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Fourth R: Uniting our Nations Case Study

Lessons learned from adaptation and implementation in Ontario
and the Northwest Territories

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2015





The Fourth R

Strategies for Healthy
Youth Relationships

Healthy Relationships, Safe Choices, Connected Youth

Promoting healthy youth relationships by building the capacity of schools and communities through innovative programming, research, education and consultation.

The Fourth R was developed as a partnership between David Wolfe, Claire Crooks, Ray Hughes and Peter Jaffe

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Glossary of Acronyms

Term	Acronym
Canadian Centre for Addictions and Mental Health	CAMH
Educational Reform Initiative	ERI
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit	FNMI
Memorandum of Understanding	MOU
Public Health Agency of Canada	PHAC
Randomized Control Trial	RCT
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration	SAMSHA
Thames Valley District School Board	TVDSB

Glossary of Terms

Aboriginal and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI): For the purpose of this report, the term Aboriginal refers to peoples who identify as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI). The term Aboriginal will be used interchangeably with the term FNMI, which is a preferred umbrella term in Ontario. The author acknowledges that these terms fail to convey the diversity within these groups and among communities and individuals and to reflect how many distinct groups choose to identify themselves (E.g. Cree, Algonquin, Haudenosaunee, etc.). Therefore both terms are only used for accessibility purposes.

At-risk and risk behaviours: For the purpose of this report, the term “at-risk” refers to individuals who are likelier to engage in “risk behaviours” or behaviours that put individuals at risk of danger or harm, including: unhealthy relationships, substance use and abuse, and violence. Unhealthy relationships are characterized by the presence of unprotected or unconsensual sexual activities as well as sexual, emotional, psychological, and/or physical violence, including bullying. Substance use and abuse is characterized by the consumption and irresponsible use of drugs and alcohol. Violence refers to sexual, emotional, psychological, and/or physical violence, including bullying and self-harm, and/or suicidal ideations and behaviour. Additionally, mental health issues, criminal activity, and skipping school are risk behaviours. Importantly, individuals are not inherently ‘at-risk’. Rather, environmental factors, such as intergenerational trauma and the social determinants of health, tend to put individuals ‘at-risk’ or make them vulnerable in this regard.

Vulnerable: For the purpose of this report, the term “vulnerable” refers to individuals and/or groups who are susceptible to these at-risk behaviours, due to historical and socio-economic context. For example, Aboriginal youth are considered a vulnerable population because of socio-economic disadvantages they generally experience (compared with the non-Aboriginal population), due to trauma related to historic and ongoing colonization.

Positive functioning: For the purpose of this report, the term “positive functioning” refers to the exhibiting of positive behaviours, including engaging in healthy relationships, avoiding substance use and abuse, and refraining from violence as well as coping constructively with mental health issues, refraining from criminal activity, and attending and engaging in school.

Protective impact: For the purpose of this report, the term “protective impact” refers to factors that protect vulnerable individuals or groups from engaging in risk behaviours.

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Introduction

Background and Overview

Context

In 2001, the Fourth R team in London, Ontario began working with educational and community partners to enhance evidence-based programming for youth. The purpose of the general Fourth R program is to promote healthy relationships and decision-making skills for youth, and to decrease violence and other related risk behaviours. However, although it was developed to be a universal prevention program, it became apparent to educators that the general program did not engage and support Aboriginal youth to the same extent as it did non-Aboriginal youth. Clearly, more tailored programming was required. As a result of the socio-economic, educational, and health gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada that have emerged from colonization (Longboat, 2012; Sisco, 2010), a greater proportion of Aboriginal youth tend to be at-risk of a range of negative academic, social, and emotional wellbeing outcomes than the general youth population in Canada. In 2010 the Fourth R team received Innovation Strategy funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, in part to further develop and expand their programming for FNMI youth.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to describe the process by which the Fourth R enhanced its programming for implementation in Ontario and the Northwest Territories and share some of the lessons learned as well as implications for policy makers.

Methodology

A case study summative evaluation was used as a methodology for this project. The specific methods included a literature review and interviews, focus groups, and surveys with a variety of participants, including: youth program participants, leaders, and regional site coordinators; educators and educational administrators; steering committee members; and policy makers. Member checking was used to ensure accuracy of data collected. A mixed methods approach (using both qualitative and quantitative methods) was used to collect rich data and capture nuance. Data were analyzed using basic statistical analysis and thematic content analysis.

Outline

This report includes two parts. Part one provides an overview of the enhancement process in Ontario and the Northwest Territories, including some of the key challenges and successes. Part two discusses the lessons learned and implications for policy makers and program implementers.



Figure 1. FNMI Graphic for TVDSB school board created by FNMI Student Advisory committee members.

Part I

About the Fourth R

Description

The Fourth R is a school-based, universal program that teaches relationship skills similar to the way in which the other “three R’s” (Reading, ‘Riting’, and ‘Rithmetic’) are taught. The Fourth R is comprised of three units to address personal safety and violence, substance use, and healthy sexuality/sexual behavior. The core grade 9 version includes a 21-lesson, skill-based curriculum that promotes healthy relationships and targets violence and other risk behaviors among adolescents as well as extensions for other grade levels, curriculum areas, and special populations (see Crooks, Wolfe, Hughes, Jaffe, & Chiodo, 2008 for descriptions).

Evidence base

The original grade 9 version of the Fourth R has been rigorously evaluated¹ and found to increase positive functioning and reduce risk behaviour. Following intervention, students in the Fourth R demonstrated increased relationship and peer resistance skills (e.g., negotiation, delay and communication) compared to their peers (Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, Hughes, and Ellis, 2012). In addition, post-test results demonstrated that the program provided a protective impact for vulnerable youth at the school level; that is, the relationship between multiple experiences of child maltreatment and engaging in violent delinquency was greatly reduced among youth in Fourth R schools (Crooks, Scott, Ellis, & Wolfe, 2011; Crooks, Scott, Wolfe, Chiodo, & Killip, 2007). During the two-year follow-up, Fourth R students reported

¹ The Fourth R was evaluated with a cluster randomized controlled trial involving youth in 20 schools. The research team followed up with more than 1700 students 2.5 years after the intervention.

lower rates of dating violence (Wolfe et al, 2009). Moreover, educators reported that the program was easy to implement and beneficial to students and themselves (Crooks et al., 2008; 2013). Most recently, a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) of the grade 8 program with students from 57 schools in Saskatchewan demonstrated that younger students also benefit from developmentally appropriate Fourth R programming, showing increased knowledge, critical thinking about the impact of violence on others, and increased healthy coping strategies (Crooks, Scott, Hughes, Zwarych & Wolfe, 2014).

On the basis of this evidence, the Fourth R has been identified as an effective practice on the Public Health Agency of Canada’s Best Practice Portal (<http://cbpp-pcpe.phacaspc.gc.ca/intervention/617/view-eng.html>). It is also considered a promising practice on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (www.nrepp.samsha.gov). Currently, some version of the Fourth R program is in more than 4,500 schools in Canada and the United States.

Programming for Aboriginal youth

In 2004, educators with the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) in Ontario identified a need to make the program more culturally relevant for Aboriginal youth, the importance of which is well documented (CCL 2007; CCL 2009; Longboat, 2012). Providing culturally relevant experiences are important to intervention effectiveness in general and also to fostering enculturation (cultural connectedness) among First Nations youth as a unique protective factor (CCL, 2009;

Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Longboat, 2012; Mussell, Cardiff, & White, 2004; Pridemore, 2004).

Between 2007 and 2009 the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) conducted extensive research that showed Aboriginal peoples learn differently than non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Table 3 illustrates some of the differences between Aboriginal and Western approaches to learning.

The impacts of colonization, especially residential schools, and the resulting gaps in emotional well-being and academic outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth has underscored the need for enhanced, culturally relevant programming that meets Aboriginal students' needs. Furthermore, the provision of culturally relevant educational experiences is a major goal

of many provincial and territorial policy frameworks (see for example, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007 and Government of the Northwest Territories, 2013).

While the Fourth R team acknowledges that it cannot provide (an) Aboriginal perspective(s) within the context of a Western based education system, it has tried to incorporate the components of "Aboriginal Learning" listed in Table 1 into its Fourth R programming for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students in close collaboration with its partners.

Table 1. Aboriginal vs. Western Approaches to Learning.

Aboriginal Learning	Western Education
Conceptualized and monitored as a lifelong process	Conceptualized and monitored as distinct stages (primary, secondary, post-secondary) attached to chronological age
Experiential	Classroom-based
Rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures	Rooted in Western languages and cultures
Spiritually oriented	Mentally oriented
Communal	Individual student and peer
Integrates Aboriginal and Western knowledge	Focuses on Western knowledge
Strength based approach to Aboriginal learning	Deficit based approach to Aboriginal learning
Accounts for social, economic and political realities	Does not account for social, economic and political realities

Adapted from Canadian Council on Learning. (2007). *Redefining How Success Is Measured In First Nations, Inuit And Métis Learning*. http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/RedefiningSuccess/Redefining_How_Success_Is_Measured_EN.pdf

Enhancement Process Overview

Enhancement of Fourth R to Aboriginal youth

In 2004, the Fourth R, Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), and its community partners—the Oneida Nation of the Thames, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and the Munsee-Delaware First Nation— began working together to enhance Fourth R programming to meet the unique needs of FNMI youth in the TVDSB system. TVDSB is a large board that includes 55 schools and 75,000 students located in London, Ontario (population 350,000) and the large surrounding rural area. Youth from the three community partner First Nations typically attend school in their own community until either grade 6 or grade 8, depending which elementary school they attend, and are then bussed into London to finish their schooling.

The Fourth R team identified the need for specific, culturally relevant Fourth R programming to meet the unique needs of FNMI youth. In 2004, the

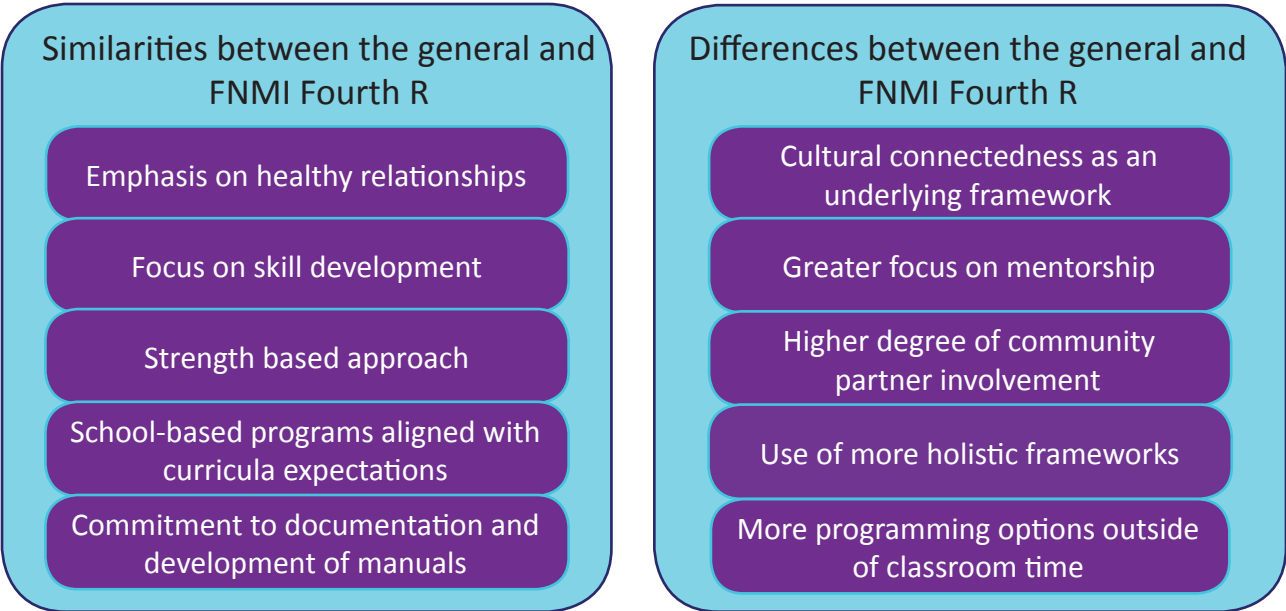
Fourth R began working with the TVDSB and its community partners to adapt Fourth R programming for FNMI youth in the TVDSB system.

The Fourth R team identified four core principles to guide the enhancement and expansion of Fourth R programming to meet the unique needs of FNMI youth. These include:

1. Utilizing a strengths-based approach.
2. Partnering closely with the school board and FNMI community partners.
3. Focusing on program expansion (to enhance beyond adapting the program curriculum).
4. Ensuring all programming reflects the key themes of a focus on healthy relationship development, mentoring, and the provision of culturally relevant experiences.

Figure 2 conveys some of the differences and similarities between general and FNMI Fourth R programming.

Figure 2. Comparison of general and FNMI Fourth R programming.



Uniting Our Nations: Ontario



Figure 3. FNMI Students at an Ontario secondary school with a painting of the three local First Nations communities.

Overview of program development and expansion

In 2005, the Fourth R partnered with TVDSB on a project to improve the relevancy of the Fourth R curriculum by developing FNMI youth-created role-play videos of their realities. The 23 FNMI youth involved in this project established the name “Uniting our Nations”, which has become the umbrella term for FNMI specific Fourth R programming. At the request of Aboriginal youth participants, some of their subsequent projects included non-Aboriginal youth as well.

Since then, the Fourth R has worked with the TVDSB and community partners to develop a range of program components based on the aforementioned core principles but that differ in duration, target group, and setting to suit various needs. For example, some schools offer peer

mentoring, a credit-based leadership course, and a small group program, while other schools might only provide the opportunity for their FNMI youth to attend the transition conference.

Programming was designed to cover a range of years on either side of the transition to secondary school and accommodate the varied backgrounds of youth, from community schools to urban settings. Figure 4 (on page 10) indicates a range of programming that was developed continuously between 2005 and 2011.

Format and content enhancements

The enhancement process included significant format and content changes to the original Fourth R program. Foremost, the program has expanded to include new models of programming, beyond

the original Fourth R classroom-based curriculum. These include Cultural Leadership Camp, Transition Conferences, and Mentoring programs (Elementary Mentoring Program, Peer Mentoring Program for Secondary Students, and Cultural Leadership Program, and FNMI Student Advisory Committee) (See Appendix B for descriptions). This section will first discuss format (storytelling and sharing circles, community inclusion, and mentoring) and content enhancements (cultural, historical, and contemporary context; student voice; and focus on strengths) broadly and then outline enhancements within the specific components of the Uniting Our Nations – Ontario program.

Format enhancements include:

- **Flexible**
- **Holistic**
- **Culturally appropriate teaching methods**
- **Community inclusion**
- **Mentoring**

Content enhancements include:

- **Cultural, historical, and contemporary content**
- **Student voice and leadership**
- **Focus on strengths**

Flexible

The Fourth R Uniting Our Nations is designed to enhance the experience of FNMI students. Therefore, in recognition that FNMI students have competing demands and unique challenges, many of these programs are offered as course credits (i.e. Aboriginal-informed Curriculum, Elementary Mentoring Program, and Cultural Leadership Course). This provides students with greater flexibility, as it does not require that they spend more time outside of their other courses.

Holistic approach

Uniting Our Nations uses a holistic model in its approach to content. For example, the medicine wheel is often used as a framework for explaining the emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental aspects of healthy youth development and relationships, with an emphasis on sexual decisions and substance use.

Culturally appropriate teaching methods

Uniting Our Nations uses culturally appropriate teaching methods within the program. For example, the Elementary Mentoring Program begins with a local storyteller sharing the Creation Story. Within the Aboriginal Perspectives Fourth R course, a narrative called Jana’s Story follows the challenges and resiliency of a young woman facing family, school, and systemic challenges. The story is broken into mini-chapters with discussion questions focused on the choices and challenges Jana faces at each step. In addition to written format, the story is available as an audio track of oral narrative dictated by a Fourth R First Nations Research Assistant. Teaching methods have been adapted to include the use of sharing circles, which provide a culturally relevant means to facilitate discussion.

“They told us about how there are four things: spiritual, mental, physical and emotional. As I started thinking about that it kinda told me to do things differently. So I was thinking if I can get my grades up that can help me mentally and if I can exercise that will help me physically and spiritually and everything, I can try to get it to a higher level” – Interview, female grade 8 student, Ontario, 2012

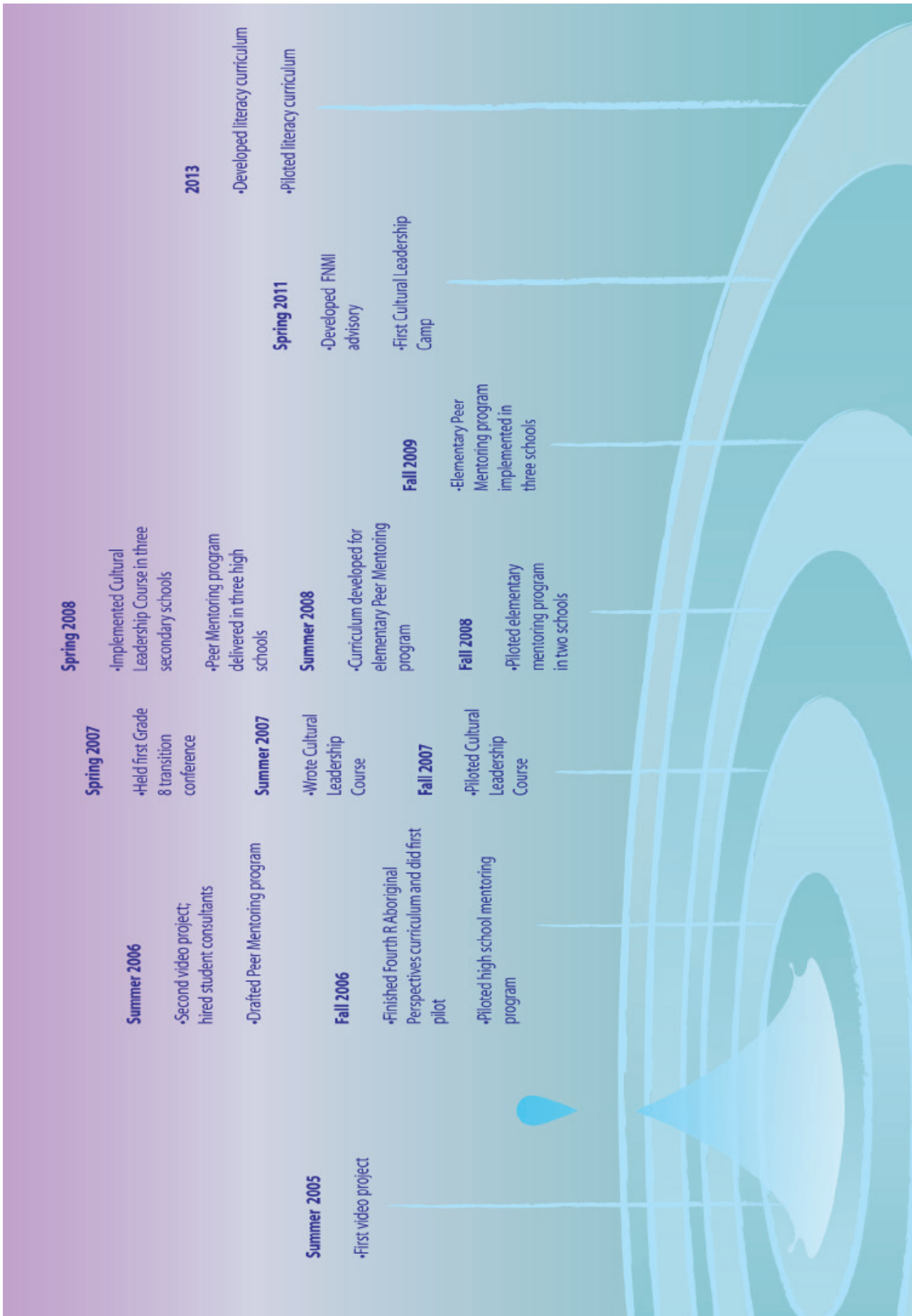


Figure 4. Timeline of program enhancement and implementation in Ontario. (Illustration by Jenny Kassen, 2014)



Figure 5. FNMI peer mentors on peer mentoring training day.

Community inclusion

The program has also been enriched by the inclusion of community members who share their teachings and experience in culturally relevant ways. Community members are invited into the Aboriginal Perspectives (Grade 9) course and Elders, community leaders, and academic experts are invited to share traditional and contemporary teachings at the Cultural Leadership Camp. Previous guests spoke to campers about traditional medicines, discussed personal cultural identity, shared traditional drum making, and lead a drum waking ceremony. Community partners are also an important part of the Transition Conferences.

Mentoring

The overarching emphasis on mentoring represents another format change. Mentoring is a culturally appropriate and effective way to support healthy relationship development for First Nations youth (Klinck et al., 2005). Although peer and adult mentors may play different roles, both

are recognized as protective influences in the lives of youth (LaFromboise et al., 2006; Pridemore, 2004). The Fourth R's FNMI student participants and community and education partners have identified the importance of FNMI youth being connected to role models that share a common cultural background. FNMI students have also identified benefits from mentoring other students.

"... you can see kids from your community in leadership positions and that's very powerful. You see amazing leadership, you see some articulate students at the secondary level going off to college and university with high aspirations and those kids have had those mentors through grade 8 up through high school and you can see that it builds confidence and capacity"— Interview, female educator, 2012

Cultural, historical, and contemporary content

Content enhancements to the Fourth R's Uniting Our Nations, include cultural teachings, traditions, historical context, and content that reflects the realities of many FNMI youth. The Elementary Mentoring Program is now based upon the local founding teachings of the Medicine Wheel, Great Law of Peace, and Seven Grandfathers. In Uniting Our Nations' Aboriginal-informed curriculum (Grade 9), intergenerational trauma, socio-economic, and health related trends among FNMI peoples are explained in the context of colonial history. For example, the risk behaviors observed in many FNMI communities are explained as a result of intergenerational trauma due to residential schools experience. The Fourth R includes suicide prevention and safety planning in this course as well, although it is not an official curriculum topic under the Ontario Department of Education guidelines until grade 11. Moreover, the Fourth R has developed a transition conference and focused on grade mentoring 7 and 8 students for its Elementary Mentoring Program to assist FNMI students to transition from elementary to high school, which remains a challenging time for many FNMI students during which they are vulnerable to negative influences. This transition is especially challenging for students moving from an elementary school in a rural First Nations community to an urban secondary school.

"It feels like I can tell them anything. It feels like they understand what I am trying to say and if it's about my culture then they will know what I am trying to say." — Interview, female grade 8 student on peer mentoring, Ontario, 2012

Student voice and leadership

Uniting Our Nations Content has also been informed by student input. For example, the themes covered in other Fourth R programs (E.g. bullying, dating violence, and peer pressure, etc.,) were included in the Uniting Our Nations role-playing video. However, FNMI youth also provided additional themes reflecting their experience, including poverty and racism experienced by FNMI students on the part of non-FNMI students and teachers as well as their community peers in relation to relationships with non-FNMI people.

The program also expanded to include an FNMI Student Advisory Committee composed of FNMI student (Grade 10-12 plus) representatives of TVDSB schools who apply (or are nominated by peers and teachers) to participate annually. Every year, this group assumes a leadership role in developing and implementing a major project related to FNMI programming. FNMI youth mentors have also given speeches at Grade 8 FNMI Transition Conferences to support younger students in overcoming some of the challenges involved with the elementary to secondary school transition.

Strength-based approach

A strength-based approach is part of all Fourth R programming, which has been adapted to a culturally relevant context and incorporated into the Uniting Our Nations Program. The adapted Aboriginal Perspectives (Grade 9) and Transition Conferences curricula address important issues with a resiliency lens; students are encouraged to identify individual and community strengths within their cultural framework that will support them in making healthy choices. The FNMI Literacy Curriculum also takes a strength-based approach in providing FNMI materials to encourage literacy among students in preparation for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

Evaluation in Ontario

Program evaluation has been undertaken in two phases. The Fourth R conducted phase one during the first five years of program implementation. Phase one included stakeholder (youth, educators, and administrators) feedback on the feasibility and success of the program in meeting stakeholder needs (Crooks, 2008). The results were generally positive with some suggestions for enhancements (Ibid). Phase two was conducted once the program stabilized and included an evaluation of youth engagement metrics, based on identifying behavioural, cognitive, and attitudinal indicators of youth in administrative data (e.g., retention rates in programs, academic success in specific courses) and program feedback data (e.g., pre- and post surveys from transition conferences, administrative feedback and data, etc.) (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes). The third phase is underway; the Fourth R team is analysing data from a longitudinal study of FNMI Fourth R programming in Ontario to evaluate the role of the programming in helping FNMI students to adjust across the transition from elementary to secondary school.

Successes

The results to date indicate four findings:

1. Programming was perceived to contribute to student success.
2. Participants experienced improved relationships, and an increased sense of belonging.
3. Participants gained confidence and leadership skills.
4. The provision of culturally relevant experiences and role models was key to program success.

Challenges

Successes notwithstanding, there were also challenges, including:

- High level of involvement required to sustain some of the programs (e.g. participant recruitment, obtaining parental consent, and logistics for off-site activities).
- External challenges, such as labour disruptions in the educational system, changes in funding programs, and level of administrator support within a particular school.

Although creating culturally relevant teaching materials is an important part of the Uniting Our Nations strategy, good materials alone do not guarantee implementation and sustainability. The first enhancement to the Fourth R grade 9 program was an Anishinabe-informed version developed in partnership with local educators and youth and reviewed by numerous experts and knowledge holders. It was implemented in an alternative education setting and was highly successful in engaging the students. The educator who implemented the program was a member of the Fourth R team who was dynamic and respectful, and had a deep appreciation of the benefit of providing culturally relevant opportunities to youth who feel disenfranchised. During a focus group, students described the program as engaging and relevant and were able to provide concrete examples of using the interpersonal skills they had learned. Although this pilot was a success when staffed by a partner organization, educators and administrators chose not to implement it as an integrated program within the school system.

Uniting Our Nations: Northwest Territories

Overview of development and expansion of program

In 2010, the Fourth R partnered with the Yellowknife Catholic Schools and their community partners in the Tlicho Region of the Northwest Territories to adapt the Fourth R's Uniting Our Nations Program to the Dene context through classroom-based, wholly teacher-facilitated programming. The program's success has led to expanded uptake. The initial intention was to adapt the Grade 9 program to include a Dene perspective. However, the grade 9 program enhancement was so successful in the Northwest Territories that the grades 7 and 8 programs have also been adapted and scaled up more quickly than anticipated. Educators and student participants throughout the region have now been trained. Moreover, the Fourth R team's involvement in policy-related activities at the school district and government levels has created a strong foundation for the programming to be sustained as part of the division and territorial mandate.

The enhancement process has been iterative in the Northwest Territories. The first pilot of the Dene-informed Grade 9 program emphasized incorporating relevant frameworks, such as the Dene Laws of Living (compared to the Seven Grandfather teachings that had been used in Southwestern Ontario). As the program was further utilized, smaller revisions were added, such as modifications to the role-play scenarios to enhance its cultural relevancy. Currently, the Fourth R is working with youth and other partners to create videos demonstrating the various relationship and communication skills taught in the program.

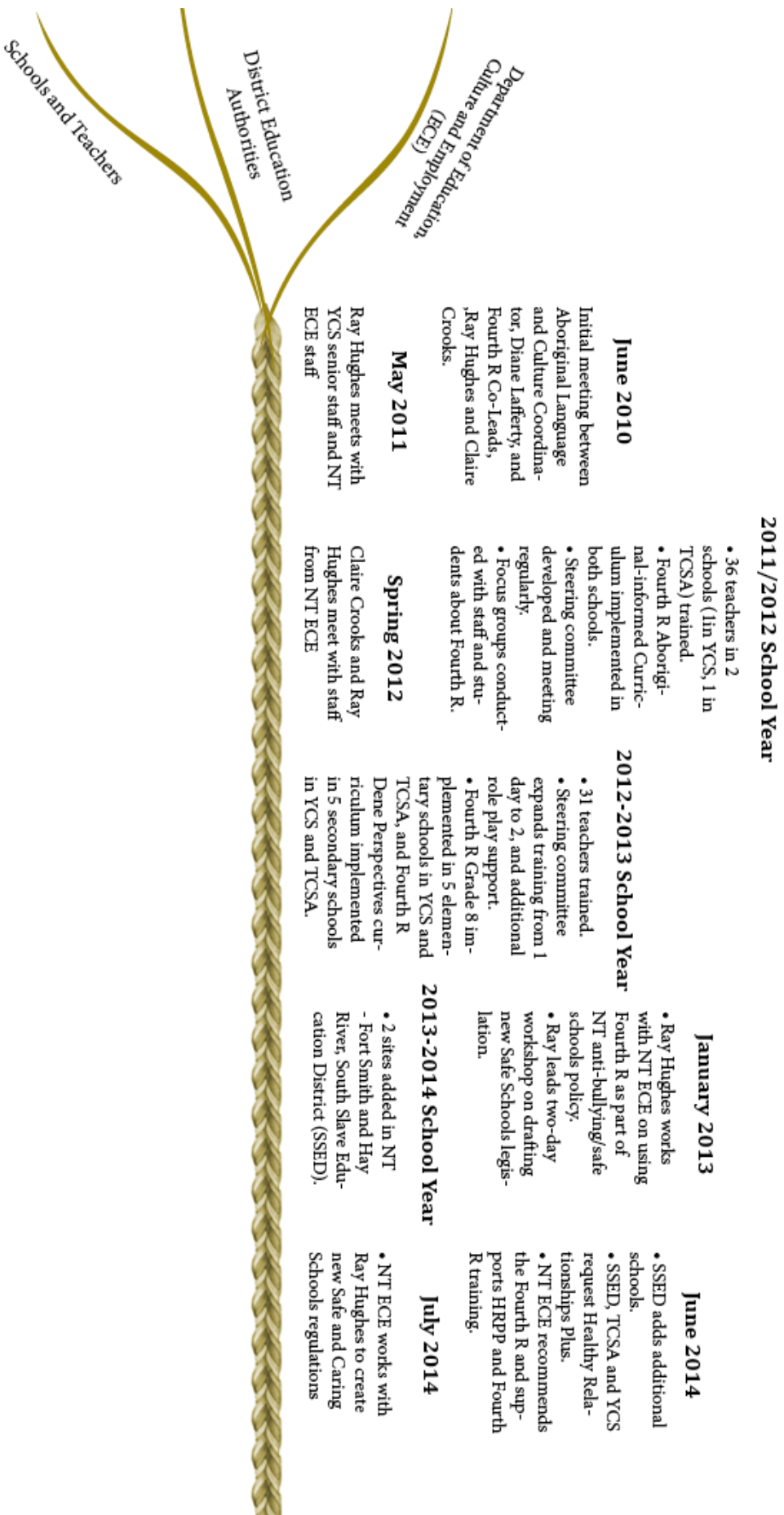
In addition to making revisions to enhance the cultural relevancy of the program, revisions were made for particular target groups. For example,

in the Tlicho region the program is being offered universally (i.e., to all youth in a particular class) during regular scheduling in schools. Conversely, Yellowknife Catholic Schools chose to incorporate the Fourth R into their specialized programming for highly vulnerable youth, many of whom have experienced multiple traumas, a high number of current life stressors, and vulnerability from pre-natal exposure to drugs and alcohol. An additional round of revisions and modifications was required for the version used with this latter group to address extremely low literacy levels, cognitive challenges, and the greater likelihood of triggering trauma. (See figure 6)

In 2010, the Fourth R began the Northwest Territories Uniting Our Nations video projects with schools in two communities: 1) Behchoko, and 2) Fort Smith. The video process included three parts. In part one, students learned passive, assertive, and aggressive communication styles. In part two, students learned negotiation skills, including: delaying, refusal, and negotiation. In part three, students worked on role-playing scenarios demonstrating the different communication and negotiation styles in response to peer pressure from a friend or relative, corresponding with three themes: 1) healthy relationships, 2) violence, and 3) substance abuse.

In Behchoko, the Fourth R provided one full day of training to the program teachers to support them in facilitating the role-plays and enlisted an Aboriginal videographer and director. Once trained, teachers showed 12 Aboriginal students (male and female) in grades 9-12 role-play videos from Ontario. Pairs of students developed role-play scenarios that reflected their realities, which included better cultural knowledge and higher risk behaviours at younger ages; they did not see themselves or their communities reflected in the Ontario videos.

Figure 6. Timeline of program enhancement and implementation in the Northwest Territories. (Illustration by Jamie Duncan, 2014)



In Fort Smith, this same process of teacher training and facilitation of role-play videos was followed with a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (male and female) in grades 9-12. Students developed role-play scenarios that reflected their realities, which included more overt racism and different support services. Beyond the benefits Fourth R students would experience upon viewing these videos, students who participated in developing the videos and their communities expressed pride at the video screening.

Evaluation in Northwest Territories

To date, the evaluation of the Northwest Territories Uniting Our Nations has been more developmental, as it is a younger program. Research methods conducted by the Fourth R, include focus groups with youth (n=82); focus groups and interviews with educators (n = 4); focus group with NT steering committee members; educator/facilitator implementation surveys and tracking sheets for each implementation; interviews with, and semi-annual reports from, Regional Site Coordinator in Yellowknife; interviews with ECE (n=3); and informal surveys and interviews educators and administrators who ordered programming (n=5). This developmental evaluation has highlighted benefits similar to those documented with the research in Ontario. Planning for a more formal evaluation is underway.

Successes

Successes of the program, included:

- Greater ownership and autonomy over the programming.
- Adaptability of strategies.
- Provision of additional teacher training to build specific skills (facilitation of role playing).
- Enhancement of the program to address population's literacy, cognitive challenges, and trauma.
- Provision of additional training and support via conference call and/or webinar to support

teachers in remote communities.

- Planning for annual training opportunities and training more community partners and administrators to increase program awareness and support, despite high teacher turnover.

"[I] think they developed a vocabulary—or comfort and ability to be able to talk about those issues"— Interview, female educator, Northwest Territories, 2014

"[I] think it really meets their needs when they see Aboriginal youth involved in the filming, not just some random actor kid from Toronto...bringing their issues to them created by them for them is huge – don't know how you could possibly do that any better...having the faces of our youth, with their issues, to be used in the community is hugely important for our youth"— Interview, female educator, Northwest Territories, 2014

Challenges

Successes notwithstanding, there are ongoing challenges, including:

- Community stressors.
- High level of need experienced by many of the youth, particularly in the specialized resiliency program in Yellowknife catholic schools (Lafferty, 2013) .
- Different levels of literacy, cognitive challenges, and trauma in the population.
- Need for development of comprehensive adapted version of programming for the Northwest Territories that includes all Aboriginal groups.

- Lack of buy in among small few, due to residential school experience, poor reception of previous programming in schools, and perception that cultural relevance could impede educational preparation for postsecondary.
- Teachers not feeling comfortable implementing role plays.
- Challenges associated with writing cultural information down.
- Logistical challenges with respect to supporting educators in remote communities.
- High educator turnover.



Figure 7. FNMI Fourth R students in the Northwest Territories.

Summary of ON and NT indicators of success

The two case studies collectively provide the following indicators of success:

- Breadth and expansion of programs.
- High level of student and community engagement and pride.
- Systematic partnership with stakeholders on program development and training and high stakeholder satisfaction and perceived benefit.
- Alignment of the Fourth R with provincial and territorial policy frameworks.
- Student success, as perceived by students, educators, and administrators.
- Increased confidence, leadership skills, and sense of belonging among participants as well as improved relationships among participants.

Part II

Lessons and Recommendations

This section provides effective practices as well as policy and program recommendations, based on lessons learned from the Ontario and Northwest Territories Uniting Our Nations case studies. These are summarized in Table 3 in Appendix C.

Effective Practices for Program Enhancement and Implementation

Effective practices for Fourth R Uniting Our Nations program enhancement and implementation include an approach that:

1. Is relationship based
2. Embeds cultural connectedness
3. Aligns with existing policy frameworks
4. Is flexible
5. Is iterative
6. Provides ongoing, differentiated, culturally appropriate, and 'two-way' training
7. Involves ongoing sustainability planning

“What really won me over when I started working with Fourth R is that they were open. They were open to learning and I think that when they first start getting into it I imagine that they were a probably typical western researchers and not really knowing yet ... I think the real strength from the Fourth R and the Fourth R team is that they recognize that there are greater compelling issues and that they need to re-frame their thinking”—Interview, male community advisor, Ontario, 2012

1. Relationship based

Foremost, the Fourth R is largely successful because of the very thing it seeks to support among youth – relationships. The commensurability of a world-view that centralizes relational knowing with a relationships-based program creates an environment conducive to successful programming for FNMI youth. Specifically, it is important for program providers to develop relationships with and foster relationships among other program providers, schools, school boards, ministries, policy makers, student participants, and communities.

Keys to maintaining strong positive relationships, based on trust, include:

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all partners using MOUs and other working documents to provide clarity and flexibility.
- Expecting and acknowledging differences in mandates and priorities among partners and collaboratively developing solutions.
- Providing ongoing, timely, accessible, and relevant feedback to partners to allow all parties to provide input and ensure research is mutually beneficial to all parties.
- Staffing intentionally – hiring and retaining passionate, competent, and committed educators, including FNMI educators, who can establish and maintain relationships with teachers and students.
- Partnering with people who are well connected with the communities involved in the program to ensure high community engagement and dissemination of information that will support the program’s success.

Recommendations for policy makers:

- Create a policy framework founded on strong partnerships among FNMI communities, school boards, schools, and students and based on collaborative program development, implementation, and evaluation.
- Maintain close, ongoing connections with the various communities under the influence of policies created.
- Provide resources for communication, feedback, and participatory development of policy.

Recommendations for program implementers:

- Encourage an environment that fosters strong, positive partnerships among stakeholders in FNMI education.
- Maintain consistent communication with all implementation stakeholders including FNMI communities, policy makers, school districts, schools, teachers, and participants through informal and formal processes.

2. Embeds cultural connectedness

Cultural connectedness is central to the Fourth R's Uniting Our Nations programming. The Fourth R incorporated culture-enhancing activities into the programming through promoting relationships with other FNMI youth and adults. According to interview participants (FNMI youth, educators, administrators and community members) this is an important aspect of the program. For example, the holistic concept of the Medicine Wheel resonated with FNMI students. One student explained how the cultural knowledge she gained motivated her to make positive changes. For other youth, participating in culture-enhancing activities increased a sense of connectedness to peers and the community. Culture-enhancing activities can enhance bi-cultural competence and cultural pride among FNMI

youth as well as help them to reconnect with protective influences. A lack of bi-cultural competence in Aboriginal youth is linked with a rejection of Western institutions that provide important skills and opportunities for youth, such as schools, which are seen as a threat to cultural identity.

“Being open to challenging myself physically and being able to connect with my culture through smudging and the drum creation made me want to know more about our ancestry. I do not want to lose some valuable traditions for the future because I did not bother to learn them and the FNMI [Facebook] group that spiraled from this camp is proof that I’m not the only city Native who wants the same” – Survey, female grade 12 student, Ontario, 2012

Recommendations for policy makers:

- Incorporate the goals of inclusivity and cultural affirmation into policy frameworks.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to develop culturally sensitive materials, curricula, and institutions.
- Provide resources and plan to ensure program implementers understand the requirements of policy.

Recommendations for program implementers:

- Facilitate a culturally inclusive and affirming atmosphere.
- Recognize and work to counter colonizing tendencies of educational institutions and curriculum.
- Encourage participant ownership of education and collaboration in developing educational materials and experiences.

3. Aligns with existing policy frameworks

Alignment with existing policy frameworks and policies was also an important factor in successful enhancement and implementation of the Fourth R Uniting our Nations program in Ontario and the Northwest Territories. Specifically, the program aligns with the Ontario Ministry of Education's Policy Framework for FNMI Education's commitment to FNMI student success through its policy statement:

- Increase its capacity of the education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of...[FNMI]...students.
- Provide quality programs, services and resources to help create learning opportunities for...[FNMI]...students that support improved academic achievement and identity building.
- Provide a curriculum that facilitates learning about contemporary and traditional... [FNMI]...cultures, histories, and perspectives among all students and that also contributes to the education of school board staff, teachers, and elected trustees.
- Develop and implement strategies that implement increased participation by...[FNMI]...parents, students, and communities in working to support success.

The program is well aligned with the Northwest Territories Education Renewal Innovation (ERI) and Safe Schools policy framework, which, like the Fourth R's Uniting Our Nations, is based on relationships, identity, learning together (relationship-based learning), diversity, and strength and growth. In fact, the Fourth R has become influential to the way in which ERI has been developed and implemented, as the government of Northwest Territories works closely with the Fourth R in this regard.



Figure 8. FNMI Student Advisory Committee celebration day.

Recommendations for policy makers:

- Ensure accessibility of policies regarding FNMI education.
- Create policies designed to align with culturally adaptive mechanisms in place.

Recommendations for program implementers:

- Stay informed of policies affecting the delivery of curriculum.
- Participate and communicate with policy makers when developing programming.

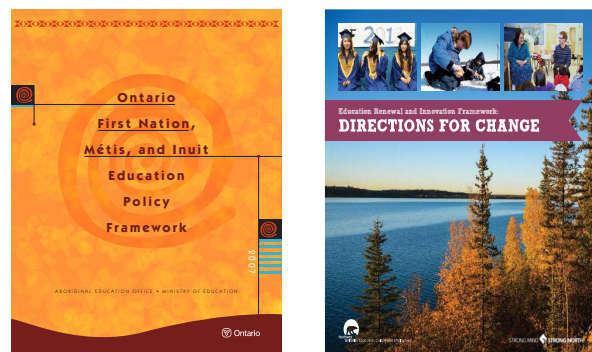


Figure 9. Existing policy frameworks in Ontario and the Northwest Territories

“...[P]art of ERI and Safe Schools is really strongly based on relationships. That’s our number 1 foundational statement for Education Renewal [Initiative] is relationships”—Interview, female policy maker, 2014

4. Flexible

The Fourth R Uniting Our Nations Program was adapted and implemented in a flexible and iterative manner. Taking this approach was critical to its success in addressing a number of unanticipated challenges in the Northwest Territories, including:

- Challenges associated with rapid expansion.
- External challenges, such as labour disruptions in the educational system, changes in funding programs, and level of administrator support within a particular school.
- Community stressors (particularly in the Tlicho region).
- Population’s literacy, cognitive challenges, and trauma.
- Level of need experienced by many of the youth, particularly in the specialized resiliency program in Yellowknife catholic schools (Laferty, 2013).
- Different levels of literacy, cognitive challenges, and trauma in the population.
- The geographical reality of Tlicho region poses logistical challenges with respect to supporting educators in remote communities.

The enhancement and implementation of the program had to be flexible to provide room for differentiation and in adapting to address these unique challenges.



Figure 11. FNMI cultural identity quilt created by the FNMI Student Advisory Committee with guidance from Amanda Myers, community mentor.

Recommendations for policy makers:

- Build the curriculum flexibility of curriculum into policy updates.
- Allow space in curriculum for implementation in diverse, community-based settings.

Recommendations for program implementers:

- Engage critically with the needs of participants.
- Allow for enhancement to occur as changes occur within policy, populations, and funding.

“From what I understand about Fourth R – there is some flexibility within the program. That’s important for us too. Keep saying with education renewal – we are not going to send out a cookie cutter initiative, one-size-fits all and say every school in the Territories is going to do this. Need to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the community. That’s been of big concern here – something good about Fourth R. Small communities say, “we are not Yellowknife, not Fort Smith, what works for them doesn’t work for us.” Heard that loud and clear”” —Interview, female policy maker, Northwest Territories, 2014

5. Iterative

It was important for all key stakeholders to have opportunities to review program materials and make suggested revisions to the Fourth R Uniting Our Nations Program in both Ontario and the Northwest Territories. This involved both formal and informal review processes. The formal review process consisted of local and national Aboriginal knowledge holders (including academics) reviewing the program initially for its cultural competence and safety as well as reflection of local FNMI realities, needs, and interests. It also consisted of stakeholders completing rating sheets and providing comments on the overall program and its various components. The informal process consisted of the steering committee facilitating an ongoing revision process during its regular meetings. These processes have resulted in numerous iterations of the programs and they continue to evolve with greater detail. This iterative approach required multi-year funding, intensive partnerships, and clear feedback loops with partners about which suggestions were adopted to ensure its success.



Figure 12. Poster created by FNMI Student Advisory Committee.

Recommendations for policy makers:

- Implement flexible policy frameworks that allow for multiple, diverse, adaptive, and community-specific iterations within policy framework.
- Provide appropriate timelines to implement and enact policy frameworks.

Recommendations to program implementers:

- Through partnerships established with various actors, contribute to free flows of feedback and communications.
- Keep record of ideas and information regarding possibilities for the improvement of the program.
- Be open to further revisions as needed.
- Approach program implementation with flexibility and readiness to update and alter programming corresponding with changes in policy, curriculum, student, and community needs.



Figure 13. FNMI community member speaking at FNMI Grade 8 Student Transition Conference.

“Cultural pieces are not necessarily written down... whose laws of living? Wouldn’t say it’s a finished piece of work – be able to go back to people in different communities and get that input. From the kids’ reaction to it... we are on the right track– Interview, female Aboriginal education coordinator, Northwest Territories, 2014.

6. Provides ongoing, differentiated, culturally appropriate, and ‘two-way’ training

Ongoing, differentiated, culturally appropriate, and ‘two way’ training was also important to the successful enhancement and implementation of the Fourth R Uniting Our Nations Program in Ontario and the Northwest Territories. For example, in Ontario, at Grade 8 Transition Conferences, the Fourth R engaged cultural teachers and Elders from the FNMI community to share their knowledge with TVDSB staff and FNMI students using a culturally-informed circle. At this same conference, peer mentors assumed leadership roles and helped to build capacity among younger FNMI youth in grades 7 and 8, who would be transitioning into grade 9 (the first grade of secondary

school in Ontario). Moreover, members of the FNMI Student Advisory Committee provided cultural competency training to other student and staff in their school environments. In the Northwest Territories, students acted as leaders in their school and broader communities in helping to build capacity about healthy behaviours through participating in the role play videos.

Additional training was provided to teachers who initially expressed discomfort with facilitating role-play, and additional training was provided via webinar and conference call to support teachers in remote communities.

“The one thing about peer mentoring that stands out to me would be the grade 8 peer mentoring conference because I learned how to stand up in front of a crowd and speak and it makes me feel appreciated in this program. It makes me feel like I am actually doing something for the grade 8’s and 9’s too.”— Interview, male grade 11 student, Ontario, 2012

Recommendation for policy makers:

- Create goals and promote funding supports for ongoing educator training with built in flexibility for differentiated training using diverse methods and materials.

Recommendation for program implementers:

- Build ongoing training into program implementation.
- Seek out opportunities for networking and training with other educators and implementers to share and learn best practices and lessons learned

7. Involves ongoing planning

Ongoing planning is critical to the sustainability of the Fourth R Uniting Our Nations programs. Specifically, planning for annual training opportunities and training of a greater number of community partners and administrators is critical to increasing program awareness and support to ensure sustainability despite high teacher turnover. In Ontario, the Fourth R has been highly involved in program logistics (E.g. participant recruitment, obtaining parental consent, and logistics for off-site activities, etc.), which has provided staff with insight into the importance of planning to sustain the program.

Recommendations for policy makers:

- Encourage and incentivize growth of culturally adaptive programming.
- Communicate effectively across institutions and implementers regarding future plans, hopes for expansion, and alterations to existing programming.
- Craft policy that is flexible and accounts for future opportunities for growth.
- Provide a forum for Fourth R champions and FNMI education thought leaders to convene and share ideas.

Recommendations for program implementers:

- Account for sustainability when considering training, growth and implementation of programming.
- Staff intentionally – placing passionate, committed, and competent teachers as program leads.
- Maintain notes on feedback, ideas, and issues for future implementation and planning.

“I have been happy to see that the Fourth R and their staff have engaged in the level of people and that they didn’t see it as a short term thing and that once their eyes were open they realized that there was a lot of work to do and so that was nice to know and to encourage them to stay with that”--Interview, male community advisor, Ontario, 2012



Figure 14. Ray Hughes, National Education Coordinator, Fourth R and Diane Lafferty, Aboriginal Coordinator, Yellowknife Catholic Schools.



Figure 15. FNMI Student Advisory Committee member speaking at FNMI Grade 8 Student Transition Conference.

Conclusion

The Fourth R's Uniting Our Nations Program represents a success story in the enhancement and implementation of Fourth R programming for FNMI students in Ontario and the Northwest Territories. Program enhancement and implementation challenges in Ontario related to the dependency on high levels of Fourth R involvement to support the program's implementation and sustainability and external factors, such as labour unrest and funding cuts. The main program enhancement and implementation challenges in the Northwest Territories included high level of student need (low literacy, cognitive challenges, and high levels of trauma), increased risk behaviours at younger ages, and logistical issues with delivery in remote communities.

However, common successes emerged from both case studies, including: the breadth and expansion of programs; high level of student and community engagement and pride; systematic partnership with stakeholders on program development as well as training and high stakeholder satisfaction and perceived benefit; alignment of the Fourth R with provincial and territorial policy frameworks; perceived student success; increased confidence, leadership skills, and sense of belonging among participants and improved relationships among participants.

The report offers seven best practices for program enhancement for use by policy makers, program developers, and implementers. These include an approach that:

1. Is relationship based
2. Embeds cultural connectedness
3. Aligns with existing policy frameworks
4. Is flexible
5. Is iterative
6. Provides ongoing and differentiated training
7. Involves ongoing sustainability planning

Moving forward, the Fourth R team will continue to develop, adapt, and expand programming through the relationship-based approaches that have proven successful in Ontario and Northwest Territories. In addition, the team remains committed to evaluation and ongoing improvement, to ensure that the culturally-based Fourth R programs promote well-being for youth and meet the needs of all implementation stakeholders.

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Appendix A – Expanded Enhancement Template

In developing Fourth R – Uniting Our Nations, it is important to acknowledge that there is no such thing as a pan-Aboriginal culture or perspective. The term Aboriginal does not describe one particular cultural group. It is a legal term, defined in the Constitution, which refers to individuals of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit backgrounds. These groups differ widely from each other in terms of culture, history, language, and beliefs, and to group them together as a cultural entity is misleading. Furthermore, “Aboriginal” is not a term that Indigenous People chose for themselves, and most individuals have more specific and accurate cultural identifiers that they apply to themselves. Within the three large groups defined as Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), there are important distinctions, as each nation, group and community has their own rich culture and history.

In adapting the Fourth R – Uniting Our Nations for a particular community, it is essential that the history, traditions, and place be reflected in the lesson plans and activities. This document provides a template for undertaking that enhancement process within the context of working with community partners.

In this document we outline seven considerations in undertaking enhancements for a particular community. In addition to identifying these

considerations, we offer suggestions as to which partners might be most able to undertake the necessary changes. The first three considerations to be reviewed and revised are the most important. These revisions should be conducted prior to implementing the program if at all possible. These three central areas include:

1. Language terminology
2. Integration of specific traditions and world view
3. Historical context

These considerations are discussed in greater detail and examples are provided in the following pages. In addition, these considerations need to be addressed in the introduction section for teachers and in the actual lesson plans.

The last four areas are more straightforward to revise and these revisions can be made during or after the first pilot implementation. These areas include:

4. Matching to State or Provincial curriculum guidelines
5. Resource listings
6. Relevance of role play scenarios
7. Attitudinal resources

Enhancement areas

Following the description of primary and secondary areas for revisions, we identify some of the common challenges that arise in this process as well as some possible strategies for countering these challenges.

A. Primary areas

1. Language and Terminology

- Language and terminology are critical issues and need to reflect the local realities and preferences
- Terms such as Aboriginal, First Nations and Métis might need to be changed

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: Language is such an important issue that several people should be involved with this process; preferably a mix of educators, community partners, and cultural advisors. The Advisory Committee should discuss this matter as well.

Considerations

Use of language is critical, not merely as an issue of “political correctness,” but because language is fundamental to one’s sense of identity. It is also very rooted in who gets to define a people or community. Some issues around language are factual and can be learned from a good glossary, but others are more nuanced and may need to be discussed with partners. Sometimes, there may not be one clear right answer to a question about language. Just as you would not expect a non-Aboriginal person to represent his or her entire culture with respect to language preferences, it is important to recognize that there are regional and individual differences. Even within a single community there may be differences in the acceptability of specific terms. For example, the use of the term Aboriginal continues to be hotly debated within various organizations. Some like the term because of its inclusivity, while others object to it as overgeneralizing and imposition by non-Aboriginal people. Rather than expect-

ing one partner to be able to speak for a whole community, discussions with respect to language and terminology should occur frequently and with numerous partners.

Examples

- Use of the word Aboriginal – there are both regional and individual differences with respect to preference for this term. Try to develop a consensus about what term(s) best reflect the preferences and make-up of the local communities.
- There may be opportunities to add words in Indigenous languages. For example, in developing a version in Saskatchewan, the Cree words were added to the Medicine Wheel.
- Use of the term Reserve may or may not reflect local demographics. Even if the enhancement is being developed for Reserve communities, the community themselves might prefer another term (such as First Nation).

2. Integration of Specific Traditions and World-views

- Relevant cultural traditions and teachings are included in a number of places (e.g., the Seven Grandfather teachings, the Medicine Wheel, Dene Laws of Living)
- Teachings that are relevant to the students and that emphasize positive values and a holistic world-view will need to be integrated to replace these
- It is important to draw from a range of traditions or choose more universal ones rather than selecting them all from a specific tribe/band/Nation
- It is also important to explain where these teachings or ideas come from (i.e., whose tradition it is)

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: Lessons can be drafted by an educator based on the traditions selected by the cultural advisors / Advisory Committee.

Considerations

Thinking about traditions and teachings bears similar consideration to thinking about language. There is not a one-size-fits-all set of teachings that can be used across communities. First and foremost, it is important to be clear which First Nation or Inuit or Métis community (or communities) you are adapting your program for and incorporate the traditions, stories, and teachings of that community. It is not always possible to gear a program to one specific cultural group, because we are often working with individuals of various cultural backgrounds, particularly in the urban setting. In these cases, the following suggestions can be considered:

- a. If you combine traditions and teachings, be clear about where these traditions are coming from (group or individual perspectives). It is disrespectful to mix and match them into one mythical pan-Aboriginal cultural tradition.
- b. There are some traditions that are more universal and will resonate with a wider range of people. For example, the Seven Grandfather Teachings (below) are subscribed to by a

range of Aboriginal groups (e.g., Anishinaabe; Seven Virtues among the Cree; also used by the Mi'kmaq) and can be incorporated into a program to benefit all youth.

Examples

The first curriculum was developed with the Seven Grandfather Teachings (see box 1). Although these teachings exist in some form across numerous First Nations, they are not universal. For the enhancement undertaken by partners in the Northwest Territories, these teachings were changed to the Dene Laws of Living (see box 2). Both sets of teachings provide locally relevant values upon which healthy relationship skills and perspectives can be developed. It is important to note that either set of teachings could also be incorporated in any version as they provide a solid set of relationship principles, as long as it is made clear from where the traditions are taught. It is also possible to include both as examples from different cultural groups. These teachings are positive virtues for all youth, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

Box 1. Seven Grandfather Teachings

- Wisdom
- Respect
- Love
- Bravery
- Honesty
- Humility
- Truth

Box 2. Dene Laws of Living

- Share what you have.
- Help each other.
- Love each other as much as possible.
- Be respectful of Elders.
- Sleep at night and work during the day.
- Be polite and don't argue with anyone.
- Young girls and boys should behave respectfully.
- Pass on the Teachings.
- Be happy at all times.

Other changes have included altering the information about Tobacco (for example, it is not sacred in the Alaskan Native community), and incorporating information about communication styles relevant to a particular community.

3. Historical Context

- The historical context of colonization is described largely in terms of Residential Schools within the Canadian context. This history is linked to rates of problem behaviors in both the substance use and sexual health units.
- This context may need to be adapted to fit the local colonization experience.

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: Someone familiar with regional history, but should be reviewed by / or discussed with the entire Advisory Committee.

Considerations and examples

There are significant commonalities to the post-colonial experience of indigenous peoples around the world. The emergence of intergenerational trauma and related challenges are similar, despite differences in the actual colonization experience.

In this curriculum, the explanation of colonialism and the resulting impacts are described largely in terms of the residential school experience. Depending on the community for which the program is being adapted, this context may or may not be

an accurate reflection of the local history. There were significant differences across the country in terms of who went to residential schools, whether or not it was mandatory (or merely coercive), and how long residential schools lasted. There are also some differences in the extent to which survivors feel they received some adequate educational experiences. First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities experienced colonialism differently in different parts of the country. The depiction of these events and dynamics may need to be tailored better to the regional experience. For example, in Alaska, residential schools did not exist, but there were boarding schools.

B. Secondary areas

4. Matching to State/ Provincial Curriculum Guidelines

- If provincial or state curriculum expectations exist (for healthy living, social skills, etc.) then the links should be identified between the program and the guidelines.
- Marking templates / rubrics may need to be adapted to reflect curriculum changes.

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: This linking is best accomplished by an experienced educator who is familiar with the guidelines.

5. Resource Listings

- There are a number of places where community resources and websites are provided for students and teachers.
- These listings need to be updated to reflect the local community.

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: A community partner can undertake this and the local school board or public health may already have such a list available.

6. Relevance of Role Play Scenarios

- Role plays and skill building are an essential part of the Fourth R curriculum.
- It is imperative that the role play scenarios seem genuine to the youth.
- Many of the issues addressed are universal (e.g., bullying, peer pressure to use drugs).
- There may be specific local issues that could be included or some scenarios that do not fit the context.

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: If possible, convene a small group of students to review the role play scenarios in each unit and make any suggested revisions or additions. The educator overseeing the adaptations in general will need to integrate these into the document.

7. Additional Resources

- There are a number of lessons that have optional videos that have been produced by indigenous filmmakers.
- All of these are offered as options and can be replaced with other videos that may be preferred or seen as more relevant.

SUGGESTED PERSONNEL: These videos can be reviewed by the Advisory Committee or left up to individual teachers to decide whether to use them.

Common challenges in the enhancement process

We have now worked with a number of groups to develop an Aboriginal Perspectives Fourth R that meets the needs of their youth and community. In observing the process undertaken by community partnerships, we have seen a number of common challenges. These are noted with some suggested strategies in the hopes that they will help other partnerships undertaking the process.

Challenge #1: Different partners are working on different timelines

Challenge:

It is always surprising how long some of the steps of adaptation process take. Community partners may require lengthier periods to review materials, educational partners may be unavailable at key times of the year, and the final proofing and printing takes longer than everyone expects.

Strategies:

- Start the adaptation process as early as possible
- Have a clear set of deadlines at the beginning so that everyone is on the same page (i.e., when do people need to submit feedback, when do things need to be to the printers)
- Acknowledge that the process may feel rushed at times. This rushed feeling can be balanced out by envisioning the adaptation process as an iterative process. It may not be possible to make all of the changes that everyone would like to see in time for the first pilot, but there will be other chances.

Challenge #2: Who has particular types of knowledge vs. who has the skills and mandate for writing the lessons

Challenge:

In most cases, the people providing the cultural traditions and perspectives are not those doing the writing. The nature of the knowledge being shared may make it difficult to capture in a written lesson plan in a respectful manner.

Strategies:

- Acknowledge that there may be areas of tension -- for example, narrative accounts of teachings that are much lengthier than the materials typically used to support a lesson activity
- If possible, numerous working sessions with the writer and consultant(s) together is better than trying to do it all in a back and forth manner (by email, etc.)
- As with other challenges, the earlier this process starts, the more meaningful it will be and the less the likelihood of someone feeling rushed or feeling that their contributions are not being reflected properly in the materials

Challenge #3: Different perspectives and priorities among partners

Challenge:

Different partners will be focused on different parts of the process. For example, consultants will be looking for the most appropriate teachings and activities, whereas educators may be more focused on meeting curriculum expectations and logistics (such as the cost or time required for particular activities).

Strategies:

- Identifying this challenge at the front end will help people recognize where some of the differences in opinion might arise. Consultants can be encouraged to make any additions or suggest any activities they deem appropriate, but with the awareness that in the end it might not be possible to include them all.
- There may be places to be creative in how a preferred activity can be linked to curriculum expectations in order to include it. For example, by adding literacy extension activities to an activity, it increases the curriculum links of any activity.

Appendix B – Adapted and New FNMI Fourth R Programs

Aboriginal-informed curriculum (Grade 9)

The Fourth R developed the Aboriginal-informed curriculum in collaboration with a First Nations educator who has extensive experience in developing curriculum that is both informed by Aboriginal culture and meets Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines and is based on the Fourth R curriculum. The curriculum has undergone several phases of enhancement (three versions were produced) and review with extensive consultation and input from First Nations educators and leaders across Canada, including a group of youth consultants who reviewed the document as part of summer employment and made recommendations.

The adapted curriculum addresses important issues with a resiliency lens, as students are encouraged to identify individual and community strengths within their cultural framework that will support them in making healthy choices. As aforementioned, it also includes historical context, such as the intergenerational impacts of residential school trauma, to nuance at-risk behaviours they may observe in their respective communities. It uses a holistic model of healthy youth development and relationships with an emphasis on the connection to sexual decisions and substance use. Myths about FNMI substance use are dispelled. Moreover, Suicide prevention is addressed explicitly with a safety-planning lesson. Teaching methods have been adapted to include the use of sharing circles and bringing community members into the classroom and additional educational materials (such as the aforementioned videos and role playing) have been incorporated that reflect FNMI realities to make the programming more relevant to youth.

Elementary mentoring program

The elementary mentoring program is an 18-week, school-based program for grade 7 and 8 students whereby two First Nations young adults mentor groups of students for one hour per week. The students begin by learning the Creation Story, as shared by a local storyteller. The group participates in sessions designed to facilitate student exploration of likes, interests, and goals. Through hands-on activities, the mentor relationship is developed in a culturally significant context. Students are given opportunities to learn and practice healthy communication skills and how to deal with peer pressures and conflicts.

Grade 8 transition conferences

The Fourth R facilitates two full day Transition Conferences annually (in the Fall and Spring) for First Nations students in grade 8. These conferences are designed to provide students with the information and resources to prepare them for a successful transition from grade 8 into grade 9. Guest speakers, including Elders, share cultural knowledge and provide guidance on navigating identity issues. First Nations counselors and teachers explain the courses as well as school and community resources that are available to support students, including extra-curricular activities. Follow-up activities with students that attend the conference at their home school help to address any concerns or information that was not part of the one-day conference.

FNMI student advisory committee

The FNMI Advisory Committee is composed of FNMI student (Grade 10-12 plus) representatives of TVDSB schools who apply (or are nominated by peers and teachers) to participate annually. Every year, this group assumes a leadership role in developing and implementing a major project related to FNMI programming.

The FNMI literacy curriculum

The FNMI Literacy Curriculum is a resource that uses FNMI materials to increase literacy skills among students to ultimately support the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). This resource is organized into three sections: nonfiction articles with a focus on literacy skills, small group novel activities, and short stories. Each lesson presents a main issue (i.e., bullying, identity, conflict) and includes instructions and materials for pre-activities, strategies to use during the activity or lesson, and extension ideas. The lessons are designed to encourage dialogue about FNMI youth culture and realities. However, they are used to open a dialogue for all youth (FNMI and non-FNMI) about culture, identity, and mental health.

Peer mentoring program for secondary students

The Peer Mentoring Program supports the development of healthy and positive relationships between junior (grade 9) and senior (grades 10 through 12) secondary students. This program facilitates student mentees and mentors meeting during lunchtime on a weekly basis over the course of the school year to engage in a range of activities together. An adult mentor from the First Nations community also facilitates a teaching circle with the mentoring participants several times per semester. This community mentor helps provide support to the school mentors, incorporates cultural teachings into the program, and acts as a role model to the youth involved. Mentors receive a full day of training prior to their involvement, which includes a description of the mentoring role; opportunities to role play situations they might encounter with their mentees; and activities suitable to use with their mentee.

Healthy Relationships Plus Program

Healthy Relationships Plus (HRPP): The Healthy Relationships Plus Program (HRPP) is a 15-session program that includes a strengthened mental health and suicide prevention, and substance use focus. Sessions are approximately 60 minutes in length. This program is intended for youth between the ages of 12 and 18. The HRPP applies the same core principles of skill building and awareness as the Fourth R classroom-based programs, but in a non-classroom setting.

Cultural leadership course

The First Nations Cultural Leadership Course was created to incorporate the strengths of high school peer mentoring into the classroom setting that would provide reach a greater number of student and provide them with credits for their participation. The course groups older and younger secondary students who are working on one of two credits—leadership or study skills—into the same classroom. In addition to the mentoring component, the course also provides students with an opportunity to participate in a number of cultural activities and allows them to assume the roles of student leaders and volunteers for initiatives outside their schools (such as the grade 8 transition conferences). The course fosters an educational experience, which includes a focus on cultural identity and healthy relationships

Culture leadership camp

Culture Camp is a three-day intensive program designed for FNMI secondary school students in an effort to promote their leadership potential, support healthy relationship skills, and offer experiential education. This outdoor adventure develops student leadership skills through culturally significant, personally challenging, and engaging activities. Elders, community leaders, and academic experts are invited to share traditional and contemporary teachings.

The Fourth R Uniting Our Nations included programs enhanced or adapted from the original Fourth R programming, as well as new programs developed specifically for FNMI youth. The table below identifies the components in each of these categories, by province or territory.

Program	Ontario	Northwest Territories
Aboriginal perspectives curriculum (grade 7)	Universal	Adapted
Aboriginal perspectives curriculum (grade 8)	Universal	Adapted
Aboriginal perspectives curriculum (grade 9)	Adapted and Universal	Adapted
Elementary mentoring program	New (FNMI specific)	New (FNMI specific)
Grade 8 transition conferences	New (FNMI specific)	New (FNMI specific)
The FNMI literacy curriculum	New (FNMI specific)	New (FNMI specific)
Peer mentoring program for secondary students	New (FNMI specific)	New (FNMI specific)
Healthy Relationships Plus Program	Universal	Undergoing enhancement
Cultural leadership course	New (FNMI specific)	New (FNMI specific)
Culture leadership camp	New (FNMI specific)	New (FNMI specific)

Appendix C – Recommendations by Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned	Recommendations for Policy Makers	Recommendations for Program Implementers
1. Relationship based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create a policy framework founded on strong, positive partnerships among FNMI communities, school boards, schools, and students and based on collaborative program development, implementation, and evaluation. ✓ Maintain close, ongoing connections with the various communities under the influence of policies created. ✓ Provide funding and resources for communication, feedback, and participatory development of policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage an environment that fosters strong, positive partnerships among stakeholders in FNMI education. ✓ Maintain consistent communication with all levels of implementation including FNMI communities, policy makers, school districts, schools, teachers, and participants through informal and formal processes.
2. Embeds cultural connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Incorporate the goals of inclusivity and cultural affirmation into policy frameworks. ✓ Collaborate with stakeholders to develop culturally sensitive materials, curriculums, and institutions. ✓ Provide resources and plan to ensure program implementers understand the requirements of policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Facilitate a culturally inclusive and affirming atmosphere. ✓ Recognize and work to counter colonizing tendencies of educational institutions and curriculum. ✓ Encourage participant ownership of education and collaboration in developing educational materials and experiences.
3. Aligns with existing policy frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure FNMI education policies are accessible to program implementers (i.e. written in clear, lay-person language as well as effectively disseminated and visibly posted). ✓ Create policies designed to align with culturally adaptive mechanisms in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keep abreast of policies affecting the delivery of curriculum. ✓ Participate and communicate with policy makers when developing programming.
4. Flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Build the curriculum flexibility of curriculum into policy updates. ✓ Allow space in curriculum for implementation in diverse, community-based settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Engage critically with the needs of participants. ✓ Allow for enhancement to occur as changes occur within policy, populations, and funding.

5. Iterative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Implement flexible policy frameworks that allow for multiple, diverse, adaptive, and community-specific iterations within policy framework. ✓ Provide appropriate time-lines to implement and enact policy frameworks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Through partnerships established with various actors, contribute to free flow of feedback and communications. ✓ Keep ideas and information regarding possibilities for the improvement of the program. ✓ Approach program implementation with flexibility and readiness to update and alter programming corresponding with changes in policy, curriculum, student, and community needs. ✓ Be open to further revisions as needed.
6. Provides ongoing and differentiated training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create goals and promote funding supports for ongoing educator training with built in flexibility for differentiated training using diverse methods and materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Build ongoing training into program implementation. ✓ Seek out opportunities for networking and training with other educators and implementers to share and learn best practices and lessons learned.
7. Involves ongoing sustainability planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage and incentivize growth of culturally adaptive programming. ✓ Communicate effectively across institutions and implementers regarding future plans, hopes for expansion, and alterations to existing programming. ✓ Craft policy that is flexible and accounts for future opportunities for growth. ✓ Provide forum for Fourth R champions and FNMI education thought leaders to convene and share ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Account for sustainability when considering training, growth and implementation of programming. ✓ Maintain notes on feedback, ideas, and issues for future implementation and planning.