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Adapting and Developing Educational Best Practices and Curricula for Aboriginal Tobacco Cessation Interventions

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Introduction

In May 2009, the TEACH Project (Training Enhancement in Applied Cessation Counselling and Health) offered a two-day pilot specialty course to build the capacity of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health practitioners to offer tobacco cessation interventions to Aboriginal peoples and communities throughout Ontario. TEACH is a knowledge translation (KT) project designed to bridge the research-practice gap (Herie and Martin 2002). The goal of this specialized course is for participants to increase their knowledge and skills with regard to the detection and treatment of tobacco dependence and misuse among Aboriginal populations. In addition to receiving training themselves, it is intended that participants in the course will share the knowledge and skills that they learn with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal tobacco cessation practitioners within their communities and organizations, thereby further increasing the capacity to offer intensive cessation interventions. Participants will also be encouraged to take part in an ongoing community of practice designed to provide networking, consultation, and support in their application of new practice skills.

The initial development process of this two-day pilot specialty course involved adapting the theories of participatory research (Schnarch 2004), community-based research (Shannon et al. 2007), and the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) (First Nations Centre 2007) to the knowledge translation of educational practices (Masching, Allard, and Prentice 2006). Other positive initiatives have been designed around many of the principles outlined by OCAP (Cargo et al. 2003; Masching, Allard, and Prentice 2006, Shannon et al. 2007), including a course developed at the University of British Columbia (Jarvis-Selinger et al. 2008). While the TEACH Project course is similar in its aim of incorporating collaborative research into the development process (Barne 2000), it is unique in its ability to implement a wholly collaborative approach to curriculum development within an accredited, intensive, cessation-counselling, knowledge-translation project.

As Masching, Allard, and Prentice (2006) indicate, "KT is about making sure that the knowledge gained through research is meaningful and useful in practice for various stakeholders." This means that "from the very beginning of a research project, plans and resources are in place for capacity building and information sharing throughout the project" (Masching, Allard, and Prentice 2006). The importance of meaningful and useful knowledge generated through the process of KT is complemented by the principles of OCAP, which aim to ensure research is conducted *with* and not *on* Aboriginal populations (First Nations Centre, 2007, Masching, Allard, and Prentice 2006). Barnes (2000) and Shannon et al. (2007) describe how working with members of the community that a project aims to assist is an appropriate way of maximizing the likelihood of the community adopting the project. The results generated by the project are also more likely to align with the principles of OCAP (Masching, Allard, and Prentice 2006).

As a method of incorporating the principles of OCAP into the collaborative and participatory process of course development, TEACH collaborated with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners and researchers working with or within Aboriginal populations from the earliest stages of course development. This was to ensure that the development process itself was based in a participatory framework and would result in a course developed *with* and not just *for* the very practitioners it was designed to train.

As one of very few working sessions accepted to the November 2008 Ontario Tobacco Research Unit (OTRU) conference entitled *Tobacco Control for the 21st Century,*[1] TEACH utilized the two-day session to bring together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals from across the province to form a group that would work together to discuss, plan, and design the preliminary curriculum and evaluation framework for the two-day specialty course. This paper will document the collaborative process of planning the OTRU conference working session, outline the conference proceedings, and discuss the next steps in developing the two-day specialty course. Lessons learned and implications for other collaborative knowledge translation development initiatives are included at the end of this paper.

Background: Tobacco Use in Aboriginal Populations

It should be noted that "Aboriginal" is a broad term, including citizens/members of First Nations, the Inuit, the Métis, people labelled as treaty/status "Indians" (an arcane term still used in the racist legislation governing Indigenous affairs in Canada), people labelled as non-status/treaty "Indians," on-reserve people, off-reserve people, and people with Bill C-31 status. Each of these categories of identities has unique concerns and histories.

The term Aboriginal also includes different genders, sexualities, political beliefs, spiritual beliefs, socio-economic statuses, languages, histories, and

cultural teachings. A heterosexual, anglophone lawyer born and raised in Toronto, and married to a non-Aboriginal wife may proudly identify himself as Aboriginal, as could a Cree-speaking lesbian community nurse with a status card, working at her reserve's health centre.

With all of these variables in place, generalized statements about the abuse of commercial tobacco amongst Aboriginal peoples become very difficult to make—the same statements may not apply in all settings. Aboriginal communities have widely varying teachings about tobacco, ranging from a deep understanding of the sacredness of the medicine to an utter lack of traditional teachings about the medicine. Christian Aboriginal communities may also have had spiritual teachings about tobacco at one point, but eschew them in the twenty-first century. This incredible diversity of teachings and beliefs must always be considered, as a pan-Aboriginal approach to tobacco cessation strategies will alienate certain peoples and communities.

However, there are still reasons that Aboriginal people might quit smoking. Winter (2001) notes the increasing rates of commercial tobacco use by Native youth and the rising rates of death among North America's Indigenous peoples from lung cancer, heart disease, and other tobacco-related illnesses. Retnakaran, Hanley, Connelly, Harris, and Zinman (2005) found that cigarette smoking at an early age may be a factor contributing to the high prevalence of cardiovascular disease among Aboriginal youth in Canada. The Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit (ACCU) (2008a) provides a provincial context for tobacco misuse: The use of tobacco products kills sixteen thousand people in Ontario every year, and smoking rates among Aboriginal youth fifteen- to seventeen years old are triple those of fifteen- to seventeen-year-olds in the general Canadian population.

Evidence suggests that Aboriginal peoples themselves are extremely concerned about the ill effects of smoking. Hayward, Campbell, and Sutherland-Brown (2007) conducted an exploratory, comparative study of the utilization and effectiveness of tobacco cessation telephone quitlines among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadian smokers. This exploratory analysis shows that even without targeted promotion, Aboriginal smokers do call Canadian quitlines, primarily for health-related reasons. Six months after intake, Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals had taken similar measures, with 57% making a twenty-four-hour quit attempt. Quit rates were higher for Aboriginals than for non-Aboriginals, particularly for men. The six-month prolonged abstinence rate for Aboriginal men was 16.7% compared with 7.2% for Aboriginal women and 9.4% and 8.3% for non-Aboriginal men and women, respectively.

Ongoing Aboriginal resistance against colonization also points to reasons to quit smoking. Commercial tobacco is mass-produced, and loaded with harmful chemicals to promote the addictiveness of the product—it is an acculturated, factory-made version of a powerful medicine that many Aboriginal peoples traditionally viewed as sacred.

Winter (2001) also notes that tobacco, when used properly, can be a life-affirming and sacramental substance that plays a significant role in many Native creation myths and religious ceremonies. Sacred tobacco can be used as a daily offering to say prayers and give thanks for all the gifts the Creator has given to us (Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit 2008b). It can also be placed onto the Earth as thanks for providing all the things that help sustain life, or onto water as an acknowledgement of the lifeblood that sustains us. Many Aboriginal peoples have also used sacred tobacco in combination with other plants/herbs to treat some illnesses or have offered sacred tobacco as a way of giving thanks in advance of a request. Not all Aboriginal peoples share teachings about the sacredness of tobacco, but for those that do, respect for tradition and culture can be an incentive to quit.

Method

Participants

It was recognized from the earliest stages of course development that a diverse planning group of key stakeholders, opinion leaders, and subject-matter experts was needed in order to collaboratively develop the TEACH Project two-day specialty course. A meeting was held with TEACH Project organizers and individuals who had expressed an interest in participating in the development of a specialty course addressing smoking in Aboriginal communities. From this meeting it was decided that taking first steps *within* the home organization Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) was the most appropriate way of proceeding in order to prevent duplication, as well as to incorporate idea-sharing into the very design of the course development process. To this end, an informal key-informant interview was arranged between a TEACH organizer, an individual interested in the course development, and an Aboriginal staff member and leader within the home organization. The aim of the interview was to achieve several goals: To survey initiatives already underway within the organization; to assess the need within the organization for the development of this new initiative; to identify the issues and priorities other initiatives within the organization work with; to share information about the TEACH development process; and to identify a snowball sample of key stakeholders, opinion leaders, organizations, content experts, and community members both within the home organization and throughout Ontario.

The next step was to make initial contact with the individuals identified through the interviews. It was very important in this first contact to emphasize the nature of the project and the expected activities of the planning group members, while ensuring no contacted individuals would feel uncomfortable or pressured by the method and style of contact. A letter was sent via email from the project director of TEACH and included the initial letter of intent for the conference, a tentative conference agenda, and the expected outcome of the two days. It was decided that email was the ideal means of contact, as it could provide fast delivery of

the information and also provided that information in a format that was easy for those contacted to forward on to other individuals who would be interested in the initiative. In this way, the initial contact method was time-efficient, non-invasive, and conducive to extending the snowball sample via respondent-driven identification of further contacts (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004). The aim was to contact individuals working with or within Aboriginal populations, and the snowball sample of contacts included First Nations, Métis, and non-Aboriginal individuals but did not include the contact information of any Inuit individuals. This gap in the contact information collected serves to underscore the importance of actively utilizing respondent-driven identification to make contact with the "hidden populations" existing within broader populations (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004). The discussion section (below) will address this issue further.

Initially, twenty-four invitations to participate in the planning group were emailed. An additional eleven individuals were identified by the initial respondents, including four elders. Approximately thirty individuals responded that they would participate in the planning group, along with four members of the TEACH Project team and the TEACH Project director and executive director. Because the nature of a snowball sample is such that it keeps growing, the decision was made to keep planning group membership open throughout the conference development process, as an ongoing and informal "open-door" policy. The planning group was comprised of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health practitioners, researchers, and community members from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds.

Over the two-day working session, at least forty participants were in attendance. This number included seventeen participants from the planning committee, thirteen participants who independently identified the TEACH working session as one of interest on the OTRU registration website, six TEACH Project staff, and at least four participants who did not pre-register but attended the two-day session because of their interest in the topic.

At no time during the working session was participant background information asked for or recorded; as such, the number of Aboriginal participants involved is unavailable. However, a large proportion of participants did self-identify as Aboriginal during group introductions. Of all pre-registered participants, fourteen indicated working for an Aboriginal organization, eleven indicated working for tobacco control and/or health promotion initiatives, five indicated working for or studying at a university-level educational institution, and four indicated working at an Ontario public health unit.

Although funding was provided by OTRU for Ontario practitioners, three participants indicated having made arrangements to travel from British Columbia to attend the TEACH Project two-day working session.

A primary benefit of organizing the planning group as a satellite session of the OTRU conference was the funding provided by OTRU for participant travel, meals, and accommodation. Ongoing barriers to the adoption of practice change for practitioners are time and workload coverage (Herie, Cunningham, and Martin

2000), and this is an acute problem for practitioners in Aboriginal communities and organizations in which inadequate resources and funding have been recognized as ongoing concerns (Assembly of First Nations 2007). In order to ensure that practitioners and individuals interested in participating in the working session had funding to attend, TEACH supplemented the allowances provided by OTRU with funding from the project budget, and planning group members from the Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit (ACCU) of Cancer Care Ontario generously provided ACCU support in funding the attendance of four elders for two days.

Planning Process

Once responses to the majority of initial contact emails had been received, four teleconferences were planned with the primary task of evaluating and developing the two-day conference agenda and identifying facilitators to address each topic. Teleconferences were agreed on as the most appropriate meeting format because the majority of planning group members lived outside of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and members' considerations of time and workload were of importance. The first teleconference was held more than three months prior to the two-day working session in order to allow for sufficient time to build trust and rapport with members of the planning group, as well as sufficient time to create a session agenda that would meet the needs and align with the beliefs of individuals involved in the process (First Nations Centre 2007).

The first of the four teleconferences was planned to formally welcome members to the planning group and to invite and encourage their meaningful involvement in the planning process. This teleconference was one hour in length, with ten participating members of the planning group in attendance. Four elders representing different Aboriginal communities were identified as individuals to invite to the conference, including the elder-in-residence at the home organization. Discussion included the first group review of the tentative agenda created by TEACH and potential topics for consideration were recommended.

After each of the four teleconferences, a summary of the discussion was emailed to the entire planning group, including those members who did not phone in to participate. There was an identifiable "core group" of the planning group members, comprising approximately five individuals who were in attendance at each teleconference and who were consistently active in responding to emails, providing support and advice, and taking lead roles in the planning process. This core group acted in effect as a steering committee within the larger planning group, which proved to be highly beneficial to the overall planning process; at each teleconference thoughts and ideas were generated by the core group, recorded, and then sent on to the larger group, which reviewed and commented on the proceedings via email. In this way, individuals were able to participate in different ways, and multiple perspectives were heard.

Over the course of the four teleconferences, fourteen facilitators and moderators were selected through self-nomination or third-party referral, and each of the four

elders agreed to participate as facilitators in three panel discussions. Through a process of constant review and revision, a final two-day agenda gradually emerged that incorporated the many priorities and interests of individuals involved in the process (**Table 7.1** – page 100).

Overview of the Two-Day OTRU Conference Session

The TEACH Project's two-day working group was one of only five concurrent two-day sessions accepted to the OTRU conference, and was the only session addressing tobacco use in Aboriginal populations. Titled "Adapting and developing educational best practices and curricula for practitioners providing Aboriginal tobacco cessation interventions," the TEACH session focused on the gap in core knowledge and skills needed to address tobacco cessation in Aboriginal communities and to evaluate training and assess impacts of program delivery at the community level. Each participant was provided with a comprehensive package of resources that was referred to during the session, which included the full two-day agenda, brief facilitator biographies, a contact list of all participants attending the session, copies of PowerPoint presentations used, and notes pages. Thanks to extra funding offered by OTRU, a professional note-taker was present for key discussions over the two days and an accurate and detailed summary of the session was recorded.

The aim of the two-day session was to develop an initial specialty course curriculum (i.e., create a rough course agenda), and to review and revise existing TEACH course evaluations to better fit with the approach, goals, and objectives of the specialty course. To this end, the first day was sectioned into three plenary discussions on topics suggested by the planning group. Each panel discussion was moderated by one member of the planning group, with a minimum of three panellists and one elder participating in the discussion. Panel topics addressed included: urban/on-reserve communities delivering cessation interventions; past and current tobacco intervention initiatives and evaluation/research; and integrating our learning and discussion (for detailed discussion points, see **Table 7.1**).

Day one of the working session began with an opening prayer and smudging ritual led by the elder-in-residence of the home organization, who began the working group on a positive and personal note by stating: "Rituals always remind me … that what I am is to serve, and the greatest opportunity I have is to serve the people." This was followed by a welcome and introduction from the TEACH project director. The plenary discussions followed for the morning and afternoon, each one involving a mix of presentation styles that were formal and informal, discussion-based and narrative-based. Much of what was discussed was not only helpful for planning the specialty course, but also affirmed the process TEACH had been following thus far, merging participatory research with the principles of OCAP to adapt recommendations to an educational framework. An unquantifiable but promising indication of the success of this process was that the working group participants engaged with the topics at hand candidly and proactively, regardless

Table 7.1: Day 1 Agenda

9:00 – 9:45 TEACH project director Elder-in-residence (home organization)	Welcome and Introductions Opening Prayer
9:45 – 10:30 TEACH project director	Overview of TEACH core course (providing context) Discussion of gaps/areas to address in the two-day specialty course we will be planning
10:30 – 10:45	BREAK
10:45 – 12:00 One moderator; three Panellists	Panel Discussion #1: Urban/On-Reserve Communities—Delivering Cessation Interventions How tobacco legislation affects Aboriginal peoples and communities: Policy initiatives and issues Social determinants of health and the impacts on smoking cessation What do practitioners need to know? How can we respond with respect to the barriers to implementing tobacco cessation approaches? What are the key, relevant cessation messages?
12:00 – 1:00	LUNCH
1:00 – 2:30 One moderator; five panellists	Panel Discussion #2: Past and Current Tobacco Intervention Initiatives and Evaluation/Research Best or promising practices in Aboriginal tobacco cessation First-hand experiences from people who have delivered cessation programs: How did they go about it? What models currently exist? How did they make it culturally appropriate? Presentation on the traditional uses of tobacco as a strategy for cessation
2:30 – 2:45	BREAK
2:45 – 3:30 One moderator; five panellists	Panel Discussion #3: Integrating Our Learning and Discussion This final session of Day 1 will help bring together and integrate the learning thus far, to set the context for Day 2. Guiding questions: What are the key issues, topics, and promising practices in developing a curriculum for professionals working with Aboriginal clients/communities? How do we, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers/practitioners build alliances with Aboriginal communities to improve research and evaluation of Aboriginal tobacco cessation initiatives?
3:30 – 4:00 TEACH project director	Overview of Day 2 Wrap up and adjourn

of whether or not they had a role in planning the session or knew other participants in the group. Facilitators attested to not having experienced such a personal level of openness, safety, and trust at an industry conference before, and, as the discussion of measures and results will indicate, this uncommon level of professional intimacy had highly beneficial results for the specialty course development.

Plenary discussions proved to be as pragmatic as they were sincere, and one facilitator shared the experiences from her own work, offering invaluable advice for creating a successful and culturally appropriate project:

> Looking at [tobacco cessation] from a positive angle is a key, along with ascertaining the capacity that exists in the community, the workers present in the community, and whether they are currently working on tobacco cessation. The most critical aspect is to find a community champion who is familiar with the community and can assist in navigating it.

The facilitator also underscored the importance of remaining flexible in the specialty course design, concluding her presentation by reminding the participants about "the holistic impact of intervention on communities, the cyclic nature of change, and the positive potential of the task at hand."

The facilitator's emphasis on flexibility for course design came into play sooner than expected. On day two of the working session, the agenda originally involved splitting the group of participants into two facilitated breakout discussion groups: One to tackle curriculum development, and the other to address course evaluation. However, large-group discussion on day one had been open and productive to the extent that the organizers were reluctant to divide the group for the purpose of meeting the workshop goals based on a pre-established timeline. Instead, the agenda was adapted to better fit the nature of the working group and the day's activities were tailored to work with the group's strength of sharing.

The outcome of an altered agenda on day two was that different priorities from within the working group were given precedence over a pre-planned development structure. Although this meant that the curriculum development and evaluation design did not proceed as expected, it resulted in the generation of original ideas that were produced and shared in an environment reflective of the individuals within it. That a process of participatory and ad-hoc agenda direction was built into the beginnings of the specialty course development indicates a promising direction for the TEACH Project's next steps.

As has been the case in other studies (Cargo et al. 2003; Masching, Allard, and Prentice 2006; Shannon et al. 2007), when the initial design of a project involves the participation of the community members who it will address and/or involve, that project has a far better chance of being adopted as having "street credit" and of being genuinely useful to those it is meant to help (Barnes 2000). By maintaining flexibility throughout the conference, the TEACH working group was able

to function primarily on the terms informally set by the working group participants themselves. Over the two days, course development was achieved through the cooperative partnership of multiple invested parties; instead of the traditional imposition of goals and strategies from the "top" down, there was a working group of peers (Shannon et al. 2007; First Nations Centre 2007).

Conference Session Evaluation Findings

Participants in the two-day OTRU conference session were asked to complete a three-page evaluation consisting of three different response formats. All evaluations were voluntary, and were anonymous with the option of including the respondent's name. Section one evaluated the workshop as a whole and asked participants to respond to statements concerning the content, facilitation, and their overall satisfaction with the working group on a Likert rating scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Statements about content concerned the clarity of learning objectives, the adequacy of time for the achievement of the objectives, the allocation of time for topics discussed, and the usefulness of the participant resource package for participation. Facilitation statements related to the plenary discussions and assessed panellist readiness (preparation for the session), panellist sensitivity to diversity within the working group, relevance of discussion to session objectives, and style of panellist responses to questions and issues. Finally, statements about the overall working group touched on how the expectations of participants were met, the respect given to the diversity of populations and communities, and the overall quality of the session.

Section two evaluated the smaller group discussions and asked participants to circle one out of four statements that best expressed the work of their group. Four aspects were evaluated, concerning the use of time, development of ideas, ability to decide issues, and overall productivity. Each set of four statements descriptively measured the perceived effectiveness of the small working group in each area, ranging from not effective at all to very effective.

Section three included a list of four open-ended questions and asked participants to comment on each. Participants commented on their perception of the most valuable thing achieved in the working session, the effectiveness and appropriateness of the two-day working group as a means of co-creating the two-day TEACH specialty course, points not discussed over the two days that were applicable to the objectives, and any final comments not already shared with the group.

Results

Overall, eighteen evaluations were completed and returned, a lower number than expected likely because of the multiple roles various participants played over the course of the working session (i.e., elders, moderators, panellists, organizers, and TEACH Project staff were all also active participants) that may have prevented an opportunity to complete the evaluation. Although the anonymous evaluations

provided the option to include a name, no names were filled in and so it was not possible to discern who did not evaluate the session and why they may not have done so.

The evaluation assessed participant opinions in three different styles, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative analysis and summary. It is of great importance to note that the evaluations not only proved useful in gauging the effectiveness of the working group, but also provided a wealth of open, thoughtful feedback. In almost every evaluation, participants shared thoughts and ideas that were supportive, constructive, and prescriptive.

The average rating for section one on the whole was 4.17 (where 5 = best/highest). Content was given an average rating of 3.69 with insufficient time given as the greatest issue. The average rating for facilitation was 4.17, the weakest measure being relevance of discussion to learning objectives. The average rating for the overall session measures was 4.41, with a strong response indicating a positive group experience.

Overall, ratings for section two were also promising; the majority of participants circled a very positive or a moderately positive statement for each of the four elements relating to the quality and utility of the small group discussion. The majority of respondents (83%) agreed that time was used effectively; 89% of respondents agreed that the session was a positive environment for the exploration of new ideas; 83% of respondents agreed that the session was facilitated in a way that promoted consensus-building; and 88% of respondents agreed that the session was productive with respect to accomplishing the stated objectives. The first two sections of the evaluation indicated an overall positive and effective session for participants in small group work as well as in large group plenary discussions.

Section three of the evaluation asked participants to comment on the four open-ended questions provided. The comments shared were thoughtful and pragmatic, providing insight into what participants would be "taking away" from the two days as well as what lessons could be learned for steps going forward. Of importance to measuring the working session's value in the course development process, the second question asked: *Do you feel this two-day working group was an effective and appropriate means of creating a two-day TEACH specialty course?* Responses to this question were varied, giving an overall sense that the working group was appropriate and would have been more effective had there been more time. Responses ranged from describing the two days as "an important step along the road" to stating that "two days aren't sufficient, especially given the oral tradition and diversity of viewpoints that needed to be shared."

Responses to each section of the evaluation provided concrete data and ideas for moving forward in the course development process, and also ensured participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback and share thoughts that they may not have made to the larger working group. As was done with the first draft report of the working session, a summary of the evaluations was circulated to

the working group to ensure all participants had access to the information, were aware of what evaluation data had been collected, how it had been summarized, and what it would be used for in the course development process. Participants were encouraged to contact the TEACH team with questions, concerns, feedback, and suggested revisions to the session proceedings and evaluation summary.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the session evaluation alone, the two-day working group was a successful way to initiate development of the TEACH Project specialty course. Based on the level of openness reached, the richness of opinions and experiences shared, and the willingness of participants to engage in dialogue across communities, disciplines, languages, and ages, the working group was an invaluable step in the specialty course development process. It combined the pragmatic principles of OCAP with the theories of community-based research (Shannon et al. 2007) and participatory research (Schnarch 2004). The participants in the working group and the planning group members came from a variety of backgrounds, including First Nations, Métis, and non-Aboriginal. The lack of Inuit contacts, and therefore Inuit voices and participation, in the planning group was the direct result of not utilizing respondent-driven identification to its full potential from the initial planning steps. As the course development continues and more individuals are invited to participate in the planning process and the two-day specialty course itself, a concerted effort will be made to identify and contact individuals working with or within Inuit populations. Just as the planning process for the two-day working group progressed with an "open-door" policy for new members, the TEACH Project plans to remain flexible with regard to the participation of interested individuals, to the benefit of the specialty course in development.

Flexibility at the working group meant that the two-day specialty course agenda and set of evaluations were not completed, which the original agenda had been designed to achieve in order to have the course development well underway by the end of the working session. However, it proved beneficial to the development of a robust pilot course that sufficient time was allowed for careful planning. Many participants strongly recommended that the course be piloted no sooner than the May 2009 training week, and although the TEACH Project had planned to offer the course during the training week scheduled for January 2009, this advice was followed in order to offer as comprehensive a pilot course as possible. It was apparent that the primary goal of the course development must remain the quality of the course itself, at times to the exclusion of other needs; as much as it would have been ideal to offer the specialty course in January, the structure and content of the course in development required more time, as did the continuation of relationship-building with potential faculty and content experts.

As some workshop participants indicated, ensuring that there is sufficient time to build and develop trusting, reciprocal relationships with people working with and within Aboriginal populations will help to create a solid foundation on which to build. Because these individuals work in a diverse range of settings and are often pressed for time, budget, and workload coverage (Assembly of First Nations 2007), clarity about expected involvement and patience in correspondence were required from the outset and are expected to be ongoing requirements.

Next steps for the TEACH Project are based on the suggestions and recommendations from participants at the two-day working session. It is the aim of TEACH that the course development continues to be a collaborative effort and the generous offer of continued support and input by working group participants will be gratefully accepted.

The following are some of the important lessons learned during the preliminary stages of course development:

Plan early: Starting the planning process as early as possible was necessary in order to allow for building trust and rapport with planning group members working in different settings with varied time commitment abilities, and for ensuring sufficient time for planning group members to share, review, and revise the two-day working session agenda and content areas.

Create a snowball sample: Initiating the specialty course development process with a key informant interview to create a snowball sample of contacts proved to be a beneficial development methodology. It allowed for respondents to continue the networking process and resulted in a planning group comprised of members from a broad range of disciplines, communities, and backgrounds. The lack of Inuit contacts provided serves to emphasize the importance of using the snowball sample to its fullest potential as a means of identifying and making contact with hidden populations. It also highlights the need to be aware of the possibility of a hidden population being overlooked and to ask questions of respondents accordingly.

Be flexible: Remaining flexible at all stages of the planning process helped the TEACH Project's initiative maintain a forward motion in the development process. Flexibility was necessary throughout the entire process, particularly when working with the diverse perspectives and priorities of the planning group members, when arranging the logistical details of the two-day working session around the changing schedules and availability of participants and facilitators, and when carrying out the two-day working session agenda in a manner that best aligned with the dynamic of the working group participants.

Use a variety of outreach methods: When making contact to actively solicit advice and involvement, it was necessary to use the outreach methods that would be most appropriate to the individuals being contacted. Outreach methods included phone, mail, email, fax, and in-person meetings, and frequently a respondent would initiate contact with an individual he or she had recommended.

Create a safe learning environment: In order to create and maintain a safe space for open learning and sharing, the challenge of talking about diversity and the importance of mutual respect and openness to constructive feedback was explicitly articulated from the outset.

Encourage a variety of facilitation styles: Throughout the working session, development process planning group members emphasized that participants at the session would likely respond well to a two-day working session if the facilitators used a variety of presentation styles. The session involved storytelling, song, personal introductions, PowerPoint presentations, interactive small group and large group exercises, and open and guided discussions. Participants indicated that the variety of facilitation styles was effective, as it aligned with the oral traditions in many of their communities. Many also strongly recommended the need to incorporate this variety into the two-day specialty course agenda as well.

These preliminary findings and lessons may have implications for other KT initiatives. The approach taken in the TEACH course development and planning session has demonstrated that it is possible to generate a sense of collective ownership, buy-in, and collaboration among diverse Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners, stakeholders, subject-matter experts, and elders. Over the six months between the two-day working group session and the two-day specialty course, TEACH worked in collaboration with organizations and individuals, maintaining flexibility while working toward the goal of offering as robust a pilot course as possible, and ensuring full transparency in all aspects of course development. Continuing to apply the principles of OCAP, participatory research, and community-based research was crucial as the project moved forward.

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Endnotes

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