LIFE SKILLS JOURNEY
Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement

14th Annual Engagement Scholarship Consortium
October 2013
Engaged Partnership Transforms Academic Practice

Authentic Engagement with a Metis Settlement in Alberta, Canada

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Alberta's Metis Settlements
Metis Settlements Life Skills Journey

A Community Based Participatory Research Project
Most Significant Changes Method
Setup - Determining the "Domains of Change"

1. Participation: How can we reduce the burden of participation in a research project for community members?
2. Specificity: How community-specific is the approach? Have we minimized pan-Aboriginal assumptions?
3. Difference: How are differences in culture, age, rural vs. urban lifestyles used as tools?
4. Institutional Issues: How do we mitigate the institutional barriers to engagement?

Most Significant Changes Method
A Three-Part Day

1. Read questions and collect stories.
2. Discuss the significance of each story to pre-selected themes (aka "domains of change")
3. Critique the MSC method as a process evaluation tool
Most Significant Changes Method

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**Process**

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3. Critique the MSC method as a process evaluation tool
Step 1

Most Significant Changes Method
Questions: Collecting Stories of Change
1. What is a change you have noticed in the relationship between your project and the community?
2. Has there been a change in how you view or understand the project and its purpose?
3. Has there been a change in how you understand your role?
4. Has there been a change in your understanding of the community?
5. Can you think of a change story that has affected a member of your project in the community, arena, or otherwise, anything that comes to mind?

Step 2

Most Significant Changes Method
The Participation Story

Step 3

Most Significant Changes Method
The Story's Significance
1. Participation can occur strategically, based on individual strengths.
2. Equal contribution does NOT necessarily mean the same level of contribution.

Strategic planning allows the community to know how to contribute and allows everyone to ask the right questions. Maintaining a sense of ownership (control) can help reduce stress and burden in the community. "Community grounded" does not mean that everyone should have the same role or that all decision-making should happen through consensus.
Most Significant Changes Method

Questions - Collecting Stories of Change

1. What is a change you have noticed in the relationship between project partners?

2. Has there been a change in how you view or understand the project and its outcomes?

3. Has there been a change in how you understand your role?

4. What has been a change in your understanding of the community?

5. Can you tell us about a change that has occurred as a result of the project in the community, office, university, anything that comes to mind?
Most Significant Changes Method

The Participation Story

5. What is a change that has occurred as a result of the BLMS project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teller</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>other comm. want to be involved. KS opens up doors.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helping your ppl!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fay</td>
<td>reaction in Facul. w/ Fay becoming PI.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ppl treat her diff. Opened doors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only now really resonating.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>FrA moving up</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL making it open access/not competitive</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Notre e.t. coming to office + seeing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>work in progress</td>
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<td>planning vs odd-hoc now. More</td>
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<td></td>
<td>control.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>planning allow them to contribute.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asking the right questions.</td>
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<td>ACFER significant. A momentum is occurring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>no one person is a leader - more than one person is involved. You</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>have to give up the control + authority</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>its OK to not know the outcome</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>realization its the right way to do it.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom to be innovative</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Most Significant Changes Method

Novel Finding - Participation

By recognizing that participation might be a burden in itself, you can talk about finding a comfortable space for participation. This space makes for a strong partnership because members know how individual strengths can relate to individual contributions. Not all individuals are comfortable making decisions that impact their entire community.
Most Significant Changes Method

Story 2 - **Specificity** in the Context of Policy

**Question:**
What has been a change in your understanding of the community?

**Stories:**
- **Elders** - the *unexpected* nature of the role of Elders in this particular community
- **OCAP & CIHR** - *Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession* guidelines from the First Nations Information Governance Centre and Canadian Institute for Health Research guidelines

**Significance:**
- **Language** - "Aboriginal" *compared* to "First Nations", "Metis", and "Inuit"
- **Assumptions** - Pan-Aboriginal assumptions applied to a *Metis* context
Most Significant Changes Method

Critique of the Method

BENEFITS
- Participants define which changes are important
- Storytelling is a less formal, more inclusive medium
- Group-based

CHALLENGES
- The term "Story" can sound like we are collecting lengthy narratives
- The term "Significant" can affect the kinds of stories people will share
- Stories can be personal
- Participants need to agree on the results of the process in order to assign significance - Who is this for?
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