

April 2017

## Beyond Collaboration: Principles and Indicators of Authentic Relationship Development in CBPR

Fay Fletcher

*University of Alberta*

Alicia Hibbert

*University of Alberta*

Brent Hammer

*University of Alberta*

Susan Ladouceur

*Buffalo Lake Métis Settlements*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/jces>

---

### Recommended Citation

Fletcher, Fay; Hibbert, Alicia; Hammer, Brent; and Ladouceur, Susan (2017) "Beyond Collaboration: Principles and Indicators of Authentic Relationship Development in CBPR," *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 2 , Article 9. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/jces/vol9/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship by an authorized editor of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

# Beyond Collaboration: Principles and Indicators of Authentic Relationship Development in CBPR

Fay Fletcher, Alicia Hibbert,  
Brent Hammer, and Susan Ladouceur

## Abstract

Authentic relationships, crafted through an ongoing process of engagement that results in shared priorities, are essential to working *with*, versus *for*, *in* or *on* community. Using a comparative analysis of a CBPR case study with two rural Métis communities, authors present shifts in individual attitudes and behaviors that represent principles for authentic relationship development. Reciprocal capacity building, relational accountability, and honoring cultural and personal boundaries are principles for authentic relationships that may be generalized across contexts to inform CBPR. Based on a process of collaborative inquiry, the authors propose two indicators of authentic relationships, including adaptability, as shown in decision-making, and shared values, reflected and achieved through inclusive reflexive practices. Using quantitative and qualitative methods to explore authentic relationship development made apparent the absence of authentic relationships in one case study. In conclusion, authors present the discussion and ultimate decision to step back from program delivery when authentic relationships are lacking.

## Introduction

Authentic relationships, crafted through an ongoing process of engagement that results in shared priorities (Bull, 2010) are essential to working *with*, versus *for*, *in* or *on* community. This article explores the steps taken to establish authentic relationships in community-based participatory research (CBPR) using a case study of CBPR with two rural communities: one that demonstrates an authentic relationship, and one that demonstrates collaboration as a first step toward an authentic relationship. The Métis Settlements Life Skills Journey (MSLSJ) project is a multi-faceted service delivery and research project. The objective of MSLSJ is to offer and evaluate life skills summer camps for youth over several years in multiple Métis Settlements in Alberta. These camps build individual and community resiliency as a means to reduce drug misuse and violence and improve the long term health of the community and its members.

Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker (1998) promote the use of CBPR methods in public health research, as the approach allows researchers to look at the social and environmental factors involved in health outcomes and to apply health knowledge in community settings. With this approach, we prioritize the participation of non-academic researchers (Métis Settlement members) to co-create knowledge. Furthermore, CBPR is recognized by national funding organizations as a desirable approach to research with marginalized communities (Canadian Institutes of Health Research,

2008), establishing an expectation that researchers will engage communities in meaningful ways as partners throughout the research process (Wallerstein & Minkler, 2008). We discuss the association between respectful, authentic relationships and the quality of research outcomes through an examination of the depth and frequency of engagement with two communities.

Our approach to CBPR supports ongoing reflection and information sharing as a way to generate growth and new ideas while actively engaging with the project. This approach promotes adaptability for both project implementation and research objectives, and builds upon the characteristics of CBPR to build long-term partnerships that recognize the context of each community, based on shared expertise and ownership (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Israel et al., 1998; Israel, Rowe, Salvatore, Minkler, Lopez, Butz, Mosley, Coates, Lambert, Potit, Brenner, Rivera, Romero, Thompson, Coronado, & Halstead, 2005).

One of the most critical characteristics of CBPR is the initial contact and relationship building (Bull, 2010; Fletcher, 2003). Yet this is also the characteristic most often at odds with academic engagement and research due to the time, energy, and funding required to establish and nurture reciprocal, respectful, and long-term relationships with community members (Chino & DeBruyn, 2006; Israel et al., 1998). We have previously documented the challenges of balancing a service delivery program within an overall research project (Fletcher, Hammer, & Hibbert, 2014). While

we acknowledge that the university does not operate as a non-profit organization tasked to provide community services, we support Dempsey's (2010) suggestion to promote the perspective of academics as collaborators with communities to address local issues and needs. To this end, the case study presented contributes to our understanding of the role of time and funds in developing authentic relationships for success in CBPR.

Collaborations are fundamental to CBPR; for CBPR projects to benefit communities and their members, both service providers and researchers must adopt the approach of working with, rather than for, in, or on communities. Academic researchers and service providers, including public health workers, have frequently been accused of conducting "helicopter projects" or "drive-by research" (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009, p. 2,626), which causes negative perceptions and makes it difficult to obtain community participation for either service delivery or research. While collaborations—working with a community to identify and address local concerns—are essential to CBPR, we believe that the objective should be to move beyond collaboration to authentic relationships. Nurturing authentic relationships is more likely to result in the full benefits of CBPR. To this end, contributing author Susan Ladouceur is a member of the Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement (BLMS) and is the MSLSJ project's Community Camp administrator.

Stories from the MSLSJ project inform the three proposed principles for authentic relationships in research partnerships discussed below: Reciprocal capacity building, relational accountability, and honoring cultural and personal boundaries. Further, our ability to achieve authentic relationships as we apply these principles in CBPR, are captured through two indicators of authentic relationship development: 1) adaptability and flexibility of community and university team members and, 2) shared partner values. In other words, the presence of adaptability and shared values in the research partnership indicates that we have reached a level of authentic relationships.

These concepts emerged during thematic analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, and debriefs. Based on our experiences, these principles (reciprocal capacity building, relational accountability, and cultural/personal boundaries) apply across contexts and are relevant to researchers who strive to maximize the impact of CBPR. In contrast, the indicators (adapt-

ability and flexibility and shared values), discussed in detail, emerged from the data, and may not be generalizable to other contexts.

The MSLSJ partnership with BLMS provides a case study of the benefits of moving beyond collaboration to building authentic relationships with community partners. In contrast, the second community (S2) provides a case study of CBPR in the absence of authentic relationships.

The PI summarized the process this way:

The general thinking is that it's a research project and it's about impacts and outcomes, [but that's an incomplete picture]. It's [also] an examination of how we begin to measure engagement and decide whether that engagement is at a stage where we can continue, or not, if [research] is supposed to be a two-way process.

### **Authentic Relationships**

The importance of establishing authentic relationships as a precursor to ethical research with Indigenous peoples in Canada has been previously documented. Bull (2010) and Fletcher (2003) have outlined 26 suggestions for implementing CBPR relationships with Indigenous communities. Initial investment in consultation is paramount to effective collaboration due to historical, political, and social processes affecting Indigenous communities. However, all Indigenous communities do not necessarily share the same social environments. We do not propose to outline a set of indicators to show authenticity in all relationships. To maximize the benefits of CBPR, researchers should nurture authentic relationships throughout all phases of the project, whether service delivery or research. Yet, we explore in this article, "How do you actually gauge a relationship being authentic?" (PI).

Academia has a long tradition of interest in the authentic. Beginning in the 15th century through the 20th century, authentic objects became valuable commodities, and ideas of authenticity created conditions of social differentiation between groups of people (Mursic, 2013). Commodities, such as cultural artifacts and artwork, become transformed into authentic objects because they are "bound to a particular socio-cultural context ...defined by its region of origin, material used for production, the production process and the local actors involved in it" (Fillitz & Saris, 2013, p. 11). Today, the contemporary search for authenticity represents a desire to appropriate and consume objects representative of different cultures

(food and clothing are two of the most ubiquitous) and old traditions (such as forms of spirituality), as well as “true expressions of emotions and ideas” (Fillitz & Saris, 2013, p. 9). In other words, authenticity includes representations of deep human connections as a way for people to find meaning in their lives (Sjorslev, 2013). In this way, authenticity may be considered personal and subjective, related to an inner core of the self (Taylor, 1999). However, as Sjorslev (2013) argues, it is in joining the personal and the collective, or the social, that meaning is made in the process. Where and when people interact, authentic relationships may be established. It is authenticity as representative of deep human connections that we focus on in this examination of authentic relationship development in CBPR.

Authentic relationships formed through service delivery and research involve an active and deliberative decision to co-learn with the community, to privilege community knowledge, and to conceive of our program and research goals as shared experiences rather than deliverables. Authentic relationships are about sharing personal experiences through an open and active process of regular engagement. The purpose is not to use authenticity as a means of differentiation from the “other” but as a process to bridge diversity to form a new relationship based on strengths. Authentic relationships are not a final achievement, rather they are fluid and fragile assets that are established and nurtured through our actions. The potential for authentic relationship is enhanced when the principles of reciprocal capacity building, relational accountability, and cultural and personal boundaries are practiced by researchers and community members alike.

### *Three Principles of Authentic Relationship Development*

**Reciprocal capacity building.** In research completed by Viswanathan, Ammerman, Eng, Garlehner, Lohr, Griffith, Rhodes, Samuel-Hodge, Maty, Lux, Webb, Sutton, Swinson, Jackman, & Whitener (2004), co-learning and reciprocal transfer was one of three essential elements of CBPR identified by all research partners.

**Relational accountability.** Relational accountability is grounded in work by Indigenous scholar Wilson (2009), who writes about the sense of relational accountability created by the connecting of head and heart in CBPR. Author Fletcher’s own experiences led to an understanding

of relational accountability as calling “on all partners to act in the best interest of self and other equally” (Kajner, Fletcher, & Makokis, 2012, p. 266).

**Honoring cultural and personal boundaries.** The proposed inclusion of established cultural and personal boundaries as a principle of authentic relationships is absent in existing literature. Boundaries, as the term is used in the field of psychological counseling, refers to geographical, cultural, physical, and personal boundaries essential to maintaining order and a clear identity. Boundaries “promote health, inner peace, safety, confidence, exploration, expression, positive relationships, and service to others” and allow “an identifiable shape to emerge around your beliefs and preferences. Defining boundaries produces a confidence within you that lets others know what you have to offer” (Black & Enns, 1997, p. 10). Further, cultural boundaries exist between communities and are formed through differences in language, behaviors, attitudes, skills, and experiences. We propose that maintaining cultural boundaries is one way to nurture and sustain authentic relationships. Knowing your personal (service provider, researcher, relative) and community boundaries (for example, Settlement’s openness to “outsiders,” university ethics board) proved to be an important aspect of maintaining respectful and authentic relationships.

### **Métis Settlements Life Skills Journey Background**

The Métis are an Indigenous group in Canada, some living on eight self-governed Métis lands called Métis Settlements, which are only present in the province of Alberta. The objective of the MSLSJ research project is to offer and evaluate summer camps for youth 7–14 years in multiple Settlements in Alberta, building individual and community resiliency. The PI has collaborated with Indigenous communities in CBPR projects since 2005 (Baydala, Sewlal, Rasmussen, Alexis, Fletcher, Letendre, Odishaw, Kennedy, Kootenay, 2009; Baydala, Letendre, Ruttan, Worrell, Fletcher, Letendre, & Schramm, 2011; Baydala, Worrell, Fletcher, Letendre, Letendre, & Ruttan, 2013; Baydala, Fletcher, Rabbit, Louis, Ksay-yin, & Sinclair, 2016—in press). We have published on community engagement through needs assessments (Fletcher, Hibbert, Roberson, & Asselin, 2013) and on reflexive research practice (Fletcher et al., 2014) as part of this project.

It is important to note that the ultimate goal of the MSLSJ project is to engage the community in such a way that the university and community, together, build individual and organizational capacity to support the delivery of the summer camp program beyond the life of the research project. Sharing experiences, while a precursor to an authentic relationship, does not guarantee it. Rather, to build authentic relationships, intentional and consistent attention before and during CBPR activities is required. Acknowledging that relationships are dynamic and in need of constant attention enhances the research process, outcomes, and impacts. A retrospective look at the MSLSJ project revealed that the key to sustaining authentic relationships has been an inclusive iterative process of critical reflection. The complexity and potential benefits of reciprocal capacity building, relational accountability, and defined cultural and personal boundaries are often underestimated in CBPR. Research goals cannot simply be measured using empirical scientific models (Chino & DeBruyn, 2006).

## Methods

Critical reflection involves the process of reflexivity and the recognition that the researcher, the community, and their biases are part of the social realms they study (Robben, 2007). Critical reflection is the active process of “looking back” in order to move forward. It creates regular opportunities for all participants in the project (community members, service providers, and researchers) to openly discuss and express their thoughts, interpretations, and assumptions. Through shared participation in the reflexive process, individuals have the opportunity to better understand one another’s emotions and ideas, foster mutual trust, recognize accountability to shared priorities, honor cultural and personal boundaries, and work together toward achieving shared goals.

Earlier MSLSJ publications document using collaborative inquiry in the form of ongoing, regular debrief sessions to share information and encourage reflection on program development (Fletcher et al., 2014). Reflexive activities help researchers adhere to the principles of CBPR. A comparative analysis of two communities provides insight into relationship development and the progression from collaboration to authentic partnerships. Shifts in attitude and behavior can be mapped against the principles of authentic relationships: community partners felt that uni-

versity-based team members acted in ways that demonstrated accountability to community needs and priorities; community members acted in ways that showed they felt accountable to the research goals; and both community and university partners evolved from a focus on individual to community and university capacity building through the establishment of networks between and within communities. In one case (BLMS), readers will see stakeholder commitment to shared program and research goals and expectations that contributed to authentic relationship development and successful implementation and evaluation; in the other case (S2), we present the difficult decisions made in the absence of authentic relationships.

## Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement and Settlement 2: A Case Study

Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement (BLMS) is located in north-central Alberta, 167 kilometers from the nearest major city. According to the 2011 national census, its population was 492, with 85 children in our summer day camp’s age range, and more than 95 individuals in our camp facilitator age range (Statistics Canada, 2012). Settlement 2 (S2), with a population similar to BLMS, is located further yet from the nearest major city.

The MSLSJ partnership was established with BLMS in 2010. After over two years of community meetings, a needs assessment, and program development, the first summer camp was delivered and evaluated in 2013. In contrast, the first meeting with S2, and the beginning of the relationship, took place in January of 2013, just five months prior to the pilot program delivery. Table 1 provides quantitative data on engagement with both Settlements from 2010 to September of 2014, covering in-person meetings between university staff and community partners and community employment. The impact of an authentic relationship to CBPR success has been most evident in the decision to not proceed with the service delivery and research at S2. For that reason, we have limited the presentation of qualitative data to the period leading up to that point. Emails sent and received between community and university partners have not been catalogued, although they do show that when the communication was predominantly unidirectional from the university to community, there were no opportunities for face to face meetings and relationships building. The decision to

---

<sup>1</sup>Settlement 2 has not been named due to lack of permission.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Selected University-Community Engagement (BLMS and S2), 2010–2014

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
	BLMS*	S2	BLMS	S2	BLMS	S2	BLMS	S2	BLMS	S2
In-person meeting in the community	3	0	6	0	12	0	2	4	2	1
Full-time equivalencies of community employment	0.4	0	1	0	2	0	3.2	0.5	2.3	0.5

include only in-person meetings and community employment in the table provides an overview for comparison rather than a comprehensive analysis.

In BLMS, the time between first contact and implementation is three years, employing at least one and up to three full-time employees for the majority of the time. In contrast, our collaborative relationship (S2) had only six months between contact and implementation with a short term, part-time employee. Notably, qualitative data from S2 are lacking, as is a participating community co-author, reflective of our lack of authentic relationship. In the section that follows, we first present a case study of authentic relationship development with BLMS. Using BLMS as a case study, we present two indicators of authentic relationship, adaptability and shared values, with the contribution of each principle to that indicator.

## Results

### *Indicator: Adaptability*

The community needs/readiness assessment, completed in collaboration with the local advisory committee (2010–2013), provided an opportunity to demonstrate adaptability on the part of both community and university, contributing significantly to authentic relationships. It was made clear from the outset of the partnership, that community members would determine whether the funding opportunity fit with their priorities. If so, the community would determine the content and inform the implementation of the service program and research. The impact of adaptability is summed up by a community facilitator:

Even though the U of A [University of Alberta] could be in the right 100 percent [of the time] that will still rub people [community members] the wrong way. So, I appreciate how they came in here like that and that they are so willing to learn, listen, and make changes if need be.

That commitment and willingness to adapt has been tested and proven key to success several times in the years since.

**Honoring cultural and personal boundaries.** In 2013, facilitator training took place over 37 days: 16 in Edmonton, 12 at BLMS, and 9 at S2. Although consideration was given to the potential difficulty of community employees adapting to city life, the impact of this change was underestimated. Sixteen days in a major city proved to be overwhelming for some community members. Credit goes to our facilitators and community coordinator for teaching us the importance of being community based (not just placed).

Based on facilitator focus groups and interviews, training in 2014 was condensed to 24 days; 20 days at BLMS and 4 days in Edmonton. The willingness on the part of the city-based team members to commute and live in the community for facilitator training as well as camp implementation was a strong show of support and commitment to the community. Data from 2014 speaks to the benefits of hosting training at BLMS in increased participation by community guests in preparation for visits to camp, community awareness of the program, sense of community ownership over the program, and amount of activity at local administration, recreation, and cultural centers. BLMS Camp Administrator Susan Ladouceur describes 2014 training as...

[a] lot better in the settlement, a lot better for all of them [community facilitators], because they didn't have to leave home. They didn't have to worry about traveling or how they were going to get to where they were going or getting lost and getting distracted.

**Reciprocal capacity building.** A 180-degree shift to one of the foundational objectives of the research was required to achieve the flexibility

demanded of authentic relationships. This shift required a revision to academic team members' concept of capacity building as well as an opening of personal and cultural boundaries, particularly on the part of community facilitators. Capacity building goals shifted toward building the capacity of non-community team members to engage and collaborate with community. The shift to reciprocal capacity building came in response to a request by the facilitators and Susan Ladouceur to recruit and hire a university-based individual with camp director experience to lead the summer camps in 2014, coupled with the selection of university-based facilitators to work in the community. Facilitators opened the doors to their community and were excited to teach university students about Métis people and Settlements while maintaining professional relationships and honoring cultural and personal boundaries. For example, one of the university-based facilitators became a baseball coach in the community, extending her stay to accommodate this. Susan Ladouceur describes the benefit: "I think it made a big difference to have [the university camp director] there every day, all day. Even their debriefs at the end of the day were much better than they were last year."

Honoring cultural and personal boundaries and reciprocal capacity building resulted in the flexibility required to relocate and adjust the duration of facilitator training, experiment with a combined cohort of community and university facilitators, and hire a university trained camp director for 2014. In a weekly debrief during facilitator training, one participant shared that community facilitators did not see the two University of Alberta students as "university people."

**Relational accountability.** University and community partners alike exhibit adaptability to get the job done. This willingness to do whatever it takes arises out of shared vision, practices, and experiences. As Susan Ladouceur states, "When the camp is happening and everybody's out there, everybody shares responsibility of doing whatever needs to be done." This accountability is counted as an indicator of authentic relationships because decisions are based not just on accepting individual and community needs, but intentionally building project expectations and goals around those needs.

Similarly, the importance of building relational accountability with leadership and community members should not be underestimated.

Community members from BLMS compare the relational accountability developed at BLMS with its absence in S2:

I don't think the life skills project that happened in the summer at BLMS would have been as successful if they never had that good of relationship with the members and Council. We were never given too much of an opportunity to build a relationship with S2, so that definitely plays a big part in how successful we (BLMS members leading the program in S2) want the programs to be. I don't think you can really help a community if you don't have a positive relationship with not only the leadership but with the members (BLMS community research assistant).

Accountability is counted as an indicator of authentic relationships since decisions and actions are based not only on recognition and acceptance of individual and community needs, but are also intentionally built into project expectations, time lines, and goals.

#### *Indicator: Shared Values*

Shared values as indicators of authentic relationships are most apparent in personal stories told during interviews, focus groups, and debriefs. At various points in the delivery and evaluation of the MSLSJ program, community and university team members began to feel accountable for each other's success (relational accountability) and had established cultural and personal boundaries that allowed difficult questions or issues to be discussed. These two principles, relational accountability and established boundaries, resulted in the internalization of one another's unique and shared values; the university's requirement for research activity and outputs; the community's desire for a youth life skills program; and the shared desire to have a positive impact on Métis people's health and wellness.

**Relational accountability.** Mutual respect exists between the BLMS camp administrator and university partners. Susan Ladouceur says,

There is respect on both ends, because that is how it is with people that I work with. If you don't respect somebody, then you're not going to do the best for them.

This respect arose out of those numerous in-person meetings and community events. At BLMS, we held 5 focus groups, had 25 in-person meetings in the community, 2 teleconference meetings, and maintained up to 3 FTEs of employment from 2010–2014. Furthermore,

There is a lot of trust ... They don't check up on me to see if I'm at work or not because they trust me enough to know that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. The trust needed to work completely by distance is built through interactions over time.

Susan Ladouceur has demonstrated her accountability to the success of the project, taking on increased responsibility to achieve shared goals. When asked about her role and official title, she replies, "Yeah, but I don't know what it is [laughs]." This speaks to her evolving role as administrative assistant, program developer, and camp administrator—she is most concerned with remaining active and adaptable to the program as it unfolds. This also speaks to her internalization of the value of research and her contribution to the research goals. For example, she expressed a growing interest in speaking about the research to Settlements provincially, nationally, and internationally. Her commitment to assist with building relationships with other communities is significant to achieving the research goals. Author Hibbert noted that, after years working together, there is a clear understanding with Susan Ladouceur as to the research goals in addition to the service delivery needs of the project.

#### **Honoring cultural and personal boundaries.**

Both university team members and MSLSJ facilitators have mentioned that non-community members need to learn the workings of the community to build positive relationships. For example, it is common to hold a wake at the local recreation center after the passing of Métis Settlement members. As non-members of the Settlement, it is important to understand that closing public buildings and workplaces is the norm and that all research and associated services are moved or postponed, and employees have a paid day off. Policies that respect local ceremonies and events associated with grief and loss also promote healthy boundaries.

Similarly, the family responsibilities of single parents were respected through flexible hours and days off. An assumption made by the prin-

cipal investigator that 7 hour days and 35-hour work weeks were preferable was soon dispelled as community employees made family and child needs a priority. According to the BLMS community research assistant:

The university gave a lot of support in everything that they would do, just being open to different people and knowing that everyone has their own life. They played a big role in supporting the program.

**Reciprocal capacity building.** After the first year of training, researchers realized that providing community facilitators and the camp administrator with a more in-depth foundation and background of the research objectives would result in improved impact and outcomes. Facilitator training in May of 2014 began with a brief presentation of the larger research project by the PI and research team so that facilitators were aware of how and why they may help achieve research goals. Being introduced to the researchers, their motives and beliefs, and the history of the program, contributed to the development of an authentic relationship.

The extent of shared values was evident in the degree of participation in reflexive discussions. As community members served successive years on the advisory committee, remained employed by the project, or returned to seasonal work year after year, their thoughtful and critical input during interviews, focus groups, and debriefs reflected growing capacity and healthy boundaries.

Susan Ladouceur played a large role in bridging between community members and university employees. She represents the community's values at university team meetings, but also represents the university in a community setting through active employment. In early 2014, after recognizing that the community voice was absent from the cooperative reflective inquiry process, she was asked to join the regular debrief sessions. During one conversation, she articulated shared values and the moment she became aware of the impact of shared values, the point at which individuals do things not because they have to, but because they want to:

There's some people who do stuff that are not...they just do the stuff and it doesn't come from the heart but just because it's their job to do it. So a lot of people don't go to these functions that happen because of that and that's the first time I said it

like that cause that's what I just realized. 'Cause it doesn't come from the heart, just because they have to do that, they do it, right? And there's a big difference in when you want to do something compared to when you have to do something.

## **Discussion**

Stories about MSLSJ project progress from 2010–2014 demonstrate suggested principles for authentic relationships in research partnerships: reciprocal capacity building, relational accountability, and honoring cultural and personal boundaries. The indicators and principles of authentic relationship presented previously align with the principles of CBPR. Analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, and debriefs resulted in two indicators of our progress in achieving authentic relationships: adaptability and flexibility of community and university team members and shared partner values.

Indicators that mark the transition from collaboration to authentic relationships in the MSLSJ project were adaptability/flexibility—shown in the decisions team members made to contribute to project progress—and shared values, shown in the examples from inclusive reflexive practices such as team debriefs. These indicators show the principles of authentic relationships at work. While relational accountability and reciprocal capacity building have been mentioned in the CBPR literature, our use of cultural and personal boundaries as a principle of authentic relationships is unique to the literature. Shared meaning is created within healthy but defined boundaries, so that each community—and each role within that community—contributes to a shared social understanding with cultural and personal confidence and respect. Meaning is made in the doing of things, in the active participation expressed as shared social group activities (Sjorslev, 2013).

Based on our experiences, these principles were critical to authentic relationship development, apply across contexts, and are relevant to researchers who strive to maximize the relevance and impact of CBPR. The indicators that emerged from our data, however, are considered specific to our project, so may or may not be generalizable to other contexts. This speaks to the importance of working with communities in CBPR, recognizing the extent of diversity between Indigenous communities. BLMS exemplifies the benefits of moving beyond collaboration to authentic relationships

with community partners. The transition of academic partners from collaboration to authentic relationship, from research to partnership, from head to heart, is captured in the following:

The general thinking [in academia] is that it's a research project and it's about impacts and outcomes, [but that's an incomplete picture]. It's [also] an examination of how we begin to measure engagement and decide whether that engagement is at a stage where we can continue, or not, if [research] is supposed to be a two way process. (PI)

In contrast, S2 served as a lesson on the importance of authentic relationship and provides an opportunity to reflect on the difficult decisions that are made in the absence of authentic relationships. The decision to not implement camp at S2 was not taken lightly, as the PI stated:

The price of [not] doing a readiness and needs assessment at S2 needs to be considered due to the apparent lack of capacity to be engaged to the level required to go ahead with another summer camp in 2014.

The following stories document signs of our inability to practice the principles of authentic relationship.

The first sign that we have not progressed from collaboration to authentic relationships with S2 is our inability to form a local advisory committee, without which it has proven difficult to have regular communication with stakeholders. In the absence of an advisory, there was no opportunity to establish commitment through shared experiences, no opportunity to be responsive to community needs or priorities, no opportunity for inclusive reflexivity, and no shared values.

The second sign was our inability, despite several attempts, to hire local settlement employees. Without a camp administrator at S2 prior to summer 2014, the onus would fall to Susan Ladouceur to create awareness at S2, coordinate with a community contact to register campers, and to manage the camp itself. She said, "It's hard if I don't know half the people in [S2] for me to be able to go and do that. It's much easier if [someone from S2] does it."

In an attempt to build the relationship with S2, a meeting was set with Settlement Council. Essentials for camp implementation were laid out; a community coordinator and facilitators would be hired, a facility for camp booked, and accommodations for facilitators provided. In return, all the expenses, training, and evaluation required to run a summer camp would be provided by the university. Meeting each other's expectations builds the relationship as both community and university contribute to the success of the camp and research (relational accountability) and contribute to program revisions and implementation (reciprocal capacity building).

Despite enthusiasm on the part of local leadership and positive feedback that “camp was great” and “everybody loved it,” the relationship began to feel like a free service to the community rather than a research partnership with the community. Debrief participants shared that, “We were just a convenient camp for S2.” In contrast, engagement and relationship building at BLMS resonated with deeper meaning and was representative of an authentic relationship.

The decision not to run the MSLSJ program at S2 in 2014 was difficult, but necessary. This decision represents a parameter that both the university and community partners at BLMS set for this project: that the community would actively contribute to both the development and delivery of the program. At the crossroads of this decision, the authentic relationship of BLMS stood out yet again. Committed to the project and the children, Susan Ladouceur, on behalf of BLMS, opened the doors for children at S2 to attend camp at BLMS. This is significant as it speaks to the BLMS facilitators' recognition of the benefits to both children and research in the successful implementation at S2 in 2013. Through the efforts of a newly hired camp administrator in June 2014, a community van was commissioned to transport children from S2 to BLMS. This decision was positive as, “They just blended right in with all the other kids” (Susan Ladouceur).

One of the most difficult challenges for researchers working in CBPR projects is to ask the question “What if the community does not yet have the capacity to collaborate and advocate for the changes they want to see?,” as in S2. Rather than alter the service delivery/research project, exclude them from future participation, or eliminate future attempts at communication (all actions felt to be punitive rather than

community based and responsive to community realities), the university team continues to seek out connections and take steps, however small, that may result in authentic relationship. Things—actions, responses, experiences, and results—do not just happen; they happen because of relationships and connections between people. Principles and indicators of authentic relationships are not merely analytic tools for results, but have proven useful in assessing what can be learned about our research relationships, what strategies contributed to the progress of the project, and what we can do to improve our research outcomes and impacts.

The implications of our findings may be useful to CBPR that combines service delivery and research. Our experiences suggest that the benefits of maintaining authentic relationship in all phases of a project, sharing reflexive experiences in the process, outweigh potential costs (e.g., time and money) when the shared goal is to contribute to positive changes with community members. Researchers entering into CBPR projects who move beyond simple collaboration will maximize CBPR processes and outcomes. Continued expansion of MSLSJ with additional Métis Settlements in Alberta will provide additional insight into principles and indicators of authentic relationship development.

## Conclusion

Our experiences have reinforced our belief in the subtle but critical difference between collaborative and authentic relationship so much that we have dedicated all discretionary funds in our current grant to the establishment or refinement of authentic relationship with future community partners. This approach will broaden and strengthen relationships with and between settlements for future sustainability. Ongoing discussions among all team members about future service delivery strategies and research proposals speak to an authentic relationship.

## References

- Baydala, L., Fletcher, F., Rabbit, N., Louis, J., Ksayyin, K., & Sinclair, C. (2016). A community-university approach to substance abuse prevention. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 9(1), pp. 68–76.
- Baydala, L., Letendre, S., Ruttan, L., Worrell, S., Fletcher, F., Letendre, L., & Schramm, T. (2011). “Why do I need to sign it?” Issues in carrying out child assent

in school-based prevention research within a First Nation community. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 6(1), 99–113.

Baydala, L., Sewlal, B., Rasmussen, C., Alexis, K., Fletcher, F., Letendre, L., Odishaw, J., Kennedy, M., & Kootenay, B. (2009). A culturally adapted drug and alcohol abuse prevention program for Aboriginal children and youth. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships Research, Education and Action*, 3(1), 37–46.

Baydala, L., Worrell, S., Fletcher, F., Letendre, S., Letendre, L., & Ruttan, L. (2013). Making a place of respect: Lessons learned in carrying out consent protocol with First Nations Elders. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education and Action*, 7(2), 135–143.

Black, J., & Enns, G. (1997). *Better boundaries: Owning and, treasuring your life*. Oakland, CA.: New Harbinger Publications.

Bull, J.R. (2010). Research with Aboriginal peoples: Authentic relationships as a precursor to ethical research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 5(4), 13–22.

Canadian Institutes of Health Research. (2008). CIHR guidelines for health research involving aboriginal people (2007–2010). Retrieved from <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>.

Chino, M., & DeBruyn, L. (2006). Building true capacity: Indigenous models for Indigenous communities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 96(4), 596–599.

Dempsey, S. (2010). Critiquing community engagement. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24(3), 359–390.

Fillitz, T., & Saris, A.J. (2013). Introduction: Authenticity aujourd'hui. In T. Fillitz & A.J. Saris (Eds.), *Debating authenticity: Concepts of modernity in anthropological perspective*, pp. 46–62. New York: Berghahn Books.

Fletcher, C. (2003). Community-based participatory research relationships with Aboriginal communities in Canada: an overview of content and process. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 1(1), 27–62.

Fletcher, F., Hammer, B., & Hibbert, A. (2014). “We know we are doing something good, but what is it?”: The challenge of negotiating between service delivery and research in a CBPR project. *Journal of Community Engaged Scholarship*, 7(2), 19–30.

Fletcher, F., Hibbert, A., Robertson, F., & Aselin, J. (2013). Needs and readiness assessments: Tools for promoting community-university engagement with Aboriginal communities. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research*

and Engagement, 6, 131–149.

Horowitz, C.R., Robinson, M., & Seifer, S. (2009). Community-based participatory research from the margin to the mainstream: Are researchers prepared? *Circulation*, 119(19), 2,633–2,642.

Israel, B.A., Parker, E.A., Rowe, Z., Salvatore, A., Minkler, M., Lopez, J., Butz, A., Mosley, A., Coates, L., Lambert, G., Potito, P.A., Brenner, B., Rivera, M., Romero, H., Thompson, B., Coronado, G., & Halstead, S. (2005). Community-based participatory research: Lessons learned from the Centers For Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 113(10), 1,463–1,471.

Israel, B.A., Schulz, A.J., Parker, E.A., & Becker, A.B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19, 173–202.

Kajner, T., Fletcher, F., Makokis, P. (2012). Balancing head and heart: The importance of relational accountability in community-university partnerships. *Innovative Higher Education*, 37(4), 257–270.

Mursic, R. (2013). Deceptive tentacles of the authenticating mind: On authenticity and some other notions that are good for absolutely nothing. In T. Fillitz & A.J. Saris (Eds.), *Debating authenticity: Concepts of modernity in anthropological perspective* (pp., 46–62). New York: Berghahn Books.

Robben, A. (2007). Reflexive ethnography. In A. Robben and J. Sluka (Eds.), *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader* (pp., 443–446). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Sjorslev, I. (2013). *Is form really primary or, what makes things authentic*. In T. Fillitz & A.J. Saris (Eds.), *Debating authenticity: Concepts of modernity in anthropological perspective* (pp., 111–127). New York: Berghahn Books.

Statistics Canada. (2012). Buffalo Lake, Alberta (Code 480253) and Division No. 7, Alberta (Code 4807) [Table]. Census Profile. 2011 Census. *Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98–316-XWE*. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

Styres, S., Zinga, D., Bennett, S., Bomberry, M. (2010). Walking in two worlds: Engaging the space between Indigenous community and academia. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(3), 617–648.

Taylor, C. (1999). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Viswanathan, M., Ammerman, A., Eng, E., Garlehner, G., Lohr, K.N., Griffith, D., Rhodes, S., Sameuel-Hodge, C., Maty, S., Lux, L., Webb, L., Sut-

ton, S., Swinson, T., Jackman, A., & Whitener, L. (2004). Community-based participatory research: Assessing the evidence. *Summary, Evidence Report/Technology Assessment(99)*. AHRQ Publication Number 04-E022-1. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Wallerstein, N., & Minkler, M. (2008). *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wilson, S. (2009). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Black Point, NS, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.

### **About the Authors**

Dr. Fay Fletcher is the academic director of Indigenous Programs and associate dean with the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Alicia Hibbert is the research project lead for Indigenous Programs in the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta. Brent Hammer is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta and a researcher with the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension. Susan Ladouceur is a Buffalo Lake Métis Settlements community member and parent.