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INDIGEGOGY

A Transformative Indigenous Educational Process

Gus Hill
Alicia Wilkinson

Abstract: Social work training programs have not been able to keep step with the needs of Indigenous people since the advent of the profession. As former agents of government assimilation, social workers now find themselves in difficult positions where they are unable to help Indigenous people, despite their best intentions. Indigenous Social Work Education has become a necessary response to the growing needs of Indigenous people, and increasing social problems in Canada. Furthermore, Indigenous people who practice Indigenous social work have become vital to the survival of Indigenous people and their communities. The teaching and practice of Indigenized, social work education has become a strong presence in the reclamation of indigenous identity. A decolonized pedagogy such as the one presented in the case study of the Aboriginal Field of Study (AFS) at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) affirms indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing and places control and ownership of helping practices firmly in the hands of Indigenous people. The case study outlines four critical elements of the AFS: Elder-in-Residence, Circle Pedagogy, *Wholistic* Evaluation and Culture Camp that are used to guide Master of Social Work (MSW) students on how to develop a Wholistic Healing Practice framework.

Keywords: Indigenous, pedagogy, holistic, Elder, culture, social work education, *indigegogy*, decolonizing, indigenizing

Abstré : Les programmes de formation en travail social n'ont pas suivi l'évolution des besoins des peuples autochtones depuis la création de la profession. Autrefois des agents d'assimilation du gouvernement, les travailleurs sociaux se trouvent maintenant dans une situation difficile où ils sont incapables d'aider les Autochtones malgré toute leur bonne volonté. Une formation en travail social auprès des Autochtones est devenue nécessaire pour répondre à leurs besoins croissants et aux problèmes sociaux grandissants au Canada. Les Autochtones qui pratiquent le travail social auprès des leurs jouent un rôle crucial dans la survie de leur peuple et de leurs collectivités. L'enseignement et la pratique de la formation

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autochtonisée en travail social occupent maintenant une grande place dans la réappropriation de l'identité autochtone. La pédagogie décolonisée, comme celle présentée dans l'étude de cas du Champ d'études autochtones (CÉA) à l'Université Wilfrid Laurier, reconnaît des façons autochtones d'être, de savoir et de faire, et remet la maîtrise et l'appropriation des pratiques d'aide solidement entre les mains des Autochtones. L'étude de cas met en lumière quatre éléments essentiels du CÉA : un aîné en résidence, la pédagogie du cercle, l'évaluation holistique et le camp culturel qui servent à guider les étudiants à la maîtrise en travail social et à élaborer un cadre de pratique axé sur la guérison.

Mots-clés : Autochtones, pédagogie, vision holistique, aînés, culture, formation en travail social, *indigegogy*, décolonisation, autochtonisation

Introduction

We continue to adhere to a mandate given by our Elders to create a social work pedagogy and practice that reflects Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, and that will meet the socio-cultural needs of our families and communities (Sinclair, 2013).

THE NEEDS MOST COMMONLY identified by Aboriginal people, as seen in their public statements and political processes, include self-determination (Alfred, 1999, 2005; Graveline, 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1998), cultural preservation (Lane, Bopp, Bopp & Norris, 2002), and respect for the *wholistic* healing worldview (Hart, 1999, 2002; McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003; Morrissette, McKenzie & Morrissette, 1993). Knowledge, and the production thereof, is seen as a key medium for meeting these needs “if knowledge is fundamental to understanding, interpreting and establishing values within a society, then control over its production becomes an integral component of cultural survival” (Hoare, Levy, & Robinson, 1993, p. 46). In 1984 and 1985, a national initiative entitled “Indian and Native Social Work Education in Canada: A Study and Demonstration of Strategies for Change” sought to redress the perceived gaps in knowledge relating to the delivery of social services to persons of Aboriginal ancestry (Baikie, 2009). Later known as the “Taking Control Project,” and currently known as the “Thunderbird Circle,” (name change as of 2014) this initiative “clearly documented the need for Aboriginal people to have autonomy over their social work education and social welfare services” (Baikie, 2009, p. 43) while also illuminating the distinct nature of Aboriginal social work.

The operationalization of these findings has been a long time in the making, but the Master of Social Work (MSW) Aboriginal Field of Study (AFS) at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) is a case study of how such a vision can be fulfilled. The AFS is currently run by Indigenous scholars,

three of whom hold doctorates. During the site review of the AFS by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies, External Consultant Dr. Stan Wilson, provided a word to the program that captured the Indigenous nature of the pedagogical process, and ultimate goal of the program, as he saw it, *indigegogy*.

Following a brief review of the literature surrounding the impact of colonization on the perceived validity of Aboriginal ways of knowing and an outline of the major themes associated with Indigenous knowledge, we will present the case study of how Indigenous knowledge has been incorporated into a pedagogical process at WLU's Faculty of Social Work, to create the space for students to transform themselves into Wholistic Healing Practitioners. The purpose of this paper is to provide a rich case study of the Master of Social Work—Aboriginal Field of Study at WLU.

Literature Review

The AFS program is positioned within the context of a university, an institution charged with the responsibility of creating, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge. It is imperative, therefore, that we start with an examination of the ways that colonization has served to validate some sets of knowledge (e.g., European-based knowledges), and marginalized or invalidated others (e.g., Indigenous knowledges) (Tamburro, 2013).

While colonization is often referred to in tangible terms such as the appropriation of land and resources, the subtler effects of colonization touch upon very fundamental aspects of society, namely the creation of societal "truths." When Europeans colonized the Americas they brought with them "a reverence for the written word as the most valid representation of fact" (Absolon & Willett, 2004). Anchoring "truth" in the written word served to invalidate Indigenous ways of knowing which were held deep in constructs neither written nor consistent with dominant language patterns (Kovach, 2005). As Europeans enforced the veracity of the written word, Indigenous oral histories were "dismissed as legends, myths, and folklore" (Absolon & Willet, 2004). Stiffarm (1998) posits that:

This unconscious, subconscious and conscious means of invalidating Aboriginal knowledge served to perpetrate a superior/inferior relationship around knowledge and how this knowledge is passed on. Systemic racism was clearly perpetrated in this way (p. xi).

The universities of the West have been some of the primary institutions advancing the validity of the written word and the colonization of ways of knowing (Cote-Meek, 2014). Research, as the hub of knowledge creation in the academy, is bound in Western assumptions and ways of knowing which are linear, positivist, and normative; in its essence, research is "wrapped around empirical evidence and the 'burden of proof'" (Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, Vol. 4, Ch. 3, s. 1). Hart (2009) explains how colonization of knowledge occurs within the academy, to the exclusion of Indigenous knowledges, in three ways. The first is through the outright exclusion of non-Eurocentric methodologies and practices. The second is through marginalization; the “process of putting peoples, individuals, ideas or additional matters on the periphery” (Hart, 2009, p. 27). The third means is through appropriation, explained as the “misrepresentation or partial representation of an idea or artifact without recognition of the sources of knowledge or inspiration” (Hart, 2009, p. 27).

Even as the academy begins to open up to new ways of knowing and fashions an attempt at being more progressive and inclusive, Eurocentric patterns continue to erect barriers to Indigenous knowledge. Baikie (2009) has argued in investigations conducted by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work in both 1991 and 2000, that the need to categorize Indigenous knowledge has often relegated it to a marginal category within a multicultural or cultural diversity milieu. Western demands for a universal definition of Indigenous knowledge precludes an understanding of a way of knowing that is both highly localized and social (Battiste & Henderson, 2000), and for which no prescriptions or formulas for methodologies exist (Absolon, 2011). Indigenous scholars have not established a common usage of the term “Indigenous knowledge” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) because the knowledge originates from experiences that are deeply personal and particular (Kovach, 2009).

The question then naturally arises, that if there is no universal definition of Indigenous knowledge, then how might the academy formulate a means of redressing the legacy of colonizing knowledge? What framework is to be used? To this we offer not a universal definition of Indigenous knowledge and methodologies, but rather a general set of themes, which while not inclusive of all conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledge, aims to touch on those themes which are salient in the literature.

Indigenous epistemologies transcend the idea of individual knowledge and, instead, emphasize the concept of *relational knowledge* (Absolon, 2011; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Hart, 2002; Kovach, 2009) and relational accountability (Wilson & Wilson, 1999; 1998). This knowledge is based upon *interrelationships* not just with other individuals, but also with the cosmos, animals, plants, and inanimate entities of the ecosystem, and encompasses all directions of life: “east, south, west, north, and beneath, above and ground levels” (Absolon, 2011, p. 31). In this context, Indigenous knowledge is garnered through examining the relationships within the natural world and the web of connections of which we are inherently a part, suggesting a highly interpretive approach at odds with Eurocentric ways of knowing.

Additionally, the strong emphasis on interconnectedness makes Indigenous knowledge both highly *mutualistic* and *contextual*, holding reciprocity in high regard. As all entities are considered interconnected,

the procurement of knowledge ought not to be extractive but *reciprocal* to ensure continual balance (Kovach, 2009). This is a particularly defining feature of Indigenous knowledge when compared to Euro-Western approaches. Research must benefit the community in some way, with the final product always being secondary to the community benefiting from the process (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Hill & Cooke, 2014).

As Kovach has argued, Indigenous knowledge is garnered through a number of means not generally accepted as “valid” under Euro-Western norms as they encompass both the *cerebral* and the *heartfelt* (2005), the *inner* and *outer* spaces (2009). Indigenous knowledge is cumulative in that it is transmitted from generation to generation, not exclusively through written texts, but rather through stories that “shape shift in relation to the wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling” (Kovach, 2005, p. 27). In so doing, Indigenous knowledge maintains the sacredness of ancestral teachings while also being dynamic and sensitive to the socioeconomic and technological changes of the present (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 44). In addition to the traditional teachings, Indigenous knowledge also relies on empirical observations that examine the relationships within the natural world and are about “honouring the primacy of direct experience, interconnectedness, relationship, holism, quality, and value” (Cajete, 2004, p. 46). While empirical observation may seem to be in line with Euro-Western ways of knowing, Indigenous knowledge expands empirical knowledge to accept “intuitive knowledge and metaphysical and unconscious realms as possible channels to knowing” (Absolon, 2011, p. 31); as such, visions, dreams, and revelations are experiential knowledge in the same way as ceremonies, songs, and dances.

Given the foundational differences between Eurocentric and Indigenous approaches to understanding and transmitting knowledge, it has become clear that Indigenous knowledge cannot be introduced into the academy piecemeal or as part of an anti-oppressive discourse, but must be incorporated as a complete approach, as its own decolonized pedagogy (Cote-Meek, 2014). Sinclair (2004) has made a strong argument for why anti-oppressive pedagogy does not make the mark in terms of addressing the colonization of societal “truths” as follows:

Awareness without legitimate action is a cognitive play that risks passing for anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogy and practice in social work. It contributes to silence and inactivity about tangible issues of racism and oppression in the field of social work and in society. Contemporary anti-oppressive pedagogy does not address the culture of silence because it does not require anything beyond a theoretical grasping of issues. (p. 36)

Baskin (2011), and Battiste and Henderson (2000) have argued that if other knowledge bases are to be introduced into the academy, they can only be fully learned and understood through the pedagogy traditionally

employed by the people themselves. In the case of Indigenous knowledge, this includes apprenticeship, ceremonies, practice, extended conversations with Elders, and a responsibility to put this knowing into daily practice (Tanaka et al., 2007).

The Aboriginal Field of Study at WLU presents a case study in ways to incorporate ceremonies, traditional teachings and knowledge, and attention to the four aspects of the self to create a wholistic pedagogy. These elements are fluid throughout the program, and are anchored in four main features of the Aboriginal Field of Study: Elder-in-Residence, Culture Camp, Wholistic Evaluation, and Circle Pedagogy.

Case Study of the Aboriginal Field of Study at Wilfrid Laurier University

The authors acknowledge that the AFS-MSW program at WLU is built upon the collective work of Indigenous scholars across North America, including but not limited to, those who developed the BSW program at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in British Columbia, the MSW program at University of Victoria in British Columbia, the BSW and MSW programs at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, the BSW-Indigenous Social Work (formerly Native Human Services) at Laurentian University in Ontario, and the declaration of the Thunderbird Circle.

The AFS program is currently only available to students possessing a BSW, thus qualifying it as an Advanced Standing program, and may be taken either full-time or part-time. The express purpose of the program is to assist students in developing an understanding of an Aboriginal Wholistic Healing approach and to facilitate the application of this knowledge to the diversity of practices that comprise the field of social work.

Students study the effects of colonization, and the ways in which these effects impact individuals, families, and communities, as well as Aboriginal cultures and identities. Students also develop their capacity to engage in the Canadian free-market economy, and their ability to maintain their cultural traditions within Canadian society. Considering that the history and values system birthed by the colonial process continues to affect the Aboriginal population in the present day, engaging the consequences of this dynamic requires social workers to fully comprehend this body of knowledge and incorporate it into each element of their practice (Cote-Meek, 2014). Courses have thus been sequenced to guide students in both developing a critical analysis of Aboriginal experiences and to foster the skills necessary for them to dismantle the effects of this legacy through their practice.

The full-time delivery of the AFS occurs in ten months over three academic terms. The program begins with a one week Culture Camp during which students become familiar with the tools, medicines, philosophies, and ceremonies that will start them on their journeys of Indigenous

wholistic healing practices. They then proceed to coursework which outlines the impact of colonial history, discusses the importance of community to Aboriginal populations, and allows students to examine their own wholistic nature and how this impacts their ability to facilitate a healing journey in the lives of others.

All classes and meetings are conducted in Circle, opening with a smudging ceremony, prayer, and song. The full-time program classes are conducted in the Circle Room. This room was specifically designed as a pedagogical tool not only for the transmission of information, but also to learn a worldview, a healing approach, a relationship building process, and an embodiment of the facilitation of Circle process (Hill & Cooke, 2014).

The part-time program delivery differs from the full-time program delivery in that at least half of the courses are conducted in communities determined by the cohort of students and the AFS Team as well as on the Faculty of Social Work Kitchener Campus in the Circle Room. All of the part-time courses are delivered in a week-long intensive format over the span of five academic terms.

Following Culture Camp, students engage in eight courses and a practicum placement that spans two academic terms, totaling ten course equivalents (as noted in parentheses). The courses are designed and delivered in a way that fosters individual self-exploration in relation to the critical Indigenous issues that are currently present in society. Each course contributes unique elements of knowledge and experience toward a wholistic knowledge bundle. The students take the following courses: Culture Camp (1), Aboriginal Kinship Structures (1), Indigenous Research Methodologies (1), Wholistic Healing Practices (1), Diversity, Marginalization and Oppression (1), Elders' Teachings and Identity (1), Indigenous Knowledges (1), Elders' Teachings and Self-Reflection (1), and Practicum (2).

The program ends with the *Elders' Teaching and Self-Reflection* course, which is an opportunity for students to return to the land during a four-day self-reflective camp. During this period, students are isolated out on the land, where they have the option of fasting. They are encouraged to journal their self-reflections as they nurture their wholistic self and "reflect on their roles as wholistic practitioners and what the past year has meant to their practice, and how they are going to make meaning out of their social work learning experience" (Jordan, 2010, para. 7).

This progression in coursework, coupled with the integration of alternative ways of knowing and learning, thus seeks to address the current gaps in social work education and provide a foundation from which true anti-oppressive practice might stem. By engaging in practice and interventions congruent with an Indigenous worldview, we create new mechanisms for addressing the unmet needs and goals of this population.

The Elder-in-Residence

These educators have already stepped away from the system that once bound them, the system that originally created the chaos. In its place they have created something new. They see clearly, take bold risks, and draw on the wisdom of... Elders (Wilson & Wilson, 1999, p. 1).

As education is viewed as a fundamentally inter-generational process in Aboriginal worldviews, Elders play a central role in the dissemination of traditional knowledge and practices. In a report published by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), Elders are viewed as:

respected and cherished individuals who have amassed a great deal of knowledge, wisdom and experience over the period of many, many years. They are individuals who have also set examples, and have contributed something to the good of others. In the process, they usually sacrifice something of themselves, be it time, money or effort ... Elders, Old Ones, Grandfathers and Grandmothers don't preserve the ancestral knowledge. They live it. (Vol. 4, Ch. 3, s.1)

Due to their pivotal role in the transmission of information and the preservation of traditional knowledge, the report recommended that:

Educational institutions facilitate opportunities for Elders to exchange traditional knowledge with one another and to share traditional knowledge with students and scholars, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in university settings. (Vol. 3, Ch. 5, s. 7)

The term Elder can foster a variety of meanings and interpretations, so we wish to clarify from the outset the use of the term Elder-in-Residence within the context of the Aboriginal Field of Study. It is the role of the Elder-in-Residence to assist in the union of Indigenous worldviews within the academy and to carry the vision of the Aboriginal Field of Study program. Elders-in-Residence “foster culturally safe environments where the integrity of the medicines, sacred circle, and sacred teachings is enacted and respected” (“Program Elders,” n.d., para. 7)

Elders-in-Residence uphold the integrity of the AFS in a variety of ways: they negotiate and find balance between the needs of the program and Aboriginal values and principles; blend cultural and professional knowledge in their guidance and interactions with students, staff and faculty; and serve as a bridge linking culture, the community and the academy. Elders-in-Residence reflect how knowledge and life wisdom can be carried with respect, while demonstrating and modeling a continual capacity to be respectful of the locations of others in the faculty. They:

know of the importance of healing and re-learning about our history, worldview, language and culture. A(n) *Elder-in-Residence*¹ will walk in a good way with the collective team. These people, because of their own wellness and healing, model and conduct inclusivity at all levels of teaching and learning. (“Program Elders,” n.d., para. 1)

Elders-in-Residence are central to community linkages and serve to grow and foster both relationships and community engagement within the AFS. The primary purpose in incorporating Elders-in-Residence into the AFS pedagogy is to expose students to different ways of knowing, learning, and engaging and to validate and guide learning journeys which bridge the formal and informal realms of knowing; for this reason, their presence is regarded as integral to the delivery of a wholistically-based graduate social work program.

The Elders-in-Residence assist students in striking a balance between their professional social work learning and the operationalization of cultural teachings which students acquire through the development of a wholistic knowledge bundle. They play a pivotal role in the wholistic evaluation, offering their reflections and observations regarding students’ progression in the program. While they are not meant to replicate Traditional “Bundle” Elders, who carry traditional knowledges of sacred ceremonies, Elders-in-Residence may coordinate the presence of Bundle Elders when appropriate and may be called upon to assist in the expansion and inclusion of ceremony in both the AFS program specifically and the faculty of social work more generally.

The Elder-in-Residence teaches two courses within the AFS, is present during Culture Camp, and facilitates ceremonies for the students throughout the program. Many of the students who enter the AFS have never been exposed to an Elder of any kind, and so the presence of the Elder-in-Residence is very powerful for students, and can be transformative in itself. The description of the Elder-In-Residence is situated first because the other three elements (Culture Camp, Circle Pedagogy, and Wholistic Evaluation) stem from, and are directed by, the Program Elder.

Culture Camp

Centuries of uninterrupted life in harmony with the natural world, in which the young and uninitiated were educated through experiential learning in their environment, has made Indigenous people experts in education out-of-doors. They have “developed methods which are robustly embedded in ecological philosophy, environmental ethics, low-impact practices and biological processes” (Cohn, 2011, p. 20).

Due to the importance of experiential learning in the Aboriginal worldview, the first course that the AFS students take, prior to any classroom learning, is Culture Camp. This one week camp, conducted on

the land in a rustic camp setting, is the context in which students first engage with *Indigegogy*. Students learn experientially about traditional culture through full immersion in wholistic healing practices and traditional teachings under the instruction of the Elders and Aboriginal faculty (“Course Descriptions,” n.d.)

As the name suggests, Culture Camp is the first opportunity for students to engage in Culture; the culture of the AFS, the culture of a very specific model of Indigenous Wholistic Healing Practice, the culture of collectivity, the culture of Critical Indigenous Holistic Self-Analysis, the culture of the cohort’s relational dynamics, and the culture of building relational accountability within the program.

Sanderson, who wrote about a similar pedagogical process involving a Culture Camp in Saskatchewan, has noted that such camps reflect “the classroom of authentic living, and remove the participants from the classroom—an environment that can easily entice us to lose touch with our wholeness and focus too strongly on the mental aspect of our being” (2012, p. 98).

The initial immersion in this aspect of the AFS worldview is foundational for students’ engagement and success in the program. This experience also enables the AFS team to evaluate students’ comfort level with the *Indigegogy* approach while allowing students to gauge their own suitability for this field of study, aside from their intellectual capacity (“Personal Suitability,” n.d.)

Culture Camp ultimately embarks students on a personal journey. Journeying is initiated by questioning, meanings, interpretations, and identity; it is begun by making a conscious decision to move into unfamiliar territory while maintaining an observing and reflective frame of mind ... Journeying without intent is nothing more than aimless wandering. Purposeful journeying leads us to shift and transform the landscape of our previously held assumptions and paradigms. (Zinga, Styres, Bennett & Bomberry, 2009, p. 23)

Cohn (2011) has noted that throughout this journey, information is not simply transferred from educators to students, but is discovered and shaped by their interpersonal interactions both with and within the environment. This, he argues, results not only in the delivery of highly personalized and customized learning, but also in a more comprehensive understanding and an enhanced potential to integrate new ways of knowing into students’ existing worldviews. Styres (2011) has noted that land as first teacher “considers the interconnectedness and interdependency of relationships, cultural positioning and subjectivities that extend beyond the borderlands of traditional mainstream conceptualizations of pedagogy” (p. 722). Culture Camp is an example of how *Indigegogy* employs unconventional learning environments and ways of knowing to develop a wholistic approach to social work education.

Circle Pedagogy

The Circle process, which is the primary pedagogical tool of the AFS, achieves several goals in addition to the transmission of knowledge. The Circle is a ceremony and an approach to decision-making, to consensus building, to healing and sharing of life (Hill, 2008; "Description of Content and Definition of Aboriginal Field of Study Program," n.d., para 4)

In a Talking Circle, each one is equal and each one belongs. Students in a Talking Circle learn to listen and respect the views of others. A stick, stone or feather (something that symbolizes connectedness to the land) can be used to facilitate the circle. Whoever is holding the object has the right to speak and the others have the responsibility to listen ... The intention is to open hearts to understand and connect with each other (Simpson, 1996).

As students experience the Circle day-after-day, they learn a worldview, a healing approach, a relationship building process, and an embodiment of a universal traditional Aboriginal teaching, which is "we are all one with all of the elements of Creation" ("Description of Content and Definition of Aboriginal Field of Study Program," n.d., para 4)

The circle is a sacred symbol for Indigenous people and, as referred to here, means a gathering of people who sit in a closed Circle. This allows for open communication because each person in the Circle can see and hear every other person. Circles within the context of *Indigegogy* open with a smudging ceremony and prayer, along with the drumming and singing of a song. Teaching is normally conducted in rounds within the Circle in a manner that resembles a Talking Circle (Hill, 2008). At the conclusion of the Circle, a closing song is shared and symbolizes the spirit of collectivity, peace, harmony, and safe travels until the next gathering.

Furthermore, meetings conducted between faculty members, the Elder-in-residence, students and staff members, including the wholistic evaluation process, are conducted in the manner described above. As such the Circle Pedagogy pervades every element of *Indigegogy* from classroom instruction to hiring processes, and every activity in between.

Wholistic Evaluation

The wholistic evaluation encompasses four key aspects which are thought to be central to wholistic practice (Absolon, 2010). It includes the spirit, the nature, the character, and the intellect of the student. The evaluation is conducted collaboratively by the entire AFS team and is ongoing throughout the program, incorporating the admissions interview, courses, performance outside of the courses, and students' field placements. These evaluations are conducted in the afore mentioned Circle Process which allows for a thorough and meaningful discussion of the four components, the details of which will be outlined below.

The Spirit Component

The spirit of the individual is commonly referred to as the essence of the self, the inner fire or spark, and is understood to be unchanging. The spirit is the vision and purpose provided by the Creator, which results in our capacity to understand our relationship to Creation, and is the source of strength that encourages us to overcome obstacles in our lives (Absolon, 2010). Ceremonies are an expression of the spirit, often incorporating medicines that facilitate the opening up of our selves and encourage wellness and balance while also providing opportunities to deal with our fears. Prayers are also an integral expression of spirituality; they are not religious in nature, rather they serve to express and strengthen our connection within Creation.

Indicators of spirit competence include an understanding of what evokes a sense of meaning in life. The participation in ceremonies in a manner that is meaningful to the intent of such spiritual practices also illustrates a strong spirit competence.

Great importance is placed on the ability to pray in a way that reflects an understanding that prayer is an expression of the deepest connection with the spirit world. This resource is particularly valuable to people who are suffering and reaching beyond the physical and human realm for guidance. This is also facilitated by the student's ability to communicate with others about the spirit realm and allow for the growth of the people they work with in this realm. Lastly, students must be able to evoke elements of vision for their own lives and in the lives of the people they work with, giving them a sense of direction.

The Nature Component

The nature of the individual is commonly referred to as the affective or emotional aspect of the self, is the emotional expression of the spirit, and is changeable. We have a general affect on others and our involvement in their lives affects the nature of their lives—an affect which we hope to be both positive and nurturing. Similarly, we are affected by others, our environment, and our own internal processes. We come to have an understanding of our nature and its impact on others through both reflexive and reflective practices that require us to be honest with ourselves. A well-developed nature is indicated by the ability to positively affect others while, at the same time, mitigate and be resilient to how others and the context of our lives affect us.

Some further indicators of nature competence include the ability to articulate one's nature, how one feels about oneself, how one influences others, and how the way one *is* affects the world (Absolon, 2010). Our affect on others ultimately affects how others feel about themselves. Students must demonstrate an understanding that nature is a tangible

element of a person and, while not visible, it has visible effects within the context of the human relationship.

Students must further explore the aspects of humility within themselves, which enable their practice as social workers. Understanding humility and its relationship to the nature of Creation is a complex and important understanding in knowing how healing works. Students learn about their nature and come to understand themselves through their reflexive work and in their feedback from the Elders who can tell them about themselves with love and kindness. One of the goals of Indigegogy is to teach students how to just *be* at peace, *be* calm, *be* quiet in the heart and the mind, and *be* open and receptive.

The Character Component

The character of the individual is commonly referred to as the outward representation of the self, the integrity one has or does not have, and is represented by the teachings, values, and beliefs that an individual embodies. It is the physical expression of the spirit. Character is expressed in the beliefs one stands for and reflected in the actions, words, writings, and thoughts the person uses. The intent is understood and experienced by others even if the intent is not consistent with the nature of the actions. Integrity is an expression of character, which is derived from whether or not a person acts, behaves, and lives in a manner consistent with the teachings, morals, ethics, values, and beliefs one speaks about. When consistency exists between actions and thoughts, that individual possesses integrity of character.

To indicate character competence, students must demonstrate that they have integrity by acting consistently in ways that are good for the people they work with, for the policy work they engage in, for the community work and visioning with which they engage, and for the research they undertake. Students further demonstrate character in ascribing to, and living out, the values outlined in the Social Work Code of Ethics. Students should not engage in hurtful behaviours, judgmental attitudes, create hurtful structures, or allow injustice to exist if it is in their power to achieve otherwise. When it is within their power, students shall actively challenge all forms of injustice.

The Intellect Component

Intellect is the aspect of the self that thinks, reasons, rationalizes, and verbalizes the essence of the spirit; it is the mental expression of the spirit. Intellect is the reflexive and reflective part of the self that allows one to analyze the other three aspects, and it is also changeable. It is reflection toward the generation of wisdom and the capacity of the individual to make meaning and sense of the world around them.

Throughout the AFS program, students are presented with knowledge emerging from an Indigenist paradigm (Hart, 2009), an Indigenous-based traditional worldview of wholistic healing, and knowledge emerging from the existing literature of critical social work. Knowledge is thus garnered from a variety of mediums including written, oral, and experiential. This approach validates a worldview consistent with Indigenous wholism, is equal to other bodies of social work knowledge, and is rooted in Creation rather than Western science.

Indicators of a student's intellectual competence include producing oral or written presentations, the capacity to be analytical within their writing, and analysis of practice situations within existing paradigms of oppression and marginalization. Students should demonstrate ability to present scholarly analysis in a comprehensive and comprehensible way, organizing information logically and orderly, and should be able to both speak and write about their understanding of the material. Additionally, students should be able to apply their learning to practice contexts and present knowledge in such a way that the people and communities they work with can understand the meaning of this "structural" knowledge (Absolon, 2010). Lastly, students should, through the course of the program, establish self-evaluative mechanisms that reflect practice-based research.

Closing Reflections on Social Work Education

Social work education for Indigenous people has been a difficult journey. The implication is that social work has failed Indigenous people, and a more congruent educational process that is reflective of the values, cultures, identities, and knowledges of Indigenous people needed to be developed (Tamburro, 2013). Forty years after our Elders issued the following mandate, there exists a culturally rich, tradition-based, accredited MSW program based on *Indigegogy* that trains Indigenous, and non-Indigenous people alike, to be wholistic practitioners who are good for Indigenous people:

In the early 1970s, our predecessors were mandated by our Elders to work towards creating schools of social work and social work pedagogy that reflected traditional Indigenous worldviews and approaches to helping. In 1972 social work programs in Alberta and Saskatchewan were developed. We were instructed to first become social workers, and then to become Educators so that we could train our own people in culturally relevant social work practices because our people had seen several generations of mainstream social work imposed upon us in ways that were extremely destructive to our families and communities, and ultimately, destructive to our languages and cultures. As a result, we have sought to decolonize social work and since that mandate, we are currently into the second and third generation of Educators who have worked tirelessly

to include Indigenous *ways of knowing, being, and doing* into generalist and clinical social work theory, research, and practice in order to better reflect Indigenous socio-economic and political realities and thereby more effectively meet the unique needs of Indigenous clients in our neo-colonial context (Sinclair, 2013).

Now there are Indigenous people being trained in Indigegogy who have the capacity and the power to transform the landscape of social work practice with Indigenous people.

Conclusion

As the opening quote would suggest, Indigenous people have been given a mandate by the Elders to develop a social work pedagogy that will result in practices and interventions which reflect Indigenous traditions and meet the socio-cultural needs of Indigenous communities. Introducing Indigenous practices and traditions piecemeal into mainstream MSW curriculums, while a valuable step forward, fails to develop wholistic practitioners who are able to meet the needs of Indigenous communities. The ongoing pursuit by Indigenous people to claim autonomy over their social work education is evident, and the delivery of a practice encompassing the values and worldview of the Indigenous communities (Absolon, 2010; Gray & Coates, 2010) must necessarily be delivered as a complete and integrated approach—as its own pedagogy.

It has been the purpose of this paper to provide a rich case study description of the Aboriginal Field of Study MSW program, and the unique Indigenous pedagogy through which the program is delivered, to provide a framework for how Aboriginal worldviews can serve as a *foundation* for social work education. By developing the program around four key features (the Elder-in-Residence, Culture Camp, the Wholistic Evaluation, and Circle Pedagogy) the Aboriginal Field of Study develops practitioners not only versed in critical analyses of Aboriginal experiences, but also provides them with an opportunity to explore understandings of their own Indigenous values and traditions and the skills necessary to address the effects of a long colonial legacy in a culturally sensitive way.

Graduates of the AFS must demonstrate to the AFS Team their capacity for the facilitation of another's healing journey, including the use of medicines, ceremonies, Elders, and helping tools that may be parts of their medicine bundles and/or knowledge bundles within their cultures (Absolon, 2010). Graduates must demonstrate love, respect, and humility in practice along with other core values that may be unique to their cultures.

The AFS espouses holism, land-based healing, interconnectedness, interdependence, relational accountability, self-care, and other-care. The AFS nurtures critical Indigenous analysis that advances the goals

of Indigenous social work practice (Cote-Meek, 2014; Tamburro, 2013) as they develop [see Thunderbird Circle (CASWE), <http://caswe-acfts.ca/position-statement-of-the-thunderbird-nesting-circle-iswen/>]. Specific skills are not necessarily the end goal of the AFS, although, the diversity of practicum experiences provide opportunities for skill development. The AFS fosters resourcefulness and the capacity to bear witness to the effects of colonization within people and community.

Graduates of the AFS are able to articulate a knowledge of their wholistic selves, what their helping gifts look like, and an understanding of how to use medicines, ceremonies, and Elders in wholistic practice, their relationship to community, along with a critical Indigenous analysis of practice in the contexts of society.

In this way, the Aboriginal Field of Study seeks to fill the existing gaps in social work education by addressing the unmet needs of Indigenous people in a way that is congruent with their worldview. This is accomplished by engaging a pedagogy that is land-based (Little Bear, 2000), where students practice the sustenance of culture and community (Iseke-Barnes, 2008). Instead of “paying lip-service” to issues of diversity, marginalization, and oppression through token courses that engage in classroom discussions about such issues, the AFS provides the foundation and practical skills necessary to develop a truly Indigenous practice (Absolon, 2010).

We hope this case study description will serve as a framework for the development of similar programing in the future and carve out a formal space in the academy where other ways of knowing might receive the validation they deserve and diversify how we come to know what we know and how we approach our practice with Indigenous communities.

Notes

- 1 The Elder-in-Residence is more commonly known as the Program Elder.

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