



Research Snapshot

Cultural connectedness and identity foster resilience in FNMI youth

What is this research about?

Cultural connectedness, or the extent to which an individual feels connected to their culture, is a key protective factor for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) youth. Cultural connectedness is consistent with a strengths-based approach to FNMI youth programming and is increasingly being recognized as an integral component to successful programming. The Fourth R Uniting Our Nations program helps to foster cultural connectedness through localized curriculum that engages community members, Elders, and educators using culturally relevant teaching methods. Local traditional teachings about wellness and relationships are included to promote positive youth development. Uniting Our Nations includes culturally appropriate teaching methods, promotes cultural connectedness and identity, and emphasizes community inclusion. The program also prioritizes mentoring approaches and includes cultural, historical, and contemporary content.

The purpose of this study was to better understand *how* culturally-relevant programming leads to resiliency among youth

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used a semi-structured interview approach to identify the factors that have led to the significant and sustained success of the Uniting Our Nations program.

What you need to know:

This study explored the specific ways in which culturally relevant programming promotes resiliency in FNMI youth. Researchers found that identity and belonging, and cultural connectedness play an important role in promoting wellbeing in FNMI youth. Programs discussed in the study are initiatives through the Fourth R Uniting Our Nations program.

Researchers interviewed 12 adults with extensive knowledge about cultural identity, FNMI youth, and the Fourth R programs. The participants included Elders, teachers, counsellors, school board staff members, and community members, many of whom had been actively involved with the local FNMI community and school board. Participants were asked about program involvement, program perceptions, and program strengths, challenges, and areas of improvement.

The researchers analyzed the interview data and the following themes emerged as key to program success:

- Partnership amongst stakeholders
- Identity and belonging
- Cultural connectedness in promoting wellbeing



What did the researchers find?

The researchers identified the theme of *cultural identity development* in the participants' interviews. Participants' noted numerous positive outcomes for students who participated in the Fourth R programs including:

- An increased sense of belonging and comfort
- Having the opportunity to explore their identity
- Not having to compromise their identity to succeed at school
- Increased student engagement in school beyond the Fourth R program
- Fostering leadership opportunities and skills in FNMI youth

The second theme that emerged from the data was *cultural connectedness*. Cultural connectedness was linked with students' sense of identity and belonging and the data suggests that cultural connectedness enhances students' sense of identity. Responses within this theme touched on several important outcomes of increased cultural connectedness in students as fostered through Fourth R programs including:

- Increased FNMI pride countering the negative effects of shame
- Cultural connectedness can serve as a protective factor for students experiencing racism
- Provides the opportunity for students to see themselves as leaders

"There are students that you saw in grade 9 and Fourth R is the first thing that they ever got involved in at school and then by the time they are in grade 10 they are starting to go out to other clubs and then by grade 11 and 12 they are leaders within the school and not just within the First Nation groups. For example, this year one of our former mentors from Fourth R is the co-president of the school. So it has really been nice to see the kids get involved, they are committed, and that group are leading the way and in the last 2 years we have had the highest graduation numbers for First Nation students in years." - Educator

How can you use this research?

These findings highlight the importance of cultural connectedness and cultural identity development in fostering resiliency amongst FNMI youth. These resiliency factors can be promoted through culturally relevant, strengths-based school programming such as the Fourth R programs. Establishing these programs in schools and encouraging students to participate can help promote FNMI cultures and encourage cultural identity formation rather than focusing on areas of challenges. Fostering resiliency through cultural connectedness and cultural identity development can help to set the stage for future academic success for FNMI youth.

Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Crooks, C.V., Burleigh, D., & Sisco, A. (2015). Promoting First Nations, Metis, and Inuit youth wellbeing through culturally-relevant programming: The role of cultural connectedness and identity. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience*, 3, 101-116.

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