

## Culture in the Classroom: Developing Teacher Proficiency in Delivering a Culturally-grounded Prevention Curriculum

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### ABSTRACT

Authors describe the training model used to develop proficiency in teaching a culturally-grounded prevention curriculum. Teachers believed it vital to discuss substance use, and considered culture and ethnicity central to students' lives, although few had experience teaching prevention curricula. Training effects were evaluated using three datasets. Analyses showed that training should emphasize teaching adult learners; encompass culture from many perspectives; address the teaching of prevention curricula; and, emphasize fidelity as imperative. Trainers found the embedded focus on culture in *keepin' it REAL* essential to success. Teachers learned that a prevention curriculum can be instructionally engaging while theory-driven and academically rigorous.

Key words: teacher development, culturally-grounded instruction, culturally-grounded training, fidelity, drug prevention curriculum

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### INTRODUCTION

*keepin' it REAL* is a school-based substance abuse prevention curriculum grounded in cultural norms and values (Hecht, Marsiglia, Elek, Wagstaff, Kulis, & Dustman, 2003; Marsiglia, Kulis, & Hecht, 2001). Funded through a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA grant #R01-DA-05629) and recognized as a National Model Program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), *keepin' it REAL* builds on students' communication competencies and adds resistance skills to their repertoires of problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills. Students read, write, and participate in activities to practice the REAL (Refuse, Explain, Avoid, and Lease) strategies. The program's central learning tool is a series of videos produced by youths based on real students' stories that demonstrate *Culture in the Classroom: Developing Teacher Proficiency in Delivering a Culturally-grounded Prevention Curriculum* p.2 of 31 how to use REAL strategies to resist drugs in actual life situations. Researchers

recognized the importance of using the same theories that ground the curriculum to build the teachers' training.

The key to effective curriculum implementation is the development of teacher motivation and proficiency (Bosworth, 1998; Ringwalt, Vincus, Ennet, Johnson, & Rohrback, 2004). The training, developed by the REAL research team, focused on the importance culture plays in both teaching and life experiences and was grounded on theoretical models about working with adult learners (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson 1998). Modeled after the curriculum, training sessions included the use of *facilitated learning* and *active engagement strategies* that allowed teachers to examine their own cultures as well as the cultures of their students and to identify protective factors of culture that keep youth safe (Knowles & al., 1998). Researchers also sought to ensure that teachers would implement the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum with fidelity. This paper describes the training model used to develop teacher proficiency in delivering the culturally-grounded *keepin' it REAL* prevention curriculum to 7<sup>th</sup> grade

students in a large southwestern city, and offers insights into the training design. Authors also report on evaluation findings and training effects.

#### The Aims of *keepin' it REAL*

*keepin' it REAL* is a school-based adolescent substance use intervention program designed to test the effectiveness of culturally grounded prevention messages and to understand better the importance of their match to the ethnicity of program participants (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003). Using communication competence theory (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) combined with an ecological risk and resilience approach (Bogenschneider, 1996), the intervention was developed using a narrative and performance framework (Fisher, 1987) to enhance cultural *identification*, to promote personal anti-drug norms and behaviors (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Hansen, 1991), to develop decision-making and resistance skills, and to decrease substance use. The intervention stresses cultural norms of the targeted group by integrating values identified as most salient for success in communicating with youths from that group (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Rodriguez, 2001). With cultural specificity at the core of the curriculum, the intervention focuses on five key elements of adolescent life: communication competence, narrative knowledge, motivating norms, social learning, and resistance skills. Research illustrated ethnic differences in common communication styles, competencies, and norms (Hecht, Ribeau, & Sedano, 1990). Because relational and communication values influence how individuals interact with others, affirming those values encouraged students to learn how to resist substances in a manner that was culturally comfortable for them and enhanced the chances of program success (Castro, Cota, & Vega, 1999). The intervention demonstrated how youths could resist offers of substance use without violating the social structures cherished by their cultures (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003; Vega & Gil, 1998).

#### History of the Project

The longitudinal Drug Resistance Strategies (DRS) Project (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003) designed, implemented, and evaluated the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum based on previous work demonstrating the efficacy of teaching communication and life skills in school-based prevention to combat negative influences (Tobler, Roona, Ochshorn, Marshall, Strecke, & Stackpole, 2000). The curriculum extended existing life skills models by using a culturally grounded narrative and performance framework (Hecht & Krieger, 2006) to enhance anti-drug norms and attitudes and to

facilitate development of risk assessment, decision making, and resistance skills. From its inception, *keepin' it REAL* was envisioned as a culturally-grounded intervention (Gosin, Marsiglia, & Hecht, 2003; Harthun, Drapeau, Dustman & Marsiglia, 2002) using “a resiliency model that incorporated traditional ethnic values and practices promoting protection against drug use” (Castro et al., 1999, p. 520) that was developed from and reflects the relevant cultural narratives, values, and practices commonly cited as central to Mexican American, European American, or African American cultures (Harthun et al., 2002; Hecht & Krieger, 2006).

Although students reported increased substance use over the course of the study, those who received the intervention reported significantly smaller increases than did control students and the intervention had its greatest impact on use of alcohol (Hecht, Graham, & Elek, 2006). In some instances, the curriculum helped students maintain preexisting, anti-drug attitudes and norms while it helped delay the onset of experimentation for others. In still other cases, exposure to the curriculum resulted in cessation of use (Kulis, Nieri, Yabiku, Stromwall, & Marsiglia, 2007). Clearly, infusing cultural elements and values into prevention programs appeared beneficial.

#### Theoretical Foundations of the Intervention

*keepin' it REAL* builds on a theoretical triad that includes Narrative Theory, Communication Competence Theory, and the Focus Theory of Norms. Six essential and interrelated conceptual elements were incorporated: 1. *Ethnic* variations in the nature of *communication competence* (Hecht, Alberts, & Miller-Rassulo 1992); 2. *Narrative-based knowledge* to enhance identification with the prevention message (Miller-Day, Hecht, & Stiff, 1998); 3. An examination of the role of injunctive, personal, and descriptive *norms as motivators* in substance use (Cialdini et al., 1990; Hansen, 1991); 4. *Social learning of social skills* and its key role in risk assessment and decision making (Tobler et al., 2000) 5. *Drug resistance strategies* most commonly and effectively employed by adolescents (Miller-Rassulo, Alberts, Hecht, Krizek, & Trost, 2000); and, 6. Grounding prevention messages in local *social contextual risk and resiliency factors* related to substance use (Bogenschneider, 1996; Castro et al., 1999).

Curriculum developers utilized communication competence theory to conceptualize messages for resisting drug offers. This model posits competence as a relational phenomenon with the three necessary components of (a) knowledge, (b) skills, and (c) motivation. Existing research demonstrated a cultural

basis for competence. For example, members of various ethnic groups differ in their general communication competencies, norms (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003; Samovar & Porter, 1991), and styles (Moore, Laflin, & Weis, 1996). Mexican American communication is more concerned with relational solidarity and has a focus on family and immediate circles of friends (Collier, Ribeau, & Hecht, 1986). African American communication is more focused on power relationships and assertiveness, and European American communication is more future oriented and focused on external rewards (Hecht & Ribeau, 1984). Ethnic, racial, and cultural influences play a role in the prevalence of substance use and abuse, in developmentally related increases in use, and in the effectiveness of substance use prevention. Therefore, cultural appropriateness is essential for communication effectiveness (Hammer & Vaglum, 1989) and interventions (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003).

Narratives can serve as an impetus for encouraging behavior change among adolescents (Botvin, Schinke, Epstein, Diaz, & Botvin, 1995) and are an important premise for prevention messages. Comprehending human reasoning, attitudes, and behavior through narratives lies at the center of narrative theory. When an adolescent faces drug offers from peers, a competent interaction is one that permits refusal of the offer, using personal desires as reasons, while maintaining a positive relationship with peers (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003). The videos accomplished that model by motivating resistance through illustrations of norms and enactments of strategies that allowed students to resist drug offers competently. In the curriculum, narratives represented salient knowledge structures; skills consisted of resistance skills and decision making; and substance use norms provided motivation for attitudinal and behavioral change. The *keepin' it REAL* videos evolved from previous research on drug offers and adolescent experiences related to drug use (Holleran, Reeves, Dustman, & Marsiglia, 2002) supported by pilot tests of narrative-based prevention programs that showed significant results (Hecht, Corman, & Miller-Rassulo, 1993), with more prominent outcomes with minority students (Botvin et al., 1995).

Researchers used the Focus Theory of Norms to frame attitudinal and behavioral changes desired based on prior research showing that people are more likely to be “receptive to models that seem *normal*, to them, and with whom they can identify” (Bandura, 1977, p. 982). Those normative models, connections to real life, serve as impetus for encouraging behavior change among adolescents (Warren, Hecht, Wagstaff,

Elek, Ndiaya, Dustman, & Marsiglia, 2006). In combination, lessons and videos taught each resistance skill through enactments or models of successful drug resistance in recognizable locales, by youth similar to the students in age and ethnicity.

#### Teacher Training Foundations

Although teachers have long been considered the logical candidates for delivering prevention curricula to students, their training to become teachers usually does not equip them to act as prevention specialists (Kealey, Peterson, Gaul, & Dinh, 2000). Elementary and middle-school teachers are prepared to teach their students to read and write—which they do quite well—but few receive any training at all that would help them to address adolescent drug use (Davis, 2006; Ringwalt et al., 2004). Teacher training typically does not require familiarity with adolescent drug abuse prevention literature or materials and few have experience implementing a skills-based prevention program (Ennet, Ringwalt, Thorne, Rohrbach, Vincus, Simons-Rudolph, & Jones, 2003; Harthun et al., 2002). It is counterproductive to thrust a teacher into the role of prevention specialist without first being equipped with the knowledge, experience, and validation needed to be proficient (Harthun et al., 2002; Kealey et al., 2000). Bosworth (1998) found that more than half of teachers responsible for delivering prevention curricula had received no training at all. The training the other half received consisted of participation in one hour-long in-service meeting. “Training was exclusively on implementing the curriculum and did not include information on drug use or prevention theory or concepts. . . .” “For the 51% who had graduate or undergraduate courses in alcohol and other drug abuse, a quickly changing field where prevention technology is relatively complex and particularly amenable to intuitive application, the expertise in prevention gained only from college classes is not likely to be sufficient for keeping abreast of the latest research in prevention” (pp. 320, 321).

Teachers wanting to influence their students positively need to understand their students’ individual cultural backgrounds (Gosin, Dustman, Drapeau, & Harthun, 2003; Harthun, et al., 2002) and how each unique experience predisposes students to interpret their teachers’ messages in slightly different ways (Haupt, 2006). Culturally-distinct parents are often unaware of how values, traditions, and ways of doing things that are normal to them may contradict teacher values, traditions, and ways of doing things (Davis, 2006; Ringwalt et al., 2004).

In the community where this program was implemented, 81% of the targeted students self-identified as Mexican, Mexican-American or some

other Hispanic group, compared to only about 30% of their teachers. Even when teachers and students share similar backgrounds, however, each person has a unique set of “cultural beliefs and past learning experiences that shaped and will affect each new learning experience” (Haupt, 2006, p. 243). Based on cultural compatibility theory, the practice of cultural grounding allows for educational goals that are more likely to be achieved when aligned with those of the community (Ringwalt & Bliss, 2006). It follows, then, that curriculum built upon culturally specific content and scenarios that mirror life experiences of the students for whom it is designed would “enhance their suitability for minority ethnic populations” (Gosin et al., 2003). Our own cultures are so much a part of us as to be invisible, and as such, rarely examined (Littlejohn, 2002). As such, teachers often miss, or misinterpret, their students’ cultural cues (Knutson, 2006). Furthermore, by not understanding the significance of their students’ cultural backgrounds, they may have been “unintentionally communicating a lack of interest” in the student (Davis, 2006, p. 15).

One of the best ways to help people recognize the influence their own and others’ cultural values and experiences evoke on their beliefs, behaviors and choices is to get them to tell their own, and listen to others’, narratives (Hecht & Miller-Day, in press; Knutson, 2006). “The heroes and villains, the choices each makes, and the circumstances that determine characters’ fates” are all indicators of the storyteller’s cultural inheritance. “All students have a story to tell, and given the right conditions and teacher support. . . they will share their stories with us” (Davis, 2006, p. xii).

Bosworth (1998) concluded, “Teachers and administrators need to be provided ongoing training in the basic concepts of prevention and etiology of adolescent substance using behavior” (p. 321). Recent studies evaluating the effectiveness of a number of respected and often-used drug abuse prevention interventions occurring in school settings support the rationale behind an emphasis on making teacher training a priority (Ennett et al., 2003; Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003; Ringwalt & Bliss, 2006). The effectiveness of the intervention, we believed, depended not only on the rigorous structure of the curriculum itself, but equally as much on equipping teachers to be effective facilitators of that curriculum (Hecht, Marsiglia, et al., 2003; Kealey et al., 2000).

#### Teacher Training Developers

Three people, with diverse backgrounds, were involved in planning and implementing the training for teachers. The lead facilitator has been a staff development specialist and master teacher trainer in a

large urban district for over 20 years. She holds a Masters Degree in French Literature, taught French, English, and English as a Second Language, and was the department chair for World Languages during the early part of her career in education. She has worked on curriculum development and teacher training for *keepin’ it REAL* beginning with the original DRS3 grant. She helped create the original curriculum and design the implementer training.

The second member of the training team holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership Studies and worked as a classroom teacher, building administrator, and district superintendent in PreK-12 settings, and is now the Director of Development and Implementation for the Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center at Arizona State University. She continues to oversee the implementation of the Drug Resistance Strategies -4 (funded by NIH/NIDA # R01-DA-0562905A1).

The third member of the training team earned a Masters Degree with a focus on Intercultural Communication, which she uses teaching communication classes at the university level. She holds a certificate in graphic design, which equipped her to work with teens in developing the *keepin’ it REAL* project graphics, videos, and promotional campaigns. An enrolled member of Western Band Cherokee, Talaqua, Okalahoma, she recently began spending summers on the Hopi Indian Reservation with Anglo teens, working side-by-side with the members of the Hopi and Navajo tribes in collaborative narrative learning projects.

#### TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

Trainers used several research-based frameworks focused on working with adult learners and on how, in general, all people learn, to guide development of training session content and format. Following those frameworks, teachers participated in activities reflective of those found in the curriculum, including (a) small group cooperative learning and interaction, (b) whole group discussions, (c) presentations, (d) role plays, and (e) games. They completed exercises targeting culture to help them understand what makes *keepin’ it REAL* a culturally-based curriculum and how those elements help students recognize and value the strengths of their personal cultural background, especially as related to resisting substance use. Training plans emphasized the use of narratives and the context of culture, both underlying theoretical foundations of the curriculum. In addition to focusing on participant understanding of the *keepin’ it REAL* curriculum and their role in the research project, training goals also emphasized in-depth knowledge of the curriculum: skills and

concepts taught in each lesson; facilitation skills to promote student learning and engagement; and, use of human and instructional resources available to them as they implemented the curriculum

#### Emphasis on Working with Adult Learners

Existing research offers much about creating conditions that promote successful adult learning experiences (Hase & Kenyon, 2002; Sharp 2002). Adult learners share the following characteristics: (1) adults are autonomous and self directed; (2) adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge; and (3) adults are practical, focusing on aspects of training that are most useful to them in their work (Knowles et al., 1998). Workshop leaders designed activities to guide participants toward developing knowledge about effective ways to teach the curriculum to their students. They provided time for participants to interact, to share personal experiences (narratives), and to explore new knowledge about prevention curricula. Participants were encouraged to share ideas that would make teaching the curriculum a worthwhile experience for both their students and themselves.

Another key factor in training requires the establishment of a learning environment that is physically and psychologically comfortable (Green, 1998; Sharp, 2002). Prior to their first session, to reduce apprehension and to establish personalized contact, participants received hand-delivered packets of logistical information, confirming times, providing directions—with a map—and providing parking and validation information. To insure that the physical environment was conducive to learning, workshop facilitators and graduate students, assigned to specific campuses, greeted participants, spending time with them before sessions to help them feel comfortable. Continental breakfasts or light supper meals, plus snacks and beverages were available at each session. During breaks, staff members were available to answer questions and share their experiences with the project.

Creating an environment that is psychologically comfortable is more difficult to accomplish because adults are less likely to be risk-takers unless they know their efforts are accepted and respected by all members of the group (Sharp, 2002). To address this need, trainers used the following strategies: using participants' names in examples or models and spending time with participants before and after sessions as well as during breaks to help them understand their role in the project. The training team consciously allocated *unhurried* time to answer questions and to find out more about their life experiences in order to build on their expertise, treated all questions and answers with dignity, and

transferred session control by using open-ended questions to draw out participants' knowledge and experience to promote a collaborative environment. The session schedule also included a comprehensive evaluation of the training because it reinforces the level of respect trainers have for participants' observations.

Another important part of developing psychological comfort requires accommodating differences in learning styles, time, types and pace of learning. To accomplish this level of comfort, trainers used auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and participatory teaching methods similar to those found in the curriculum that teachers would be delivering to their students. For example, to engage all participants in the learning process, trainers grouped and regrouped participants for most activities and called upon different pairs/groups to present information, answer questions, and share implementation ideas with their colleagues. Participants provided oral and written feedback on what they were learning as well as the strategies that helped them learn. Facilitators used that information to shape the next session(s). Participants' comments were shared with the whole group (both affirming comments and ideas for change) and training sequences or materials were modified based on participants' needs. Teacher training sessions were designed to mirror what teachers would do as they taught students the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum. Participants received training manuals, complete with color transparencies and masters of all student activity sheets, videos that accompany the curriculum, homework handouts in both English and in Spanish, and electronic and hard copy references to link lessons to state academic standards in multiple curricular areas. Upon completion of all training sessions, teachers received a stipend and a certificate for 16 hours of professional development credit toward state recertification.

#### Emphasis on the Principles of Learning

A second framework, the Principles of Learning (Leinhardt, 1992), also shaped the design of the training. These principles include: (1) new learning is shaped by the learner's prior knowledge; (2) much learning occurs through social interaction; (3) learning is closely tied to particular situations; and (4) successful learning involves the use of numerous strategies. Training sessions were designed to include experiences that were reflective of each principle. Teachers were asked to *share their experiences* about teaching. They also were prompted to ask questions about the research project and to learn more about the curriculum materials. Throughout the training process, teachers were encouraged to share their own ideas and strategies for implementing the curriculum.

They also experienced the activities their students would be doing.

As an example of enhancing *social learning opportunities* that would help them develop commonalities and shared experiences specific to learning about and teaching new content, teachers worked individually, in pairs, and in small groups. In teams of four, they created posters and gave presentations. They also facilitated fellow participants through segments of individual lessons.

To underscore *connections between learning and specific situations*, teams designed group presentations to identify the appropriate place in each lesson to introduce the videos. After viewing the video, participants responded to the questions they would ask their students to discuss. They reviewed every student activity and created models to use during each lesson. For example, they played the Risk Game in Lesson 2 and practiced *I statements* in Lesson 3. They also completed the Norms/Values activity and made their own Name Acrostic (Lesson 8), and they made a model eco-map (Lesson 12) to identify their individual support networks.

To help attendees *develop numerous strategies* for lesson delivery and to highlight the use of numerous instructional strategies embedded in each lesson, participants worked in pairs to present Lessons 10 and 11 to each other. They were encouraged to share techniques and methods they found effective in their teaching in order to assist in expanding teachers' tool kits. Finally, teachers created quick and engaging wrap-up activities to help students summarize what they had learned in each lesson.

#### Emphasis on Narratives as an Instructional Technique

Teachers were engaged in communicating their own stories to one another and project staff. This emphasis on narratives was an essential finding of prior research (Hecht & Miller-Day, in press). During the curriculum development process, 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were interviewed and asked to share their stories about how they resisted drugs and other substance offers. Their stories became the inspiration for characters and stories in the videos and in the scenarios in the lessons of the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum. This *creation story* was shared with all participants and mentioned often throughout the training sessions, linking research findings to curriculum product.

We wanted teachers to have a sense of the importance of allowing sufficient time during the school day to encourage students to tell their stories; to help them discover and build on their own strengths; and to offer other students personal

insights into peer values, lives, and cultures. Existing research shows that narratives of personal experience are a primary means of sense making (Littlejohn, 2002). Personal narrative is a frame for moral choices and an organizing principle for human behavior and communication (Fisher, 1987). To encourage exchanges between teachers and their students, teachers created models of student assignments based on their own personal experiences and stories.

#### Emphasis on *keepin' it REAL* Structure and Content

In addition to the importance of the research project and the culturally-grounded foundation of the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum, session segments included the (1) history and research behind the project, along with the rationale for having classroom teachers become the *prevention specialists* for the program; (2) research frameworks that guide the delivery of the curriculum, (3) curriculum content including goals, objectives, and student activities of each lessons; and, (4) logistics and fidelity of curriculum implementation including timelines, student pre-and post-survey procedures, role of the liaison, implementation calendar, lesson fidelity observations, dosage forms, and Teacher Reflection Forms.

During the first day, participants met each other and the *keepin' it REAL* training staff. Graduate students assigned as campus liaisons also attended training sessions to become familiar with the curriculum and to establish a positive relationship with teachers from the campuses they would be serving. Teachers and liaisons shared personal goals for the training, asked questions about the program, learned about the goals/objectives of the training, participated in an activity focusing on personal culture, and listened to an overview about the history of the project. Following those segments, attendees were introduced to the curriculum format and videos as well as to the supplemental materials including state academic standards alignment and lesson transparencies. Becoming actively engaged with the lessons and materials, they worked through goals, objectives, and student activities in the first three lessons and then prepared the next four lessons for presentation. Lessons 4-7 are considered the CORE lessons because each of the resistance strategies is taught in one of the lessons: L4-Refuse; L5-Explain; L6-Avoid; and L7-Leave. Teachers and *keepin' it REAL* staff also discussed guidelines of the pre/post survey processes, importance of the implementation calendar, and next steps of the training. Then, the facilitator reviewed questions participants posed at the beginning of the day to ensure that as many as possible had been answered. At the end of the first day, participants provided feedback about content

and format of the training session, identifying what they thought worked well and making suggestions for the next session.

On the second day, participants reviewed what they learned during the previous training, completed an activity about their students' cultures, presented the CORE lessons (4-7) to each other, watched the videos, reviewed goals and objectives of lessons 8-12 and worked through student activities in those lessons. Teachers and Liaisons assigned to their campuses developed an implementation calendar for each site. Three wrap-up activities followed: (1) participants summarized what they learned about the curriculum and how to teach it using an inner/outer circle activity; (2) the facilitator reviewed the list of questions participants posed throughout the sessions to ensure that each question had been answered; and (3) participants discussed the learning objectives of the training with a partner. At the end of that discussion each pair shared the information with the entire group. Finally, participants completed the formal training evaluation.

## METHODS

The *keepin' it REAL* curriculum uses an ecological risk and resiliency approach to prevention and intervention, and recognizes that ethnicity and culture are important social contexts that moderate risk behaviors and build resiliency against risk. The curriculum also emphasizes communication competency and strengthening of culturally-grounded resistance skills, demonstrating the integration of both in real life situations. Facilitators wanted participants to examine their personal cultural backgrounds and those of their students to increase awareness and understandings of the range of diversity they encounter in the classrooms every day.

### Focus on Culture

On the first day of training, teachers were asked to illustrate their name tents using words, pictures, and symbols that represented their personal cultures. Next, in groups of four, they explained the significance of their drawings. Following small group discussions, participants created a list of similarities and differences, identifying strengths and protective factors from their cultures. They also discussed and reported on the role of culturally-based learning and communicating. From the very beginning of the training sessions, participants were encouraged to listen to others in order to realize how personal culture is shaped, and continues to shape, every person.

### Focus on Student Cultures

At the beginning of the second day of training, teachers were given a three-page handout with many words and phrases used to describe people (e.g., *multiethnic, monolingual, 1<sup>st</sup> generation America, lives in an apartment, celebrates Quinceañara, Tohono O'odm*). Participants were instructed to write the initials of one of their current students at the top of the page using a colored marker. Participants read through all descriptors and drew a colored dot by the word/phrase if they knew *for sure* that this described the student. They repeated the activity four more times, using a different colored marker for other students. As part of the follow-up discussion, teachers were asked these questions:

- What do you know about your students?
- What are their strengths?
- What protective factors do your students' cultures provide?
- What don't you know about your students?
- How can knowing about your students' culture make you a more effective teacher?

Answers to these questions helped teachers get to know each other and to become aware of the cultural diversity that exists in every classroom. The discussion generated by the activity helped teachers to recognize the stereotypical attitudes some of them held. The discussion also led participants to a better understanding of the similarities and differences between themselves and their students (Haupt, 2006). Ultimately, insights gained through the exercise served to create an atmosphere of trust and respect among training participants.

### Training Participants

Teachers who participated in the training represented 15 individual schools. Demographic information for each participant was collected as part of a self-report registration process. When tallied, self-reports revealed that 67% of our participants were female, and 64% of them were 'white.' Although student demographics of representative schools were largely Mexican or Mexican American students—approximately 80%—only 9% of the respondents shared that heritage. African Americans comprised 27% of our sample, 6% were American Indian and only 3% reported being of Asian American ethnicity.

### Datasets Analyzed

Training effects were analyzed using three sets of data. The first dataset included responses gathered during a pre-training survey focused on perceptions about student and classroom culture. The second set

of data consisted of training evaluation responses provided by training participants. The third dataset targeting fidelity of lesson delivery was compiled from trained observers' lesson observations collected during the curriculum implementation.

## TRAINING EFFECTS

### Pre-training Teacher Perceptions

At the beginning of the first training session, teachers were asked to complete a survey that gathered demographic information as well as information about what teachers knew about (a) their students' cultures and (b) substance abuse prevention. Data showed that teachers believed it was vital to talk about substance use with students. They reported having ready access to information about effective ways to prevent youth substance use and said they were comfortable discussing the topic with them (Bosworth, 1998). They firmly believed discussing substance use did not increase student experimentation. Moreover, they were certain they possessed the skills necessary to communicate effectively with their students about substance use and abuse (Ennett et al., 2003; Ringwalt & Bliss, 2006), even though only 7 teachers reported ever having taught a substance use prevention program prior to *keepin' it REAL*.

These teachers believed that, for the most part, teachers model behavior that shows students how important it is for people from different races and cultures to get along with each other. Without exception, they claimed that student culture and ethnicity was an important part of every student's repertoire of life experiences (Bosworth, 2000; Knutson, 2006). Additionally, they reported that their schools incorporated ethnic culture into their events and that school activities reflected the community's language, culture, and experiences. Finally, they unanimously claimed that they made ethnic and minority parents and families feel welcome in their classrooms, and that they made efforts to cultivate active communication with them (Haupt, 2006; Ringwalt, et al., 2004).

Some discrepancies, however, arose in the analysis of our teachers' responses. For example, even though teachers reported access, comfort, and skill levels to deal with prevention, none reported having experience actually delivering prevention content to students (Davis, 2006; Ringwalt, Ennett, Johnson, Rohrbach, Simons-Rudolph, & Vincus, 2003). Another important example of discrepant responses emerged from this data. Respondents strongly confirmed statements that they supported the diversity of their students (e.g., culture and ethnicity

as part of experiences; culture integrated into school events) and strongly agreed that teachers did not ignore the native language of students for whom English was a second language (Knutson, 2006). However, the sample was clearly split, nearly 50/50, about whether or not teachers who were fluent in Spanish either used the language in the classroom or regularly provided materials in Spanish. To add to this marked contradiction, teachers also were split, in the same proportion, on whether or not culture-specific knowledge was excluded from tests and assessments.

### Teacher Evaluation of the Training

The evaluation instrument was comprised of 6 Likert-scale items and 3 open-ended questions. The 5-point Likert-scale ranged from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree and was selected because it encouraged participants to provide specific feedback both about their reactions and the degree of those reactions. The six closed-ended questions were used because they provided for greater uniformity of responses and were more easily processed (Babbie, 2001) while open-ended questions were chosen to provide participants the opportunity to express themselves in their own words and to contribute additional information (Fink, 2003).

Evaluation instruments were distributed as the very last activity in each training session. Facilitators asked participants to refrain from adding any self-identifying information to the document so that responses would remain anonymous. To help ensure anonymity, the evaluation instrument was distributed to all teachers, but contained no identifying characteristics or information requests. Participants were asked to return evaluation responses to a box marked specifically for that purpose that was placed next to the door they used to exit the training. Closed ended questions were tallied and summarized to identify effects, and open-ended questions were coded and catalogued in order to use responses to confirm, disconfirm, or enhance the interpretation of closed ended responses.

Targeted feedback was gathered in the following areas: (a) what teachers learned about curriculum content, (b) what teachers learned about how to teach the content in a facilitated learning environment rather than as direct instruction, and (c) what effect the format of the workshop had on teacher self-perceptions of learning. The return rate for teacher evaluations was 98%. Table 1 shows the percentages of participant responses by item. No *disagree* or *strongly disagree* responses were reported by any of the participants.

Table 1 Participant Responses to Closed Ended Evaluation Items

<b>Item content</b>	<b>% Strongly agree</b>	<b>% Agree</b>	<b>% Neutral</b>
I have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of the <i>keepin' it REAL</i> curriculum	82	18	0
I have a clear understanding of my responsibilities in teaching the <i>keepin' it REAL</i> curriculum	74	26	0
The activities of the training helped me understand the goals and objectives of the lessons	86	14	0
My questions and concerns about the curriculum, student activities, and materials were answered	84	16	0
The facilitator(s) displayed competent skills in conducting the workshop	98	2	0
The Format of the sessions helped me learn the curriculum	82	16	2

Participants also were asked to respond to three open-ended items. Narrative responses were collected, catalogued, and coded using the goals of the training sessions as categories into which comments were entered. After the coding, analysts identified themes that emerged relative to the goals. One prompt requested feedback about what parts of the training teachers liked. Coded responses showed that *hands-on activities* and the *interactive approach to learning* represented the best-liked elements of the training. When additional comments were coded, three themes emerged that were defined as (a) *training was engaging and motivating*, (b) *positive anticipation of curriculum implementation*, and (c) *good for kids*. In a unique comment, one participant noted “[T]hank you for reaching out to kids, to help them make wise, good choices in life; this impact will be far reaching.” Another remarked, “The hands-on activities helped me visualize how this is going to work in my classroom.”

**Implementation Observations: Fidelity and Fit**

Teachers were informed which lessons were targeted for observations, meaning when observers would be present in their classrooms. They also knew there was a designated back-up lesson in order to accommodate instances in which an observer missed the targeted lesson. The lesson observation form was developed using the standards of instruction common throughout teacher preparation literature (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Under the direction of the implementation director, graduate students were trained as formal observers of the implementation,

using a series of *indicators* applicable to each lesson segment that included a range of responses for each item on the observation report. Observers were encouraged to take notes using the indicators, but were not permitted to complete the form during the observation period. Instead, observers returned to the project offices and entered responses to the form and verbatim narrative comments into a formal observation report.

Trends in these third-party observations used for tracking fidelity of lesson implementation revealed that teachers, overall, were well organized for the lesson implementation and that they were prepared to teach the lesson being observed (Kealey et al., 2000). Observations were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *fully implemented* to 5= *not implemented*. Ratings showed that the least fidelity occurred in assigning and explaining the homework (mean of 1.67; SD = .896). The most completely implemented segments were the videos within the core lessons (mean of 1.33; SD=.616). The ratings of the direct instruction and in-class practice portions resulted in identical means of 1.67 (SD=.7705 and .715, respectively), reflecting insignificant variations in fidelity ratings for the 25 teachers observed. Also noted by some observers was that teachers implemented strictly according to the order of segments in the Implementer’s Manual (Backer, 2001; Bosworth, 2000) and consistently encouraged students to respond to questions suggested in the lesson plan.

Although observers indicated that active participation was observed in every classroom,

several noted that teachers struggled to get students actively engaged in role plays and narrative exercises when those activities were part of the lesson. Observers also reported that most of the students participated by the time the full lesson was implemented. Notwithstanding the lesser degree of active participation observed during some lesson segments, observers reported that most students were engaged in active practice of skills and strategies taught.

The importance of the materials and learning objectives *fit* to the academic classroom also was an element of the observation process (Ennett, et al., 2003; Ringwalt, et al., 2004). Observers were asked to judge developmental appropriateness of materials as they watched students respond during the lesson and listened to student and teacher comments which were recorded for analysis. Student responses and attentiveness during lessons led observers to report, overall, that materials were either *very appropriate* or *appropriate* to the student audience (Backer, 2001). Although observers noted that the classroom management style of teachers was the greatest influence on student active participation, they also reported that student responses to the lessons were positive.

Several connections among observation trends and fidelity adherence, by lesson component, were reflected in the observer data (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2001). In some instances, observers reported student non-compliance with teacher direction to focus on the lesson; that is, until the video was shown. Then more engagement with topics and discussions followed, with most students actively involved in the remainder of the lesson. In several other instances, students seemed to make connections between the classroom and real life easily, leading one teacher to comment, "You have a lot of good things to say and I am interested to hear your responses [to activity prompts]."

Observers noted student comments that situations were convincing and realistic and that students were able to label behaviors and strategies using key terms included in the curriculum. Of those segments trainers wanted implementing teachers to emphasize, demonstration of the strategies in real life situations and commitment of time for guided practice in the classroom were paramount considerations. Teacher commitment to videos, discussions that came after viewing them, and classroom-based practice activities reflected teacher commitment to the degree of fidelity emphasized during training.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION

*Culture from many perspectives.* Facilitated learning and active engagement strategies upon which the training was founded prompted participants to encounter and then examine their own cultural foundations, to recognize their students' often very different cultural backgrounds, and to understand both in the context of academic expectations and the classroom environment (Davis, 2006). In the beginning, teachers stated that they knew a lot about their own and their students' cultural backgrounds, until, that is, trainers involved them in activities designed to elicit specific information about their cultural values and their students' experiences (Haupt, 2006). Following this second cultural activity, most teachers commented that they did not know as much about individual students as they thought they did. In response to this revelation, teachers were prompted to share strategies they thought would be successful in classrooms in order to find out more about their students. In addition, in-depth discussions about students' cultural strengths emerged. As a result, teacher perceptions about student strengths changed, and they realized the importance of finding and emphasizing student strengths as a way to motivate and build rapport with students and to help students recognize and use their personal cultural strengths to resist substance offers (Knutson, 2006).

*Teacher experiences with prevention curricula.* The overwhelming response of these teachers reflects their belief that it is vital to talk to kids about substance use and abuse. They also believe that they have the appropriate level of comfort to deal with prevention topics. However, important to implementation considerations, only a small fraction of these teachers reported any personal experience in actual prevention curriculum instruction, on any topic (Kealey, et al., 2000). The implication for those supporting primary prevention is important. This situation might connote a *false confidence* by teachers. Issues that arise during discussions related to substance use and abuse, especially in a narrative context and through facilitated discussions, might prove much more sensitive than teachers who had no experience with the delivery a prevention curriculum might anticipate (Haupt, 2006). Furthermore, facilitated instructional sessions, by their very nature, encourage more personal commentary on topics and foster additional self-disclosure by participants (Knutson, 2006; Yoder, 2001). Therefore, teachers who have not had the experience of facilitating a prevention intervention may be faced with disclosed information that requires follow-up rather than the

usual *objective* information that emerges from academic discussions. As Kealey noted, when there is no relationship between implementation fidelity and cognitive outcomes. . . when teacher training is overlooked or ineffective, the result is implementation failure” (Kealey et al., 2000, p. 65). Training sessions planned for teachers with little or no experience must include optional and appropriate responses for teachers faced with sensitive self-disclosures as well as a ready list of resources for teachers to share with students and families.

*Culture in the classroom.* These participants also were very clear in their reported support of the diversity of their students. The inclusion of culturally-based activities and special school events were comfortable topics for them and they believed that teachers did not ignore the native language of students for whom English was a second language. Nonetheless, and important to those planning for prevention curriculum implementation in communities that are increasingly diverse, teacher responses did not reflect congruity between supporting student diversity and using the native language of their students either in class or through written instructional materials; illustrating nearly polar opposite responses (Davis, 2006; Ringwalt, et al., 2004). The same was true when prompted to respond to questions about whether or not culture-specific knowledge was excluded from tests and assessments. These participants were split on their perceptions of unbiased assessments and tests. Primary prevention implementers should review all materials and measures in depth, including working with members of representative populations to ensure that materials do not reflect cultural biases or taboos (Ringwalt & Bliss, 2006). It is important to remember that the primary purpose of offering any prevention curriculum lies in its inherent capacity to assist students to adopt strategies and skills in ways that match their cultural and ethnic identities.

*Fidelity, fidelity, fidelity!* Because observers overwhelmingly reported that teachers were *completely* or *mostly* faithful to the lesson plans, the importance of fidelity to the plans must be a vital and integral component of training implementers engaged in primary prevention. Training should empower implementing teachers to emphasize the demonstration of strategies in real life situations through the commitment of time for guided practice in the classroom (Kealey et al., 2000). The demonstrations and guided practice activities must reflect the nature of the cultural grounding of the students in addition to allowing choices of strategies

to which individual students may subscribe (Ringwalt & Bliss, 2006.)

*Training as the teaching of adult learners.* Teachers also responded positively to the interactive, facilitated approach to learning—both for themselves and their students. This aspect of training emerged as key to their learning of the content, their creation of models for their students, and their classroom instructional strategies (Kealey et al., 2000). Because the Implementer Manual contained all the materials needed for every activity in every lesson, teachers embraced the notion of stressing facilitated learning and practiced it during the training sessions, prior to undertaking the exercises in the classroom with their students. Those planning for implementer training should ensure that all materials are provided; that they are attractive; that they are clearly organized and user-friendly; and, that they reflect the philosophical approach to the training as well as to the program for which the training is being provided.

## CONCLUSIONS

The focus on culture embedded in the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum and in the training of the teachers who deliver the curriculum to students was integral to the success of the training and implementation. The activities and discussions during training sessions served to increase the attentiveness of teachers to the many facets of student diversity, not just the visible elements or the language differences, but those cultural elements important to the *whole child*. Through that process, participants came to recognize and appreciate the cultural elements that served as protective factors for them, both as children and now as adults. Moreover, within that context, the importance of maintaining and strengthening the protective factors of the students and their families became an important part of every discussion.

Culture, in its complexity and importance, became a topic of overt interest and expression, once exposed as central to individual identity. Participants returned to the second session with narratives of discovery about themselves and their students, based on their new awareness. Activity models and peer demonstrations were verbally referenced to cultural elements and, often, trainers were called upon to help *unpack* meanings and to assist in creating classroom strategies that would enhance the instruction.

Acknowledging culture as a critical element in interactions and instruction encouraged a more in-depth look at intra-group differences among students. Teachers and trainers discussed the different acculturation processes in different neighborhoods and how that might affect student interpersonal

interactions and substance use norms. Such discussions revealed additional avenues for instructional planning and for comprehension of student reactions that previously had been ignored or misunderstood.

In most instances, teachers acknowledged that *research* was not a part of the usual teacher discourse. Because trainers were able to describe the research behind the development of the curriculum, and how teachers and students were integral to the process, participants began to understand the

intersections between theory, applied research, and instructional practices. The intersections became key reference points, as teachers discussed the learning objectives, the rationale for different activities, and even the linkages to the state academic standards. These teachers discovered that a prevention curriculum can be theory-driven, practical in application, instructionally engaging, and academically rigorous in addition to being just *good for kids*.

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