

Chapter 1

Indigenous Worldviews and Pedagogies in Indigenous–Based Programs: Social Work and Counselling

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents on the findings of a case study that was conducted with the Indigenous Social Work degree program, based in Sudbury, Ontario and the Maori Counselling degree program, based in Hamilton, Aotearoa (New Zealand). This research set out to examine the social and political approaches that Indigenous peoples undertook to situate Indigenous designed programs within Western academic institutes and to find out what were the distinctive features of these programs in relation to their content and pedagogy. A case study method combined with an Indigenous methodology approach was used to guide this research. This involved gathering key pieces of information as well as interviewing participants (graduates/faculty/developers). Key themes that emerged were that Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies were critical aspects of Indigenous social work/counselling programs.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents on the findings of a case study that was conducted with the Indigenous Social Work degree program (formerly Native Human Services), based in Sudbury, Ontario and the Maori Counselling degree program, based in Hamilton, Aotearoa (New Zealand). This research set out to examine the social and political approaches that Indigenous peoples undertook to situate Indigenous designed programs within Western academic institutes and to find out what were the distinctive features of these programs in relation to their content and pedagogy. A case study method combined with an Indigenous methodology approach was used to guide this research. This involved gathering key pieces of information as well as interviewing participants (graduates/faculty/developers). Key themes that emerged were that Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies were critical aspects of Indigenous social work/counselling programs.

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Indigenous Worldviews and Relevance to Indigenous Programs

Indigenous authors are privileging the rightful place of Indigenous worldviews as a critical discourse in Indigenous education (Absolon, 2010; Alfred, 2005; Baskin, 2006; Battiste, 2000; Cote-Meek, 2014; Graveline, 1998; Hart, 2002; Lavallee, 2009; Royal, 2007; Sinclair, 2004; Sinclair, Hart & Bruyere, 2009; Smith, 2003). Indigenous worldviews are vastly different from the scientific, capitalistic and Western-based worldview dominating academia today (Nabigon & Wenger-Nabigon, 2012; Sinclair, 2004). A scan of the literature notes that Indigenous worldviews are informed by a number of key themes. These include; Indigenous perspectives and self-determination ideas, traditional knowledge and histories, distinct ways of being and knowing, spirituality and culture, Treaty and land rights, and self-determination-decolonizing frameworks (Cote-Meek, 2014; Hart, 2002; Sinclair et al. 2009). When social work/counselling educators use Indigenous models and theories in the classroom, they enable students to gain insight and meaning into the Indigenous world (Absolon, 2010, Baskin, 2006; Battiste, 2000; Hart, 2010). Indigenous-based models and theories have thus become relevant frameworks for understanding Indigenous research, practice and theories.

Although there are numerous examples of Indigenous theories and models, here are a few in common usage: Cree Medicine Wheel Teachings (Nabigon, 2006); Seeking mino-pimatisiwin –Aboriginal helping (Hart, 2002); an Ecology of Indigenous Education (Cajete, 1994); Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2004); Whare Tapa Wha (Durie, 1994); Te Wheke (Pere, 1991); Sharing/healing circles (Baskin, 2006; Lavallee, 2009) and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection (Lavallee, 2009). These teachings assist to provide a framework from which to understand a cultural, social and political perspective particularly that is useful for a social work/counselling context. For example, Grande's (2004) "Red Pedagogy" examines the intersection between critical theory and Native American social and political thought. Her "Red Pedagogy" enables social workers/counsellors to promote restorative projects that value Indigenous languages, cultural knowledge and history. Another well-used model in Aotearoa is the Whare Tapa Wha model which was created by Dr. Mason Durie in 1982. This model was founded on Maori philosophy and is based on a holistic health and wellness framework. Holistic Maori health is underpinned by four dimensions representing the basic beliefs of life – te taha hinengaro (psychological health); te taha wairua (spiritual health); te taha tinana (physical health); and te taha whanau (family health). Each of the dimensions is necessary for a balanced and holistic lifestyle. This model can be applied to any social work issue whether it involves physical, spiritual, cultural or psychological well-being interventions (Anglem, 2009; Durie, 1994).

Indigenous social work educators also convey the importance and applicability of a holistic framework for Indigenous-based practice. Partridge (2014) explains that "the Aboriginal world view is holistic; when we talk about being in balance" it encompasses the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional aspects of ourselves" (p. 9). The teachings on "balance" and "positive introspection" are important values conveyed in Indigenous models and theories (Absolon, 2010; Nabigon, 2006, Partridge, 2014). Indigenous theories and models therefore position holistic health and wellbeing as a fundamental core of Indigenous social work/counselling practice. This leads me to claim that an Indigenous worldview connects Indigenous peoples to their sources of traditional foundations for wellbeing and self-determination. Indigenous authors that have created Indigenous-based models give rise to the merging of traditions and contemporary use in social work/counselling practice.

Not only are students who attend Indigenous-based courses being exposed to Indigenous worldviews, they are also learning about the wider issues of the impacts of colonisation, oppression and

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