University of Sydney Policy Reform Project

Research Paper for NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS): Decolonising engagement – an evaluation of actual & theoretical practices of non-Indigenous social services engagement with First Nations People

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About the Sydney Policy Reform Project

The Sydney Policy Reform Project ('Project') facilitates University of Sydney students to write research papers for policy organisations, and submissions to government inquiries, under supervision from University of Sydney academics. The Project is a volunteer, extra-curricular activity. The Project is an initiative of the Student Affairs and Engagement Team within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and the Division of Alumni and Development, at the University of Sydney. The Project is funded by a donor to the University of Sydney. Any inquiries about the Project or about this paper should be directed to the Administrator, Ms Zoe Nutter, at the following email address: <fass.studentaffairsandengagement@sydney.edu.au>.

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Policy Brief

Sydney Policy Reform Project

Paper	Topic	Academic Supervisor
2 NCOSS	Best practice approaches for engaging with First Nations people, organisations, and leaders	Professor Linda Tsung linda.tsung@sydney.edu.au

About the NSW Council of Social Service

The [NSW Council of Social Service](#) ('NCOSS') is the peak body for the community sector in NSW. It works with and for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in NSW to make positive change in our communities.

Background

This research paper will help inform NCOSS's ongoing and future engagement with First Nations people, organisations, and leaders as we work to implement our Reconciliation Action Plan and continue to advocate with our First Nations partners for improved outcomes for First Nations communities in NSW.

The importance of working and engaging with First Nations people can be expressed through the phrase 'Nothing about us without us.' This phrase became commonly used through disability activism in the 1990s and is based on the principle that "no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy".[1]

This aligns with the understanding that government efforts in Australia to improve the life outcomes of First Nations people continue to fail dismally, primarily due to "the failure to enshrine genuine Aboriginal self-determination into the child and family system. Self-determination is distinct from both consultation and participation, reflecting the collective right of Aboriginal communities to make decisions, through their own processes, and carry them through to implementation."[2]

Working and engaging closely with First Nations people, organisations, and leaders to improve outcomes must also be conducted in an environment of 'cultural safety', which has been defined by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

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[1] Wikipedia 2021, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, Wikipedia, viewed 11 March 2022,
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us>.
[2] Absec 2017, *Family is Culture: Independent Review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in OOHC in NSW*, Submission, viewed 11 March 2022,
<https://absec.org.au/strategies-and-submissions/>.

as: "Cultural Safety is being acceptable to difference, having the ability to analyse power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonisation, and relationships with settlers. Cultural safety is about providing quality health care that fits with the familiar cultural values and norms of the person accessing the service, that may differ from your own and/or the dominant culture."[3]

Research Parameters

NCOSS would like a summary of academic literature that describes and (to the extent possible) evaluates 'actual and theoretical practices' of non-Indigenous social services working and engaging with First Nations people, organisations, and leaders, in Australia and (to the extent possible) in comparable jurisdictions, from the year 2000 onward. Some parameters:

- 'academic literature': Researchers should prioritise impactful scholarship from respected, peer-reviewed journals or academic books from recent years. Researchers should use their discretion in including relevant 'grey literature' (i.e. reports, submissions or publications from government bodies, authoritative organisations, news publications etc.), noting however that authoritative voices on best practice engagement with First Nations communities will often be found in 'grey literature' that has been produced by First Nations authors and/or organisations.

  - Researchers should outline their search strategy, reasons for inclusion/exclusion of sources, and any possible limitations of included sources. It is strongly encouraged to take advantage of the University's library services to develop a robust research method.

- 'that describes and (to the extent possible) evaluates': Researchers should give priority to summarising literature that describes practices of social services working and engaging with First Nations people, organisations and leaders, including to summarise any descriptions of examples, models and patterns of implementation. Secondarily, if there is research capacity, researchers should summarise literature that evaluates these practices, with a particular focus on summarising any literature that identifies best practice, as well as other ethical issues raised by, and assessments of, social service delivery by First Nations people (both positive and negative). Some literature will both describe and evaluate practices of social service providers working and engaging with First Nations people, organisations

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[3] Australian Human Rights Commission 2018, *Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people: A background paper to inform work on child safe organisations*, viewed 11 March 2022, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/child-safe-organisations-and-cultural-safety>.

and leaders, and so giving sequential attention to description, and then to evaluation, may not be the most appropriate research strategy, or ultimate structure, for your paper. However, if a choice must be made between summarising descriptions or evaluations of social services working and engaging with First Nations people, organisations and leaders (for example, given limited research capacity to examine non-Australian jurisdictions), then priority should be given to description rather than evaluation.

- 'actual and theoretical practices': This includes any theoretical models or actual practices of social service delivery and/or activity, which involve delivery and/or design of social services directly involving, partnering and/or working with First Nations people, organisations and leaders that the social service delivery aims to alleviate. Researchers should include summaries of literature that raise ethical issues for both the providers and consumers of the social service delivery. Researchers should also note that some First Nations communities and organisations may have their own set of 'principles of engagement' that non-Indigenous services and organisations are requested to follow when engaging with these communities, and that this may be included in the practices identified for this research.

- 'non-Indigenous social services': This refers to any organised activity provided by government or non-government organisations that is not Aboriginal-led or Aboriginal-controlled, and aims to alleviate disadvantage or improve the welfare of a person, such as through provision of information, care and support for financial hardship, housing, mental health, domestic and family violence, disability and employment.

- 'First Nations': This can refer to the peoples or nations of people who were there from the beginning, prior to the settlement of other peoples or nations. In Australia, the use of this term is generally accepted as respectfully encompassing the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities. Researchers should note that literature may use this term interchangeably with 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal' and/or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', and that some communities and cultures may prefer the use of a particular term over another.

- 'in Australia and (to the extent possible) in comparable jurisdictions': Researchers should prioritise summarising relevant literature from an Australian context, and then secondarily, if there is research capacity, relevant literature from comparable overseas jurisdictions. Priority should be given to overseas jurisdictions that share similar socio-economic characteristics to Australia.

- 'from the year 2000 onwards': Researchers should give priority to summarising relevant literature that has been published more recently. Summaries of older (but

still relevant) literature may be included in the paper, to the extent the researchers consider this useful to understanding the prevalence of or associated issues with people in paid work experiencing homelessness and/or accessing homelessness services. However, as a general rule, it is suggested that only literature published from the year 2000 onwards should be included, unless there are good reasons to do otherwise.

Please take care to ensure all information sources are referenced accurately and completely, according to the Harvard Referencing Style. This is very important for NCOSS to use your research effectively. Some starting points for research are noted at the end of the brief.

Research Question

Given the parameters above, please summarise academic literature that describes and (to the extent possible) evaluates 'actual and theoretical practices' of non-Indigenous social services working and engaging with First Nations people, organisations, and leaders, in Australia and (to the extent possible) in comparable jurisdictions, from the year 2000 onward.

Preliminary Resources
- AIATSIS 2020, *Principles for engagement in projects concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, https://aiatsis.gov.au/publication/94687.

- AIHW 2013, *Engaging with Indigenous Australia—exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*, Issues Paper No.5, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Canberra.

- Thorpe, A., Arabena, K., Sullivan, P., Silburn, K. & Rowley, K. 2016, *Engaging First Peoples: A Review of Government Engagement Methods for Developing Health Policy*, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.

*Please note that references included in this brief may not accord with the Harvard Referencing Style. Students must take care to ensure that their final paper follows said referencing style.

Executive Summary

In Australia, social service providers are increasingly working to foster best practices for engagement with First Nations people, organisations and leaders. Despite steps towards reconciliation, social service workers operate within a colonial framework, and the first step in effective engagement is to critically deconstruct perceptions of Euro-Australian superiority and recentre First Nations cultures and ways of knowing.

The aim of this paper is to assess and recommend actual and theoretical practices which actively seek to decolonise processes of non-Indigenous social services engagement with First Nations communities in a culturally supportive and safe manner. The authors have conducted a methodical literature review of approximately 35 peer-reviewed sources published from 2000 onwards. Authors have privileged First Nations voices through prioritising sources written by at least one First Nations author.

The report primarily focuses on evaluating best practices of trauma-informed care, Indigenous ways of knowing, existing strategies of cultural competency, consultative methods and community control. To evaluate strengths and weaknesses of these methods of engagement, they have been assessed through the Integrated Model of Cultural Support. Authors explore the application of critical reflexivity practices as a way of addressing privilege and power dynamics inherent in relationships between non-Indigenous social service workers and First Nations peoples.

The paper concludes with a series of detailed recommendations for how social service providers can support engagement with First Nations peoples including:

- Improving consultative models of engagement,

- Incorporating First Nations methodologies into engagement practice,

- Operationalising the Integrated Model of Cultural Support and

- Incorporating community control into engagement practices.

1. Introduction

Overview

When providing social services support, it is critical to acknowledge any racial and cultural differences between the social support worker and the client. This point of difference is especially loaded when considering the differences between White social service providers and First Nations people in Australia because of the history of colonisation and today's political and societal systems that centre around a Euro-Australian way of life. Academic research has explored how to address this dynamic in a way that prioritises high-quality experiences and outcomes for First Nations persons.

Thesis

In our paper, we seek to provide a literature review exploring best practices with providing trauma-informed care and utilising Indigenous ways of knowing in the context of social service provision with First Nations persons, as well as provide a review of some existing programs with attention to cultural competence, community control, and consultative models. We discuss the merits and pitfalls of these strategies and programs, as well as provide recommendations for providing social service support to First Nations individuals and communities.

Definitions of Key Terms

- *Euro-Australian* is a term used to describe Australian people of European descent. It is used in this paper to describe the majority White culture in Australia.

- *Colonisation* is a term used to refer to the British invasion and settlement of Aboriginal land, including the dispossession of Indigenous people of their traditional lands (*History: Colonisation* n.d.). Colonisation began in 1788, continued over time with settlements in different areas, and continues to this day with countless policies and systems that operate on the assumption that the Euro-Australian way of life is superior to all others.

- *Decolonisation* is a term defined as:

  (A) process that begins with the understanding that one is colonised [...] It is creating and consciously using various strategies to liberate oneself from [oppression]. It is the restoration of cultural practices, thinking, beliefs and values that were taken away or abandoned but are still relevant or necessary for survival and well-being. It is the birth and use of new ideas, thinking, technologies, and lifestyles that contribute to the advancement and empowerment of [First Nations] Peoples (Yellow Bird, 2008, p. 284).

2. Context

History of Colonisation and Social Services

Colonial policies and initiatives are predicated on the idea that First Nations people should aspire to a Euro-Australian identity. Some examples of these policies include protectionism and assimilation, which were traumatic and contributed to a "level of distrust and suspicion of social workers within many Aboriginal communities, families and individuals" (Bennett 2019, p. 23). This history makes it critical for social services between white practitioners and First Nations peoples to be collaborative and culturally responsive.

A detailed history of colonisation falls out of the scope of this paper but is nevertheless important for understanding the context in which social service providers operate. For a more detailed account of First Nations history for social work practitioners, please refer to the first chapter in Bindi Bennet and Sue Green's book *Our Voices: Aboriginal social work*, titled "The importance of Aboriginal history for practitioners" (2019).

Decolonising Engagement

To effectively engage with First Nations peoples, one must unlearn Australian majority culture's implicit understanding that First Nations culture, practices, and peoples are inferior to Western culture, practices and peoples. It is also important to critically analyse the power relationship between the coloniser and First Nations Peoples and cultures

(Walter & Baltra-Ulloa 2019, p. 70). Additionally, because decolonising is about practitioners "losing privilege, power, and identity," it is important to centre feelings like fear and loss, and seek to quash shame by focusing on building trusting relationships (Walter & Baltra-Ulloa 2019, p. 77).

During our research, we found that current publications about best practices in First Nations engagement failed to recognise the harms and implications of colonisation.

We also noticed a failure to fully embrace First Nations cultural practices as a key feature of the proposed engagement strategies. When First Nations cultural practices are mentioned, it is almost an afterthought, where they try to retrofit Western systems with First Nations values and practices. This approach has roots in colonialism and shows an implicit assumption that Western culture is superior to First Nations cultures; therefore, this approach should be avoided.

In this paper, we seek to offer an evaluation of theories and practices that place First Nations cultures, peoples, and practices at the centre of non-Indigenous service providers.

3. Aims

In our paper, we seek to:

1. Summarise academic literature that describes and evaluates best practice methods of non-Indigenous social services working and engaging with First Nations people, organisations and leaders in Australia;

2. Describe existing programs of non-Indigenous social services working and engaging with First Nations people;

3. Present conclusions from the research, including methods for incorporating the Integrated Model of Cultural Support and executing best practices in First Nations engagement; and

4. Propose six recommendations for actual and theoretical practices to incorporate in NCOSS' work with First Nations people, organisations, and leaders.

4. Methodology

Search Strategy

We began our research by reading the Policy Brief from the NSW Council of Social Service ("NCOSS") and preliminary resources, including principles and conditions set forth by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Lowitja Institute.

Next, we performed a search on The University of Sydney's Library website and Google Scholar. Key search terms included 'aboriginal engagement', 'aboriginal social services practices', 'cultural competence', 'Indigenous methodologies', 'self-determination', 'decolonising practice', 'culture-centred approach', 'Indigeneity Resistance' and 'trauma-informed care'.

We also included reading materials from the University of Sydney course SCWK2009: Indigenous Australians and Social Work.

Eligibility Criteria

To be included in our literature review, sources needed to be published after 2000 and the research must have been conducted in Australia or a comparable jurisdiction (with regards to history of colonisation and economic development). We also aimed to privilege and draw on First Nations authored sources.

Limitations of Research

Due to the time constraints of the Project, we were only able to include sources from two search engines, and articles were only screened once for relevancy to the project aims. We found that First Nations authors are underrepresented in social services literature at large, but they are comparatively better represented within social work literature than other fields. For this reason, a good portion of our theories are directly related to social work, but the learnings can and should be transferred to the provision of other social services.

Additionally, we believe it is important to note that none of our group members come from a First Nations background. We acknowledge that the best way to define best practices in engaging with First Nations people is by prioritising the lived experience, opinions, and voices of First Nations people themselves. For this reason, we prioritised sources written by First Nations authors.

5. Findings

Best Practices/Strategies

Trauma-informed Care

Our literary review found that reflexive Indigenous research methodologies are a best practice strategy to support trauma-informed care. Reflexivity involves practitioner awareness of their own beliefs and worldviews through planning, action and reflection consistently before, throughout and after the discussion (Rix, 2018 as cited in Terare, 2020).

Waller's (2020) research approach for trauma-informed care focuses on 'yarning', an informal conversation that values contributions from all parties and gives participants greater control over their stories. This approach has been put to practice for Aboriginal workers who have completed the Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) Aboriginal Qualification pathway. The aim of this study was to find out how First Nations workers in the trauma field understand their practices, in what ways these practices are shaped by a First Nations Worldview and how to use these findings to improve the practice of trauma-informed care. The study showed that the most effective practices include those that acknowledge and prioritise First Nations peoples' Ways of Knowing, values and experiences; these include a sense of belonging, an understanding of tribal connections, having extensive knowledge of colonial history, sharing knowledge with non-Aboriginal colleagues and challenging Western theories through reflexivity (Waller, 2020).

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Best practice in trauma-informed care for First Nations peoples must privilege the voices of these Peoples. Yarning circles should prioritise the epistemology (Ways of Knowing), axiology (Ways of Being) and Ontology (Ways of Doing) of the target group to show that practitioners value their sacred stories.

First Nations Peoples have a strong sense of connection to their ancestors who have paved the way for their resilience, strength and emancipation. Epistemology defines the knowledge of First Nations Peoples and how they have come to that knowledge (Wilson, 2008 as cited in Waller, 2020). Through First Nations peoples' epistemology, participants can provide practitioners with knowledge of their tribal cultural practices, which can become a foundation for their practice within that community. It is essential to provide an approach in which First Nations Ways of Knowing are a standard principle guiding engagement practices, as it preserves their cultural identity and practices. By prioritising reciprocity, connections, relatedness, integrity, belonging and identity, practitioners can empower First Nations people.

Existing Programs

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is a prominent existing strategy for non-Indigenous social service engagement with First Nations People, developed through professional development and training programmes. The concept refers to, "a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together as a system, agency, or among professionals to enable that

system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations"
(Sutton 2000 cited in Hill & Mills 2013, p. 65).

Our literature review identified key cultural competence models enacted in social-based
sectors in Australia. Several of these were located as part of the *Indigenous Cultural
Competency Project in Australian Universities* (Universities Australia, 2011) and included,
The Charles Sturt University (CSU) online Indigenous Cultural Competency Program
(ICCP) (Hill, Tullock, Mclek & Lewis, 2020); The CSU Cultural Competence Pedagogical
Framework (Hill & Mills, 2013); and The Central Queensland University (CQU) Indigenous
Cultural Competency Training Course (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016). Furthermore, we
explored two existing cultural competency training programs including the cultural
competency training package for Town Planning-related engagement with First Nations
People facilitated by the organisation Zion (Zion Engagement & Planning, 2020), as well
as The University of Sydney's Online Cultural Competence Modules (University of
Sydney National Centre for Cultural Competence, 2022). Of the programs identified, the
CQU Indigenous Cultural Competency Training Course (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016)
displayed the most effective model, incorporating critical reflexivity which changed the
behaviour of participants, challenged the way the organisation operated and interrogated
the ways in which participants saw themselves (p. 5).

The respective literature explores cultural competence as an experiential concept,
developed through a number of skills and reflective practices which should be
incorporated into engagement practices with First Nations People (Robinson, Lee &

D'Antoine 2002, p. 1). Accordingly, cultural competency is argued to transcend academic knowledge by incorporating attitudinal positions, reflexivity, openness and sensitivity to the diversity of First Nations culture by encouraging "...a psycho-social journey, influencing our ways of being in the world" (Hill et al. 2020, p. 15).

Community Control

Community control is a research and practice model in which the definition of problems and solutions are led by the affected First Nations community (Couzos, Lea, Murray & Culbong 2005, p. 92; Davis, 2013). Community-controlled research involves participatory processes and locally driven decision-making, which "shift the balance of control towards those being researched… [and] makes research more responsive to community needs" (Couzos et al. 2005, p. 92). Community-controlled practice can strengthen empowerment of First Nations People through the deliverance of holistic and culturally appropriate services (Davis 2013, p. 12).

Our literature review identified health as a key area in which effective engagement is being facilitated by community control. The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) is an Australian non-government body which facilitates Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), "...allow[ing] the local Aboriginal community to be involved in its affairs in accordance with whatever protocols or procedures are determined by the Community" (NACCHO, 2022; 'About Us'). We explored literature which assessed the effectiveness of ACCHO's in the landmark controlled clinical ear trial (Couzos et al., 2005), as well as the ability for ACCHO's to strengthen First Nations Peoples self-determination as outlined in the United Nations

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (Davis, 2013). Furthermore, we compared NACCHO's approach to that of Canada's Community Health Representatives (CHRs), prominently identifying Australia's limitations regarding accountability of community control practices (Lavoie & Dwyer, 2016).

The literature locates community-controlled organisations and practices as universally praised mechanisms by which engagement with First Nations People can be strategic and geared towards high-priority needs (Couzos et al. 2005). Community-controlled engagement is accordingly positioned with the ability to improve the acceptability, quality and scope of research and services involving First Nations People (Couzos et al. 2005), as well as empower First Nations People to determine the content of their self-determination (Davis 2013, p. 12).

Consultative Models

Consultative models are the most prominent methods of engagement of non-Indigenous services with First Nations People. Consultation is defined as a "two-way flow of information", (Family & Community Services 2011, p. 5) involving the reciprocal giving and receiving of advice (Saunders 2015, p. 21).

The literature regarding consultative models spans a number of disciplines and sectors, including both government and non-government. We examined several existing government-level consultation models including the Family & Community Services Aboriginal Consultation Guide (2011), the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (AIHW) 'Engaging with Indigenous Australia' guide (2013), and the Native Title Report outlining

the elements of meaningful and effective engagement (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). Additionally, we reviewed literature assessing the effectiveness of enacted consultative models of engagement regarding a community-led suicide intervention skills training program (Nasir, Kisley, Hides, Ranmuthugala, Brennan-Olsen, Nicholson, Gill, Hayman, Kondalsamy-Chennakesavan & Toombs, 2017), as well as a theoretical consultative model of engagement for public health research (Pyett, Waples-Crow, Van Der Sterren, 2009).

The literature positions consultation as an effective method of engagement which can be measured by the opportunity to make substantive contributions and the effect of these contributions (Saunders 2015, p. 21). There is a general consensus that consultative models must be genuine, authentic, and undertaken with 'good faith' in order to prevent the risks of rational and linear consultative models reinforcing passive and tokenistic decision-making (AIHW 2013, p. 6; Saunders, 2015). As such, the literature argues that consultation should be undertaken in combination with cultural competence and community-controlled processes in order to be effective (Nasir et al. 2017, p. 4; Pyett et al., 2009). Accordingly, effective consultation is argued to encompass the capacity to "share power in relationships that foster mutual trust" (AIHW 2013, p. 3), transforming engagement into active participation which translates into meaningful service-delivery.

6. Discussion

Integrated Model of Cultural Support

The Cultural Support Scale is a recently designed model that involves culturally inclusive and responsive practice designed for social workers and service providers when engaging with First Nations communities. In the current Australian context, 'cultural competency' is the dominant concept used in social services discourse to engage with First Nations' Australians. Cultural competence alone is a superficial and tokenistic marker of engagement (Herring et al. 2013, p. 106). Given its one-directional approach, there is a limited interest in how First Nations' cultural concepts can be used to engage communities within the social services sector. There is potential danger that these concepts and knowledge forms can be co-opted when being forced to fit into white knowledge forms within a colonial based institution (Dutta et al. 2020, p. 5). First Nations' knowledge is not homogeneous; thus, they cannot be streamlined as a method of engagement for differing First Nations communities. Accordingly, cultural competence is not included in the integrated model of cultural support (Green et al. 2019, p. 176).

The Cultural Support Scale is instead an integrated framework which builds on previous concepts of:

- *Cultural Awareness:* the exposure of individuals to First Nations' histories can increase awareness, lowering racism and disadvantage, resulting in better outcomes for individuals from disadvantaged groups.

- *Cultural Sensitivity:* the ability to make decisions that are culturally appropriate, taking into account different values, positions and drawing on cultural expertise (Tucker et al. 2017, p. 84).

- *Cultural Safety:* providing clients with the power to participate in the provision of their care.

- *Cultural Responsiveness:* cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective.

- *Cultural Support:* builds on all these past concepts to recognise that all are necessary to deliver a culturally affirming practice. Cultural support encourages researchers to look at themselves and critically disaggregate how their own racial bias and prejudice may impact the pre-ordained structures of engagement.

The problems with each of the concepts is that they have only been considered as individual, separate models rather than pieces of a larger model. There is a limited awareness of how the deficits of previous models can inform their successors.

These models are also one-directional in approach as they are only concerned with what can be learnt from Indigenous knowledge, rather than how current practices and systems in place continue to appease issues faced by First Nations communities and how they are informed by race and whiteness (Green et al. 2019, p. 88). The integrated model of cultural support is a multi-directional process between the service provider and First Nations client. It encourages self-reflexivity for researchers who hold power and advantage because of their race (Green et al. 2019, p. 181).
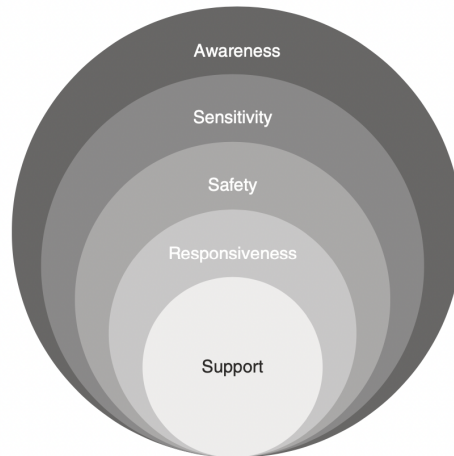
Figure 10.2   Elements of cultural support

1. Cultural support plans for social workers involve a practice plan with clients and assess the training needs of individual social workers, both at an initial and ongoing level (Green et al. 2019, p. 181)

2. Cultural support plans set out an intake assessment for social workers which provides them with information about the cultural background and needs of an individual client (Green et al. 2019, p. 181)

Best Practices and the Cultural Support Scale

Community Control - The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

Community control can be viewed as best practice within the Cultural Support Scale.

- Being a community-controlled health organisation, NACCHO enables cultural support as community members are empowered to participate in decision-making

and self-determination positions through the locally elected Board of Management (NACCHO, 2022; 'About Us').

● Forming the basis of the national peak body, NACCHO dismantles the power relationship and imbalance between the service workers and the First Nations client (NACCHO, 2022; 'About Us'). Use of inclusive and diverse decision-making boards will challenge and deconstruct accepted ways of knowing and practising, ensuring that all practice models are culturally aware, sensitive, safe, responsive and supportive.

Consultative methods

Consultative methods can be considered important steps toward cultural awareness and responsiveness but fall short when meeting criteria of cultural support.

● Consultative models within a rational, linear policy making model can fail to embrace political complexity. This ultimately reinforces centralised and passive models of decision making (Reddel & Woolcock 2004, as cited in AIHW 2013, p. 6), limiting overall participatory citizen engagement.

● According to Green (2019), consultative models can be whiteness affirming rather than disrupting. This means that consultative models continue to frame First Nations people as marginalised, requiring intensive help from the profession's knowledge system, leaving existing power relations unsullied and unchanged (Walter et al. 2019, p. 72).

Indigenous ways of knowing/ trauma-informed care

When approached in a reflexive and sensitive manner, Indigenous epistemologies serve as a tool of emancipatory freedom from colonial legacies and intergenerational trauma, thus meeting the criteria of the Cultural Support Scale.

There are high risks involved with relying on Indigenous epistemologies as a white, social service worker. Prioritising First Nations' cultural concepts does not force service workers to address their whiteness directly, but instead causes them to concentrate even harder on the race of the 'other' (Walter et al. 2019, p. 72). If Indigenous knowledge is used out of context, meanings of this knowledge can be co-opted by the hegemonic structures of white-centric social services (Green et al. 2013, p. 9).

- Rigney (2006) describes Dadirri as being underpinned by a 3-point agenda: political integrity, giving privilege to Indigenous voices and taking action. Dadirri is built on ways of relating and acting within the community that champion 'non-intrusive observation' (Waller et al. 2018, p. 230).
- Ways of knowing can be applied through social service engagement practice via a use of cultural supervision to ensure social service workers can reflect critically on practice with First Nations' Australians (Bennet et al. 2018, p. 814). This will develop a strong rapport with clientele, building on practices of deep listening, yarning and storying (AASW, 2012).
- First Nations' epistemologies are used to develop practical programmes which maintain an awareness of trauma to bring about wellbeing (Waller 2018, p. 228).

It is important to view trauma and culture as separate entities, not mutually exclusive (Green et al. 2019, p. 184). In order for this process to be culturally supportive, workers must be prepared to learn from Elders in the community, using Indigenous ways of knowing in conjunction with community control.

7. Recommendations

Based on our research and analysis, we suggest NCOSS undertake the following recommendations:

1. Improving Consultative Models: Consultation with First Nations peoples must be genuine and high-quality

Our research indicates that there needs to be significant improvement in current consultative models with First Nations people. Previous non-Indigenous service practices have failed to recognise the diversity of First Nations peoples' society and culture, causing a sense of exploitation and misrepresentation (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006, 855 as cited in Terare, 2020). We implore that consultation programs with First Nations people are genuine and high-quality as well as consistently assessed at both personal, practice and organisational levels (Herring, et al. 2013, p. 111-114).

Personal implications and steps

It is important that service workers internalise the understanding that modern-day First Nations peoples' personal and cultural identity have been shaped by the history of colonisation. Therefore, it is essential that service workers, (1) are informed about the full history of First Nations people, including the covert and overt racism that First Nations people experience and the importance of their living cultural practices and resilience; (2) take a moral stance when confronting every day, institutional racism toward First Nations people by interrogating white privilege; and (3) reach out through small acts and

connection which aim to identify ways to consult and support First Nations communities (Herring et al. 2013, p. 111-113).

Practice-level implications and steps

At the practice-level, genuine and high-quality consultation for First Nations people can be actualised by becoming informed of the barriers faced by First Nations people when using mainstream services which invoke the possibility of re-traumatisation. In some cases, First Nations people will withdraw themselves from consultation services because it seems to be the logical and safe thing to do when faced with historically damaging systems (Herring et al. 2013, p. 114).

It is the task of service providers to be active in pursuing genuine cultural responsiveness. As such, it is the responsibility of practitioners to demonstrate that consultations are a safe space that both sensitively interrogate the role of colonial structures and incorporate an understanding of First Nations people's culture into their services.

Organisational-level implications and steps

Organisations need to ensure that practitioners have a reflexive understanding of First Nations peoples' history and intergenerational trauma. Organisations should also identify what can be offered to provide culturally supportive and sensitive services for successful engagement. It is fundamental that organisations take initiative to reach out and provide consultation opportunities which involve First Nations People in decision-making to ensure a meaningful and ongoing partnership (Herring et al. 2013, p. 114).

2. Incorporating First Nations Methodologies and ways of knowing into practice: Alternative and empowering models of engagement

The frameworks of First Nations methodologies and Ways of Knowing can be utilised in engagement settings to provide deep capacity where both practitioners and First Nations people can build understanding of the intergenerational trauma experience (Terare & Rawsthorne, 2019 as cited in Terare, 2020). Applying First Nations Ways of Knowing will emancipate and validate their epistemology and axiology. It will also ensure that their rights are upheld, and their trauma experience is heard.

In practice, trauma-informed care should incorporate First Nations people's Ways of Knowing into yarning circles through three phases (Cullen et al. 2020, p.4-5):

- **Phase 1:** Yarning circles must be used to build relationships and understanding. This includes:
    - *Social yarning:* to create trust between practitioners and participants;
    - *Research yarning:* to help practitioners gain information; and
    - *Therapeutic yarning:* for First Nations people to share information of their trauma experience, while practitioners affirm their story and work towards understanding their experience.
- **Phase 2:** Learnings from the yarning circles are categorised into themes and explored deeper to develop understanding of core issues.
- **Phase 3:** Focusing on decolonising, stories are presented across the community to consolidate understanding and interactive learning. This can cover issues of colonisation, local history, racism, white privilege and fragility.

3. Operationalising the Integrated Model of Cultural Support: Creation of trauma-informed cultural support training programs for non-Indigenous service practitioners

Our research suggests that current cultural competence training strategies are limited in their ability to develop reflexive and trauma-informed practices of non-Indigenous social service engagement with First Nations People. In theory, cultural competence has the capacity to transform engagement and its outcomes (Hill & Mills 2013, p. 63). In practice, it can be reduced to a passive "...risk management technique to be applied in culturally diverse workplaces and when working with culturally diverse clientele" (Carey 2015, p. 838).

We argue that strengths of the CQU Indigenous Cultural Competency Course indicate the untapped capacity to create cultural training programs which align with the transformative practices, values and outcomes of the Integrated Model of Cultural Support (Green, 2019).

In order to improve engagement practices of non-Indigenous social services with First Nations People, we recommend NCOSS develops and resources a training program underpinned by The Integrated Model for Cultural Support (Green, 2015). This program should clearly identify that cultural support is a consistent and transformative learning journey which involves teaching skills and knowledge pertaining to reflexivity practices and trauma-informed perspectives. The program should inherently aim to interrogate the invisibility of Whiteness in social service decision-making and practice (Moreton-

Robinson 2006, p. 388), as well as foster active recognition of the diversity of First Nations Peoples ways of knowing, being and doing.

4. Incorporating Community Control: First Nations people define the problem, lead the research, and develop solutions within their local contexts

Our research sustains the usefulness of community-controlled research and practice for facilitating effective engagement and outcomes. Western-centric problem-solving has devalued the knowledge and self-determination of local First Nations communities (Davis, 2013), enacting passive 'outsider' attempts to address these problems (Ife 2013, p. 286). Alternatively, community-led processes can provide effective alternatives which increase the responsiveness of research and engagement endeavours (Couzos et al. 2005, p. 92).

We argue that NACCHO's success in the area of health has demonstrated the capacities of community control to effectively respond to targeted high priority needs. This indicates the potential to develop community-controlled engagement practices which can target the specific, personalised and localised contexts in which the engagement is occurring.

Problematically, current pre-engagement practice involves defining problems and goals without the contribution and knowledge of the people affected. As an alternative, we suggest NCOSS begins engagement with the mutual definition of problems and goals among non-Indigenous service workers and First Nations People. Furthermore, NCOSS should continue to ensure engagement incorporates First Nations Peoples' control at all stages of the process, reinforcing self-determination and ensuring the responsiveness of the engagement (Davis, 2013).

When community control is compounded at all stages of the engagement process and First Nations People are treated as partners, stakeholders, informants and recipients of services, all problem-solving and decision-making will be positioned to more accurately reflect the diverse and specific needs of the community (Ballard & Syme 2016, p. 202).

8. Conclusion

This paper evaluates theories and practices that prioritise First Nation cultures and peoples, as a step to promote decolonised engagement. Our research discovered the Integrated Model for Cultural Support as a model which can be applied to engagement, demonstrating cultural inclusivity, and offering best practice engagement strategies with First Nation communities. The Integrated Model for Cultural Support allows non-Indigenous service providers to improve consultative models, incorporate First Nation ideologies into research and practice, integrate cultural support and maximise community control in all engagement endeavours.

For further research about how to improve engagement with First Nations people, we highly recommend the book *Our Voices: Aboriginal Social Work* by Bindi Bennett and Sue Green. This is a collection of essays written by First Nations social work educators that outlines "appropriate behaviours, interactions, networks, and intervention" (Bennett and Green, 2020).

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