



AHA CENTRE

A PROJECT OF CAAN

Capacity Bridging: reciprocal and equitable knowledge sharing on a research team

Marni Amirault¹; Sherri Pooyak¹; Renee Masching^{1,2}; Charlotte Loppie^{1,3}; Ken Clement²; Patrick Brownlee^{1,2}; Jennifer Mavrtsakis¹

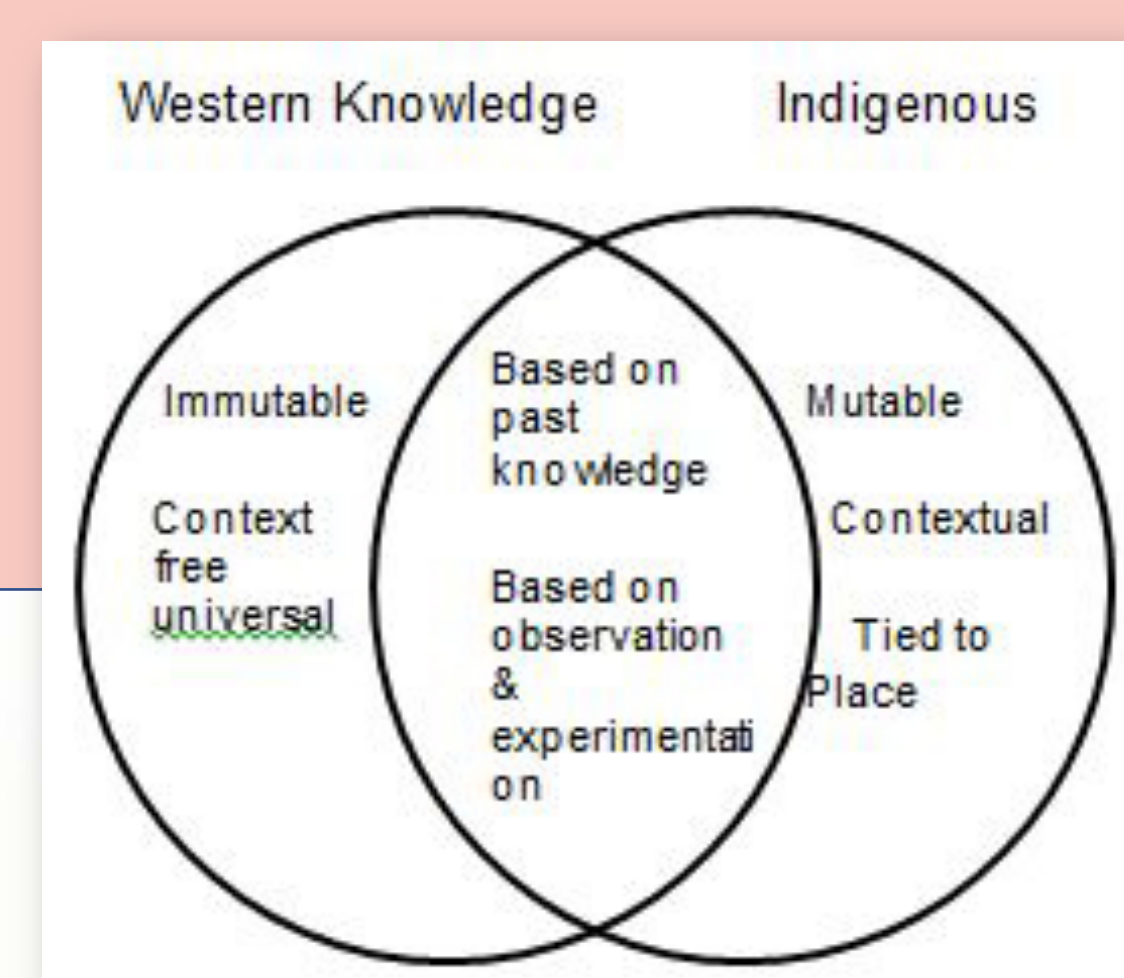
AHA Centre¹; Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network²; University of Victoria³

Background: The concept **Capacity Bridging** is put forward by the AHA Centre 2.0 where a term familiar to Community-Based Research (CBR) - **Capacity Building** - is nuanced to better suit an Indigenous context. **Capacity Bridging** builds upon ideas that are important to Indigenous Peoples, such as reciprocity, relationality and relational accountability (Wilson 2008) and engaging 'in a good way' (AHA Centre 2016). In research, the concepts of Ethical Space (Ermine 2007) and Two-eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012) are also included.

Capacity bridging acknowledges that when we are engaging in research, we are all engaging in a co-learning journey (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012) by recognizing the value and opportunities in learning from every person on a research team. In short, it's the idea of coming together to do research in a good way. The concept of Capacity Bridging was introduced during the Visioning Health project, which is co-led by AHA Centre team members Tracey Prentice and Doris Peltier and further built upon by AHA Centre Co-Director, Dr. Charlotte Loppie. Initially, the term Capacity Bridging came from a desire to do the work of Visioning Health from a strengths-based approach to research.



Two-Eyed Seeing: Marshall



Ethical Spaces: Ermine

Our Approach: Stretching the concept of *Capacity Building* so that our understanding of *building* encompasses the concept of *bridging* speaks to the power of language. We are challenged to think carefully about the stories we tell ourselves about the work that we do and the communities we work with.

As Wilson (2008) says, if research doesn't change us, we aren't doing it right. What we may be ignoring is that no one comes to a research team as a 'blank slate' or in a vacuum. Key to our discussion is the fact that everyone on research teams—researchers, scientists, community people, policy makers, EVERYONE—will learn something new and have his or her capacity 'built' in one way or another when they engage in research.

Capacity Bridging is about reciprocity: coming together, sharing, learning from one another and listening to each other. In this approach, a strengths-based understanding guides to seek out the gifts and wisdom that all team members bring to a project rather than identifying the gaps that need to be filled with unique skillsets. The desired outcome in both approaches – deficit or strengths-based – aims to create a whole team that can engage in effective and meaningful research. The IMPACT of each of these approaches however is profoundly different. A deficit-based approach sets team members apart from each other with boundaries around their roles where a strengths-based approach unites team members in celebrating the diversity of each team member, complimenting each other's abilities.

We hope that the term *Capacity Bridging*, once understood, may help to break down research barriers by acknowledging that one person may wear many hats.

Findings: Capacity bridging allows researchers and community members opportunities to find common ground before moving forward respectfully, to do research in a good way. Learning from a CBR approach, this respectful engagement strategy can drive research across disciplines, inviting greater support for interdisciplinary research as well as community-academic partnerships. Moving beyond a historic approach to research where the "experts" arrive prepared with a clear cut plan of what they will do, how they will do it, what they need, and how long it will take to get it all done. A capacity bridging approach recognizes the importance and value of working together from the earliest point in research development in order to learn from each other and advance truly new knowledge.

Capacity bridging not only celebrates all team members' expertise, it reduces the expectations (and pressure) for any one team member to have all the answers or make all the decisions for a project. Leadership roles and responsibilities are still essential and should be clearly outlined to support team functionality and success. Research team agreements can be very effective to support a team's work and understanding of how the research process will unfold.

Implications: The term capacity bridging, once understood, may help to break down research barriers by acknowledging that everyone has something to offer a research team or project. It looks for ways that we can extend our reach to produce more wholistic and meaningful research that serves our Indigenous communities "in a good way". Capacity bridging has the potential to positively influence and effect research and the communities the findings serve.



Sherri Pooyak & Janice Duddy
Capacity Bridging V-log 2017

References:

- Bartlett, C.; Marshall, M. and Marshall, A. (2012) Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*. November 2012, Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 331–340.
- Ermine, W (2007) The Ethical Space of Engagement. *Indigenous Journal of Law*. Volume 6/Issue 1 (Pp. 194-201).
- Pooyak, S. and Duddy, J. (2017) *Capacity Bridging – Reciprocity at Work in Research*. Retrieved from: <https://vimeo.com/224986189>.
- Wilson, S. (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*.