychometrics of NAT-T items.
- Use data collected from NAT-T to develop evidence of positive outcomes using culturally responsive interventions to support AI/AN youth in transition.
- Use data collected to drive NAYA programming.



Acknowledgement

- Thanks to our research team members, NAYA staff and community, and research participants.



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The development of the contents of this presentation were supported by funding from the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, United States Department of Education, and the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDRR grant H133B090019). The content does not represent the views or policies of the funding agencies. In addition, you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

