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CENTRING ABORIGINAL WORLDVIEWS

in SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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■ Abstract

As Aboriginal peoples gain more access to schools of social work, the academy needs to respond to their educational needs. This involves incorporating Aboriginal worldviews and research methodologies into social work education. This paper focuses on one definition of worldviews according to Aboriginal epistemology and implements an anti-colonial discursive framework in its analysis of education. It also critiques both the role of social work in the lives of Aboriginal peoples and the goals of social work education. Through the findings of a recent research project with Aboriginal social work students in Ontario, Canada, it raises key components that need to be addressed in the academy and provides ways in which this can be achieved. The overall theme flowing through this paper is that of decolonisation whereby reclamation of the belief that all peoples of the world have much to offer one another and life is a reciprocal process comes to the surface. In addition, the paper stresses the importance of this content being taught to all social work students and its relevance to all areas of Indigenous humanities.

■ Introduction

As an Aboriginal social work practitioner and educator, I have a vested interest in how this profession has been involved with our families and communities for the past several decades. The profession of social work has not tended to be friendly towards Aboriginal peoples. Rather, it has often been intrusive, judgmental, controlling and harmful. However, as more and more schools of social work begin to incorporate anti-oppressive theories and practices into their curricula, it opens the door for such approaches to include work that is conducive to Aboriginal perspectives. This paper asserts that Aboriginal worldviews must be incorporated throughout social work education as well as in all of the humanities. Furthermore, I assert that the humanities, such as philosophy, history and theology, are fundamental pieces of social work education. The paper does not include all components of Aboriginal worldviews, but rather only those that I see as of first importance to the topic of social work education. The paper includes a literature review of social work education by Aboriginal scholars which centres on what they believe needs to be taught in curricula. From there, I present the findings from a recent research project with Aboriginal social work students across Ontario, Canada, which raises suggestions for animating Aboriginal worldviews within education.

■ Towards an understanding of Aboriginal worldviews

Chickasaw academic Eber Hampton (1995) published an article several years ago in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* titled "Memory comes before knowledge". For me, this magical, mysterious and completely sensible phrase captures the connections inherent in Aboriginal worldviews. It helps me to understand so many pieces of the circle that contribute to Aboriginal ways of knowing and seeing the world. It is inclusive of spirit, blood memory, respect, interconnectedness, storytelling, feelings, experiences and guidance. It also reminds me that I do not need to know or understand – in the sense of absolute certainty – about everything. It reinforces the sense that it is perfectly acceptable and appropriate to believe that there is much that I am aware of, but that I cannot explain. I am aware, for example, that I carry teachings of my ancestors, that I do certain things according to the changes of the moon each month and that my brother who has passed into the spirit world

is attending school over there. I am aware of these things, but I cannot offer explanations. I am also aware that this is the way it is supposed to be. I accept what cannot be known and recognise that this is part of my worldview.

In keeping with this assertion is Cree scholar Willie Ermine's (1995, p. 108) statement that "Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self". Thus, in order to find meanings in the world around us, we must continuously explore our inner selves. Aboriginal worldviews incorporate ways of turning inward for the purpose of finding meanings through prayer, fasting, dream interpretation, ceremonies and silence. Our ancestors left us these methods through the generational teachings that are passed on by our elders and via our blood memories. There is an explicit acceptance that each individual has the inherent ability for introspection. Although there is great community guidance, this inward journey is conducted alone and is unique for each of us. It provides us with our purpose and, therefore, what we have to offer the whole.

Knowledge, then, is based on experience. One's experiences through her inward journeys provide both individual learning and teachings for the collective. The accumulation of each individual's contribution becomes a community's culture. Culture is kept alive and constantly changing because individuals continue their introspective journeys and contribute their learning to the community. Collective cultural and spiritual experiences strongly indicate the notion of connection. Many Aboriginal writers (e.g., Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Couture, 1991; Fitznor, 1998; Shilling, 2002) emphasise interconnectedness as an important concept of our worldviews. As Paula Gunn Allen (1986, p. 60) says "all things are related and are of one family". Thus, I am connected to my family, community, Míkmaq Nation, everything on Mother Earth and the spirit world. To divide any of these realities into separate categories is a dishonour to Aboriginal ways of thinking.

This understanding of interrelatedness applies to each individual as well which is asserted by Carol Locust (1988, p. 328) who writes, "As Native people, we cannot separate our spiritual teachings from our learning, nor can we separate our beliefs about who, and what we are from our values and our behaviours". Hence, all of the aspects of a person – physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual – are connected and cannot be viewed in isolation. Both Cree scholar Laara Fitznor (1998) and Anishnawbe academic Renee Shilling (2002) emphasise the importance of this concept to the well-being of each of us. Fitznor (1998, p. 33) reminds us "that we are all related and all have a responsibility to each other's healing and growth". Much of this occurs in our sharing circles which also "reflect the traditional concept of interconnectedness" (Fitznor, 1998, p. 34). This, in turn, leads to a holistic

approach of healing and learning whereby "all of the senses, coupled with openness to intuitive or spiritual insights, are required" (Brant Castellano, 2000, p. 29).

Since I am particularly concerned about the idea of responsibility within Aboriginal worldviews, I emphasise it in discussions about oral tradition. Teaching and passing on information by elders to younger generations is an essential concept in our worldviews. I seem to always learn best by listening to the stories of my elders' and traditional teachers' personal life experiences. These are people who know me and with whom I have gradually developed relationships with over time. Whatever they choose to teach me at any particular moment is based on our relationships and always takes place in person. Both the teacher and the student have a responsibility for the knowledge that is passed between them. According to Haudenosaunee scholar Marlene Brant Castellano (2000, p. 26), "Aboriginal people know that knowledge is power and that power can be used for good or for evil. In passing on knowledge the teacher has an obligation to consider whether the learner is ready to use knowledge responsibly". This is the reasoning behind the resistance of many elders and traditional teachers to having their teachings recorded in the written form. Brant Castellano (2000, p. 27) points out the seriousness of this consideration when she states, "teachers who allow these things relinquish the possibility of adjusting their teaching to the maturity of the learner and thereby influencing the ethical use of knowledge". For me, these selected concepts of Aboriginal worldviews – acceptance and a belief in the unknown, inner journeying, experience is knowledge, interconnectedness, responsibility and teaching through oral tradition – relate to how I view the practice of social work which is healing and the education of it which is teaching from experience.

At this point, I would like to make a statement on Aboriginal worldviews with reference to universality and specificity to place. My experiences have shown me that there are remarkable similarities amongst Aboriginal nations across Turtle Island (North America) in terms of worldviews. This is also seen in the above writings by Aboriginal scholars who represent several different nations but describe worldviews in similar ways. I am defining worldviews as foundations and values upon which societies and cultures are built. This is where the universality amongst nations ends and specifics begin. Societies and cultures are specific to territory or land base. They differ in terms of language, food, spiritual practices, teachings, ceremonies, forms of leadership, government and so on. It would be ludicrous to think that my day-to-day practices – a Míkmaq woman from the Atlantic coast of Canada – would be the same as those of an Innu man living in the far north of Canada. There is no "pan-Indian". We are unique to our Nations.

■ Anti-colonial discursive framework

The anti-colonial discursive framework sees Indigenous knowledges as an important standpoint. This framework highlights key issues such as colonialism, Indigeneity, spirituality and resistance/agency. Many academics, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, (e.g., Alfred, 2004; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Bhabha, 1994; Cesaire, 2000; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000; Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Fanon, 1967; Kelley, 2000) write about the definition and ongoing effects of colonisation. According to Kanien'Kehaka scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2004, p. 89):

We understand colonialism as the major historical evil that our people have had to face; and we understand it mainly in material terms, as political injustices, domination, dispossession of lands, or economic oppression. Some understandings of colonialism touch on some of the psychological or spiritual effects of all of the material loss, manifested in dysfunctional or self-destructive behaviours. But I believe that the true meaning of "colonialism" emerges from a consideration of how we as Indigenous peoples have lost the freedom to exist as Indigenous peoples in almost every single sphere of our existence. The thing that must be defeated, colonialism, is far beyond being merely an economic or political problem with psychological manifestations. I think of it like this instead: it is the fundamental denial of our freedom to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and the unjust occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces we need in order to survive as Indigenous peoples.

Colonialism, then, cannot be viewed as merely a historical period. It totally surrounds and is absorbed into our whole existence and how we think about ourselves individually and collectively. Education, in particular, is implicated in this false consciousness that we carry. It is a denial of our truthful histories and a means by which we have been artificially divided as Aboriginal peoples so that we can be managed by the colonial order. Colonialism cannot be said to be over when the dominant state continues to make decisions for Aboriginal peoples, literally telling us what we can and cannot do. It cannot be over when White peoples, whether they be representing themselves individually or institutionally, exploit and appropriate our traditional knowledges, cultures and spirituality for their own interests and advancement. This theft is no different than the theft of our original lands over 500 years ago.

An anti-colonial framework moves way beyond a definition of colonisation. It takes up who we are – through Indigeneity – as well. Indigeneity has strong links to resistance/agency. This is proven by the fact that

Indigenous bodies and knowledges have survived in spite of colonialism. Prior to colonisation, Indigenous knowledges explained worldviews. However, today since colonialism continues to exist, these knowledges are also means by which Aboriginal peoples can challenge dominant discourse. This is articulated by Elizabeth McIsaac (2000, pp. 99-100):

Indigenous knowledges not only represent alternatives and challenges to dominant discourses, but also restore historical agency. While knowledges drawn from experience traditionally have been passed on for purposes of understanding nature, the land, the animals, and the elements, these knowledges can also be understood as articulating a cosmology that contradicts the logic of colonialism and offers a radical alternative.

However, within the concept of resistance, understanding Indigenous knowledges as an alternative to the colonial discourse is not enough. Resistance must be more than cognitive. As George Dei, Leena Karumanchery and Nisha Karumanchery-Luik (2004, p. 8) relate:

Awareness alone may allow us to look reflexively at ourselves as subjects within the moment, but it does not necessarily help us to move away from the guilt, solitude, insecurity and pain associated with those moments in which we could not understand why ... This is why a critical education is so important: because the oppressed cannot be expected to resist without understanding what they are resisting and why they are resisting it. Consciousness and awareness of racism helps us to analyze our place within the racist experience. However, consciousness in and of itself is not enough. We must also strategize for resistance.

Strategies of resistance, according to McIsaac (2000, p. 91), must be those that "truly challenge or subvert dominant culture". Such challenges come from theories and practices of anti-colonialism, anti-racism and anti-oppression. "The anti-colonial approach recognises the importance of locally produced knowledge emanating from cultural history and daily human experiences and social interactions" and it "sees marginalised groups as subjects of their own experiences and histories" (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000, p. 300). Anti-colonial thought also examines Indigenous peoples' understandings of agency and resistance. It argues that power and discourse are not possessed entirely by the coloniser. Quite the contrary, the colonised also have the power to question, to challenge, and to subsequently subvert the "oppressive structures of power and privilege. Discursive agency and power of resistance also reside in and among colonized groups" (Dei & Asgharzadeh,

2000, p. 300). This is in large part why I like an anti-colonial framework. It is not simply against colonial discourses. Rather, it promotes our own powerful discourses such as storytelling. It guides anti-colonial researchers to use our own Indigenous concepts and cultural frames of references in our work. It encourages researchers to make use of oral traditions as forms of resistance and a celebration of our knowledges and cultures. Anti-colonial discourse also "entails a shift away from a sole preoccupation with victimization" (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000, p. 301).

An anti-colonial framework is about working for decolonisation. It involves a process of dismantling the colonial relationship between Aboriginal peoples and dominant society and forming a new relationship. This new relationship must "be based on principles of mutual respect, sharing, and recognition of the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples to follow their traditional ways of governance" (Sunseri, 2000, p. 146). This view is reinforced by Cherokee activist and academic Ward Churchill (1993, p. 433), who describes a new relationship as "the inculcation of voluntary, consensual interdependence between formerly dominated and dominating nations, and a redefinition of the word "nation" itself to conform to its original meaning: bodies of people bound together by their bioregional and other natural cultural affinities". I also suggest that, for Aboriginal peoples, an anti-colonial framework is about choice, control of decisions, and control of the decision-making processes. Whatever the end result is, decolonisation must be about Aboriginal peoples determining who will be included and which course will be taken. If nothing else, at least whatever decisions are made, they will be made by Aboriginal peoples rather than by the Canadian state.

Collective identity is another aspect which is crucial to the anti-colonial liberation movements of Aboriginal peoples. Notions of collectivity operationalise into a reclaiming of cultures, spirituality and identities. However, cultures and identities are not static, of course. Rather, they adapt in response to the changing environment around us. Stuart Hall (1994, p. 394) speaks to this stating:

Identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". Thus, colonized peoples cannot simply turn back to the idea of a collective pre-colonial culture, and a past which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity.

An anti-colonial framework is not about turning back to what once was. It is about our collective future. And, even though this clearly involves a reclaiming of our cultures and our spirituality, these processes are intended to provide us with the strength that we will need in our struggle to be a sovereign part of that future. An anti-colonial framework also emphasises

that it is not only Indigenous peoples who need to be decolonised – the colonisers must be as well. This stance is taken by anti-colonial writers such, as Franz Fanon (1967), Aime Cesaire (2000) and Robin Kelley (2000). According to Cesaire (2000, p. 225, original emphasis), colonisation:

dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out.

Kelley (2000, p. 13) adds another layer to Cesaire's boomerang effect by stating that "colonialism results in the massive destruction of whole societies – societies that not only function at a high level of sophistication and complexity, but that might offer the West valuable lessons about how we might live together and remake the modern world". Colonisers have lost out on the incredible knowledge sustained by Indigenous peoples, especially in the area of the humanities, which could greatly contribute to their quality of life and to the future of our mother, the earth. After all, if she dies, the colour of a person's skin or the amount of wealth one possesses will not matter. If she dies, we all die. Thus, an anti-colonial stance advocates for a future that privileges all knowledges equally for the betterment of all humanity.

■ Aboriginal worldviews in social work education

The language of the social services ... does not stem from or operate within the consciousness of interconnected and interdependent planes of reality. The institutions isolate and treat the "problem" that, in a tribal view, is only a symptom of a more significant imbalance. Institutionalized words, "white words" cannot initiate the kind of healing achieved through tribal rituals (Blaeser, 1996, p. 44).

As Blaeser asserts, therein lies the reason why conventional social work has often failed and harmed Aboriginal peoples – it oppresses our ways of knowing and healing practices. Certainly, both the profession of social work and systems of education are implicated in the oppression of Aboriginal peoples since they have historically acted as arms of colonisation. One Anishnawbe social work educator, Gord Bruyere

(1998), raises the difficulties of bringing Aboriginal ways of knowing into the educational system, which has ignored or disrespected these ways. He identifies how painful it can be for Aboriginal students to talk about issues related to social work, such as residential schools, child welfare and substance abuse, because these are not merely academic exercises for us. Rather, they are about us, our families and our communities. Bruyere also discusses the racism experienced by Aboriginal students from both other students and professors, and the frustration expressed by those who are tired of hearing about our demands for inclusion. He concludes that "the implication of these acts of omission is that a potentially liberating experience, education, simply continues to be indoctrination into and perpetuation of a colonial relationship between indigenous peoples and the newcomers" (1998, p. 175). I agree with Bruyere's critique of social work education as failing most of our students. I appreciate that many of us come into the classroom carrying emotional and spiritual wounds. But I firmly believe that the issues of child welfare etc can be taught in social work education in ways that place responsibility where it should be and, in fact, contribute to the healing processes of Aboriginal students. These issues must be addressed for this learning is crucial to all students as it can be liberating to learn the truth.

As an Aboriginal social work instructor, I find myself in an odd place between the binary of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldviews and because I teach about a profession that, in many ways, continues to oppress Aboriginal peoples. However, I situate myself here as someone who ruptures the notion that there is only one way – the Eurocentric one – of doing social work. I am referring to how a specific knowledge is privileged within social work education at the exclusion of all other ways of seeing and understanding the world. I agree with Morrisette, McKenzie and Morrisette (1993, p. 92) who stress that "models of helping remain too firmly entrenched in an ideology and orientation that is particular to conventional society and the worldviews of the dominant culture". This has created a meta-narrative within social work education that continues to be universally applied to all peoples regardless of race, gender, class etc. This "taken-for-granted" knowledge, which is grounded in Judeo-Christian values, needs to be interrogated so that schools of social work can rethink their curricula and teaching methods. As the outsider on the inside of academia, I see my privileged role as one who brings Aboriginal worldviews into the classroom while teaching and critiquing Eurocentric social work theories and practices. As social work educator Robyn Lynn (2001, p. 910) writes, this inclusionary approach to learning

challenges some of the sacred cows of the meta-narrative of social work and opens the

possibility of questioning and building multiple helping processes. These practices can raise, for the non-indigenous practitioner, questions about the highly individualized focus of western interpersonal helping, the language about the activities of a "professional" worker, the value of verbal expressiveness and the value of a particular set of technical devices, for example empathy, which encourage minimal self-disclosure and sharing, while at the same time expecting the clients to share intimate aspects of their lives ... Indigenized approaches have the potential to blur those boundaries. They open up the possibility, through dialogue and self-reflection, of deconstructing the professionalized/scientific approach and revaluing skills and the knowledge of life.

I have one major concern with the work of Aboriginalising the academy. This concern has to do with responsibility and appropriation. I have the responsibility to teach Aboriginal ways of knowing and helping within the context of social work, and I am accountable to students, communities, and to the Creator for how this is done. I also have the responsibility to safeguard against the appropriation of Aboriginal knowledges by students, colleagues and educational institutions. George Dei et al. (2000, p. 47) says this best:

As we seek to integrate these knowledges into the conventional school systems, we must guard against appropriation and misappropriation. This is a contemporary challenge for educators. The process of validating Indigenous knowledges must not lead to Indigenous peoples losing control and ownership of knowledge. In other words, it must be recognized that these knowledges are valid in their own right and that the process of bringing them into the academy should not itself constitute the measure of validation.

Some schools of social work state that they embrace "an Aboriginal perspective and analysis". The implication of this is that the views of Aboriginal peoples are as integrated into the curriculum as wholly as other perspectives such as structural or feminist social work approaches. But what happens when one asks the question "is an Aboriginal perspective mentioned in the classroom as often as anti-racist practice or feminist analysis or a structural approach?" (Bruyere, 1998, p. 174).

This leads to the importance of social work practitioners and educators examining their own values and biases while teaching students to do the same. While examining the literature on this topic, I learned that Aboriginal scholars emphasise that "faculty must become aware of their own biases, stereotypes,

and cultural indifference before they are able to adequately address cultural issues in the classroom" (Weaver, 2000, p. 416). This process is referred to as cultural competency in the literature (Hurdle, 2002; Weaver, 1998, 2000). According to Weaver (1998), cultural competency can be summarised with three major principles:

- the social worker needs to be knowledgeable about the group being worked with;
- the social worker needs to be self-reflective and recognise biases within herself and within the profession; and
- the social worker needs to integrate this knowledge and reflection with practice skills.

Clearly, the knowledge of the group being worked with must focus on the history of the colonisation of Aboriginal peoples and how this continues to oppress us today. It must also include Aboriginal worldviews, diversity and cultural strengths. This involves ongoing learning from those we call "clients". However, self-reflection is inadequate as it merely suggests that a social worker needs to examine the practice that she has engaged in after the fact or "intervention". Instead, social workers must critically examine themselves, particularly their own culture and biases, while analysing how these impact on the people they are trying to assist which is known as reflexivity. This process also needs to involve critiquing the profession of social work itself since all theories and models contain a value base. Donna Hurdle (2002, p. 186) writes that "culture influences how problems are defined, as well as the nature of problem resolution". If social workers do not consider this, they will never know what kind of assistance clients want that would fit with their cultural views on problem resolution. Hence, when it comes to practice, social workers must have diverse ways of acknowledging Aboriginal knowledges, values and problem-solving capacities.

As an anti-racist and anti-colonial practitioner and educator, I tend to critique the cultural competency approach. This approach is framed within the context of multiculturalism which means that it avoids naming racism and other oppressions while racialising culture. I definitely do not support the emptiness of multiculturalism and I certainly do not advocate that if one learns something about someone else's culture, all will be well. My dream, however, is that although I firmly assert the naming of racism and other oppressions, I do not want to be constantly focusing on them in the teaching of social work. Rather, I want to move beyond this to a place of acceptance and inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing within the education and practice of the profession.

This needs to be taught in schools of social work with an emphasis that all efforts be supportive of Aboriginal

sovereignty and self-determination. Students can be assisted in learning how to be activists in changing the colonial activities of the educational institution, their placement agencies and governmental structures that define social policies. Students can be encouraged to actively support, for example, Aboriginal social services organisations, changes in social policies regarding child welfare and those groups involved in pursuing land claims and the right to fish. Importantly, too, is that students gain the confidence to take stands on issues that specifically impact in negative ways upon Aboriginal peoples, so these are not as likely to be marginalised as being of little importance to non-Aboriginal peoples. This is articulated by Weaver (2000, p. 417) who states that:

since Native [peoples] are often perceived to be a very small group with no political clout, they are often ignored and their issues marginalized. Once politicians realize that many people, Native ... and non-Natives alike, are concerned with "Indian issues" they will no longer be able to ignore or marginalize these concerns.

■ Gathering stories: Research in social work education

Throughout the world, Indigenous peoples are beginning to take control over research that is conducted with our families and in our communities. This gradual take over is not merely an adoption of Western forms of research. Rather, it involves true representations of our worldviews and methodologies. Even though our approaches live on the margins of Western research, this is a space of survival, resistance and anti-colonial discourse. It is a space of both struggle and intense creativity. Gathering our own stories through Aboriginal research methodologies is about how we gather our information, the stories we choose to tell, and how we communicate them. Aboriginal research methodologies are also about who does the gathering and the communicating, for, uppermost, they represent a responsibility to anti-colonialism and the promotion of Aboriginal worldviews. An anti-colonial framework centres on emancipatory aims within research. It is about community control over decision-making, the research agenda, how resources will be distributed and ethical practices. It includes a focus on critical questions such as the following:

- What research is important and worthwhile to carry out?
- Who will conduct the research?
- How will it be carried out?
- Who will own the research?
- Who will the research benefit and what positive differences will it make?

- How does conventional research support local capacities to undertake their own research?

We will not have power if we ask for it, nor can it ever be given to us. We have to take it. One way of taking power around the humanities in the academy is to push for, and to insist on conducting research according to Aboriginal methodologies, which includes our protocols. Such protocols may involve the offering of tobacco to participants, including traditional teachers/elders in our projects, and ensuring the value of reciprocity by adding participants' names to our research publications and giving back to them through, for example, food and gifts for the knowledge they have passed on to us. This means challenging the discourse and the conventional rules of the academy. When we understand who we are, we are better equipped to do so and, in so doing, we determine which of the academy's rules we can abide by and which ones we cannot.

The ways and means of gathering information need to respect Aboriginal epistemologies and cultural protocols. Our worldviews shape our approaches to research and shape the questions we seek to answer. Two examples of Indigenous research methodologies that are of use to social work education are storytelling and the medicine wheel. Several Indigenous researchers – both within social work and in other areas of the humanities (e.g., Bishop, 1998; Deloria Jr., 1995; Kanuha, 2000; Wilson, 2001) – emphasise that storytelling as a research method fits easily within an Indigenous paradigm. As Wilson (2001, p. 177) explains, storytelling “coincides with the Indigenous epistemological importance of relationships. Storytelling and methods like personal narrative ... fit the epistemology because when you are relating a personal narrative, you are getting into a relationship with someone”. Storytelling within the context of a circle of participants is relevant because

people get a chance to address the issue without fear of being interrupted. Generally the procedure is for people to speak one after another, in sequence of left to right ... The discourse spirals, in that the flow of talk may seem circuitous, opinions may vary and waver, but the seeking of a collaboratively constructed story is central (Bishop, 1998, p. 206).

Other Indigenous scholars (Absolon & Herbert, 1997; Walker, 2001) – again both those within social work education and those within other areas of the humanities – write about the medicine wheel as a significant research methodology. As Walker (2001, p. 19) explains:

in the Medicine Wheel methodology, the East represents the Spiritual aspects of experience. In the East, researchers acknowledge their interconnectedness with the research participants

and the wider community. Research from the Eastern position integrates a wide range of senses in coming to know. The South represents the Natural World. In the South, researchers honour and utilize emotional experience, speaking from the heart, with authenticity. The West represents the bodily aspects of knowing. In the West, researchers are encouraged to go within themselves, discovering what is important in relation to the connections between self, others, nature and traditional teachings. The North represents the mental processes of balancing intellect with wisdom. In the North, researchers work within the community to find solutions that are balanced and restore harmony to the community as a whole.

As Indigenous researchers and educators within social work education, we must be both creative and bold in the work that we do for our communities. We cannot hide our worldviews and methodologies in our academic work and research. Rather, we need to explicitly state them. We must not allow them to continue to be outlawed in this work, as our ceremonies and languages were for so long in the past. Thus, I have implemented both storytelling and the medicine wheel in all of the social work research projects I have conducted and they are the methodologies I teach within my role as a social work educator. I have experienced them to be conducive to social work education which stresses values such as honouring the integrity of people and self-determination.

Animating Aboriginal knowledges in social work education

Since there is no representation in the literature of the voices of Aboriginal social work students, they were the participants in my research project. After all, the academy is a space shared by both instructors and students. Circles were conducted with students in three sites across Ontario, Canada, during the fall of 2003. When it comes to animating Aboriginal worldviews in the academy, students focused on:

- who teaches;
- curricula;
- community involvement;
- teaching the teachers;
- creativity; and
- decolonisation.

Several students took up the topic of Aboriginal instructors within formal education. For those students who had/have Aboriginal instructors, this is often what assists them in staying in university. One of these students explained:

The main focus [today] is to regain our culture for our people because a lot of us coming [to universities] have never been exposed to the culture, you know, as far as teaching, because of the strong impact of Christianity and colonial beliefs, so by being taught with Native instructors it just kind of opened it up, opened up my way of thinking because I can relate to their stories.

A second major issue that emerged from the research project was on what should be included in curricula along with who should teach the content and how. Many of the students interviewed cited specific course work as a major method of bringing Aboriginal worldviews into social work education. A strong suggestion was a mandatory course on this topic that all students would be required to take. This would then be followed up and built upon in all other courses.

Several students also spent time discussing reading materials and curriculum development. All emphasised that Aboriginal students "have to have our own writers writing books and curriculum". They were direct in their belief that since non-Aboriginal peoples come to the work with a "totally different perspective", they cannot write in ways that will be respectfully representative of Aboriginal values and teachings. These students also saw elders from Aboriginal communities as having a significant role in curriculum development. Another idea was to have people living in reserve communities assist with curriculum development. The reasoning behind these choices was that curriculum which is grounded by the teachings of elders and based on reserve community needs and preferences could build better working relationships in the future between non-Aboriginal social workers and the Aboriginal peoples they would service.

As with making the learning of Aboriginal worldviews mandatory, the students who participated in my research project were all in support of making the learning about the history of colonisation also mandatory. None of the students had any qualms about this, for, as one of the students neatly put it, "we have to learn theirs [history, language etc] in school, so therefore they should have to learn ours ... [but] not [about] the feathers and the Pocahontas princess. They need to know the real thing about colonisation and [about] assimilation practices". Some students also emphasised the need for educators to be taught the history of colonisation. They explained that this can be made mandatory within teacher's colleges and in doctoral programs, so that those who teach at all levels will be educated. One student expressed a thoughtful and culturally relevant way to help educate educators. She said:

Just think if we pulled all the teachers out of school, sat them in this circle and talked about our history in a good way [with kindness] rather

than "you did this" and "you did that". It has to be talked about in a good way or they won't be open to really listening. But if this were to happen, then when teachers went back, they'd probably teach it [colonisation] in a totally different way.

This student expresses how the pedagogy of the circle and what it represents – equality, ongoing learning, listening, sharing, connection, spirituality – would be an excellent method of teaching educators about the history of colonisation and its impacts upon Aboriginal peoples. The reference to teaching about history "in a good way" is connected to Aboriginal values of kindness, patience and emphasis on relationship-building. It is also linked to the idea that people will be more receptive to hearing about colonisation if we speak about it personally from the heart and spirit, without any intention of hurting or blaming individuals. This includes talking to others in a circle in the same way we want to be spoken to. In this way, there is the real possibility of opening up a genuine dialogue whereby teachers could be educated. This, too, is consciousness-raising and, once a teacher knows the truth and, more importantly, the devastation of the impacts of colonisation upon the people sitting in the circle, it becomes difficult to step back into denial and minimisation. The injustice and harm that has deliberately been done to Aboriginal peoples then becomes a part of one's consciousness that needs to be shared with others who are, in this case, students. Perhaps these teachers would then educate in ways different from before, in that they would not gloss over history, but rather address it in meaningful ways.

Many students emphasised how having Aboriginal peoples bring the community into the academy is a tangible way of breaking down walls of ignorance and assumptions while demonstrating other teaching practices. As one student explained:

I read the section in our social work textbook on Aboriginal [peoples]. It was dry and very repetitive. Then he [our instructor] presented [an Aboriginal teacher] to our class. Maybe that's exactly what needs to be done – participants that identify with the Aboriginal culture showing or teaching [other] people and leading the way. Maybe it shouldn't be textbooks that teach our peers and our professors. Maybe it should be somebody who can actually identify and relate and can give you something that is legitimate and concrete ... There's nothing that I thought was worthwhile other than when [the Aboriginal teacher] did her presentation because it came from somebody who identifies with the culture, who knows what the problems are and gives accurate information, honest information, saying the positive and the negative.

Pedagogy clearly comes into play then. Another student took this up by adding:

Aboriginal people don't learn by copying overheads. We learn by the way people speak. In the class [taught by an Aboriginal educator], I didn't write. My notebook has one or two words in it. Yet I learned so much. I came away with more than anything I've ever come away with in my two previous years [of social work education] before that ... [It matters] who's actually conveying the message. Was there respect and truth?

These students are speaking to both content and pedagogy. They are suggesting that first voice be represented in the classroom by Aboriginal peoples themselves. They want to read articles and books by Aboriginal authors. They want Aboriginal bodies from the community coming into the classroom to speak on issues of concern to Aboriginal peoples. They want live teaching by those who have lived experiences on what it means to be an Aboriginal person in Canada today. No-one else can deliver this particular point of view. Thus, when course content is on issues of relevance to Aboriginal peoples and communities, these first voices must be physically present to teach in the classroom. However, the ethics of bringing community members into the academy must be addressed. If elders, traditional teachers and other community members are to teach in classrooms, they must be paid for their services, acknowledged for their contributions, shown the utmost respect and be guarded against voyeurism.

Another student had a wonderful story about a creative way she used to raise awareness with a group of non-Aboriginal peoples who held many false assumptions about Aboriginal peoples. She explained:

What we did to help them understand the historical roots and pains that Aboriginal people in this era still carry is that we did a drama. We started with our people living harmoniously and knowing their language. Then we introduced non-Native people ... and portrayed everything that happened after that [such as] the fur trade, alcohol and residential schools. It was like layers were being taken off. It really was an eye opener for them to see someone portray a [child] in residential school [saying], 'you cut my hair, you took my language, you took away my family.' Light bulbs came on. There wasn't a dry eye in the house.

This could easily be conducted in a classroom either performed by Aboriginal peoples or as an assignment for students, whereby they research the colonisation process and its effects and then act it out. Drama can be a powerful teaching tool.

One of the students described a learning environment provided by one of her past instructors. She related:

The prof [professor] seemed to think that the classroom at the level of university is a perfect opportunity for people to start providing feedback to one another. [This] forced each of us to really react or respond or feel or think or relate to what is being said by an individual. It encouraged a process of self-reflection as to how we look at our biases, our own ways of thinking, values and assumptions. Through time, I found that the more we engaged in this kind of discourse, [the more] we came to understand that because [we have] our own biases and our own assumptions, they have blocked us from opening up to what somebody else thinks and feels ... A number of times we actually were privileged to see people change their views because they opened up more. When we're [Aboriginal students] able to see that we're able to have an enhanced sense of hope for the future, because they [non-Aboriginal students] changed their assumptions and biases right before us.

"Decolonising involves all people and includes issues around class, race and gender," declared another student interviewed. Thus, this is not merely a process whereby only Aboriginal peoples must decolonise. Everyone is affected by the impacts of colonisation in Canada, including the descendants of the settler population and those who immigrate here. White people are affected because they have missed the opportunity to have what could have been – an environment that was inclusive of Aboriginal values and worldviews, which have much to offer all of humanity. Non-White peoples who have been racialised by the dominant population – both those who are born in Canada and those who immigrate here – are affected not only because the latter are fleeing colonised places, but also because the ways in which they are all treated here by the dominant population are similar in many respects to those first practiced on Aboriginal peoples. On Turtle Island, the practices of colonisation were perfected on Aboriginal peoples. Racialised peoples born in Canada are also affected because they do not have opportunities to learn that they and Aboriginal peoples have much in common, both in terms of Indigenous knowledges and experiences of oppression. Thus, often the opportunities to form meaningful relationships and alliances are not an option.

Not all Aboriginal peoples will support my position, however, especially regarding peoples who immigrate to Canada. Some will take the stand that those who immigrate here make a choice to do so. Yet I wonder what kind of a choice it is to either come to Canada

or remain in a place torn by war, where one's original economy has been destroyed by capitalism, where one may be tortured, raped, starved to death, and where one would watch one's children die from disease at the hands of oppressors. Furthermore, the idea of "choice" is relative. It is crucial to ask questions about why immigration takes place. In no way does choice ameliorate any of the ill consequences of colonisation, regardless of what part of the world it happened in. The process of decolonisation will inevitably be quite different for Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples. It will also be different for non-Aboriginal peoples, depending largely on whether one is White or not. For Aboriginal peoples, students described decolonisation as "decolonising our thoughts" and "unlearning what we've learned" from dominant society. This particularly involves "regaining our languages," which a student described as "the voice that the Creator gave to you", "our history" and "storytelling". Another student suggested that Aboriginal peoples need to be cautious, however, of "who defines decolonisation" and "who does the decolonising", within social work education, meaning that none of us must be left out of the decision-making processes around the issues.

Through social work education, instructors can also help to facilitate a sense of responsibility within students to work towards social change and a just society for all. Additionally, pushing further entails all students learning about what White peoples, collectively and individually, have gained by colonising Aboriginal peoples, how the society they have built has been on the backs of Aboriginal peoples and how their well-being is a direct result of the devastation of generations of people. After all, our history is White peoples' history as well, and both need to face this. In addition, it could be argued that this has to be accomplished before any teaching or discussion on Aboriginal values and worldviews begins.

Conclusion

The fact that decolonisation has begun within educational institutions is a testament to the strength and determination of individual Aboriginal peoples who are willing and able to work at least twice as hard as White students and educators. I believe this because Aboriginal peoples must learn how to be helpers in their communities while, at the same time, learn how to do social work according to the Eurocentric profession that is predominantly taught in educational institutions. They must successfully navigate two sets of knowledges. Yet this is a heavy load. Solidarity is crucial for those of us inside the academy "whose academic and political interests are to subvert the social order" (Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004, p. 167). It is necessary for our safety within academic and political projects, such as animating Indigenous humanities particularly

within social work education, that we form collectivities in undertaking this work. As academic warriors, this must be our future.

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