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## INDIGENOUS LITERATURE IN SOCIAL WORK - ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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### ABSTRACT

*It would be safe to say that, over the past several years in Indigenous education, despite important improvements in some areas, much remains to be done. In this paper, we will compare the challenges and the perceived solutions within the field of Indigenous literature in social work education. Those working in regional communities are often struck by the fact that one Indigenous community is successful in keeping crime rates low while another is not. This raises the question as to what are the essential differences between these communities.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Indigenous Literature , Issues And Challenges , social work education.*

### INTRODUCTION:

What are the defining elements of a strong Indigenous community? Does the size of the



community make a difference, does it matter if cultural traditions are observed, is the form of leadership a key element, do strong women leaders or elders set the 'tone' in the community and does the vibrancy of the local economy make a difference? Knowledge about strong Indigenous communities could also tell us if the crime rate is linked to the strength of bonds between community members.

### WHAT IS INDIGENOUS LITERATURE?

Current writings by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people belong within a cultural and historical continuity that predates the invasion even as

utilizing, adapting and challenging the written genres and forms of the colonizing culture.

Each indigenous culture is distinct and unique. While many peoples may express similar worldviews and a common indigenous identity, their cultures are nonetheless based on different histories, environments, and creative spirits. The word Indigenous has many meanings. In every region of the world, many different cultural groups live together and interact, but not all of these groups are considered indigenous or inherent to their particular geographic area. In fact, it is only in the face of a collective or shared sense of identity

that the term indigenous peoples has been internationally recognized.

### INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Mahia Maurial (1999) defined Indigenous knowledge as "the peoples' cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common territory" (p. 62). Joey De La Torre (2004) defined Indigenous knowledge as the established knowledge of Indigenous nations, their worldviews, and the customs and traditions that direct them. This last definition demonstrates the close connection between Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. The connection is further evident when looking at the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge. Castellano (2000) described the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge as personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed in

narrative or metaphorical language. Maurial (1999) identified three characteristics of Indigenous knowledge: local, holistic, and oral. They highlight the importance of culture and local knowledge in the development of genuine and authentic social work practices in these diverse contexts. The growing acceptance of Indigenous social work has arisen, in part at least, as a consequence of providing services to increasing numbers of immigrants from nonwestern countries, the recognition of the value of alternative worldviews, the development of Indigenous social work literature, the resurgence of interest in spirituality, and growing awareness about environmental degradation. There is widespread acknowledgement in the social work literature from both the western and nonwestern worlds that social work as a profession is a product of culture and that culture plays a critical part in its construction. The discovery or rediscovery of the diversity and uniqueness of local cultures has led some academics and practitioners to question the relevance of applying western models of social work practice to nonwestern contexts.

### **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

Indigenous peoples are ethnic minorities who have been marginalized as their historical territories became part of a state. In international or national legislation they are generally defined as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and to their cultural or historical distinctiveness from politically dominant populations. The concept of indigenous people may define them as particularly vulnerable to exploitation, marginalization and oppression by nations or states that may still be in the process of colonialism, or by politically dominant ethnic groups. As a result, a special set of political rights have been set to protect them by international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank. The United Nations have issued a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to guide member-state national policies in order to protect the collective rights of indigenous peoples, such as their culture, identity, language, and access to employment, health, education and natural resources. Although no definitive definition of "indigenous peoples" exists, it is estimated that the total population of post-colonial indigenous peoples seeking human rights and discrimination redress ranges from 220 million to 350 million. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the inherent dignity, equality, and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. The rights of all members of indigenous populations are included in this declaration. However, Indigenous Peoples also have rights as distinct cultural groups or nations.

### **SOCIAL WORK TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM**

Professionalization of the social work teachers working in Indigenous contexts through professional associations, conferences and a professional journal. Specially targeted curriculum materials were needed, as was the widespread dissemination of Indigenous social work education. The attitudes of non-Indigenous teachers and their need for cultural awareness and pro-diversity training were highlighted and research into the analysis of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and ways for changing these was recommended. The development of a literature on Aboriginal history was seen as necessary for both informing teachers and cementing Indigenous identity. The importance of localizing the curricula to the needs and histories of the specific local community was emphasized. In addition, early education in the language for speakers of indigenous languages was recommended. Experimental programs aimed at fostering local indigenous culture and identity were recommended. The lack of systematic evaluations, including long-term trials of programs, has been a major oversight in Indigenous education over the past 30 years (see also Watts, 1982).

### **AN INDIGENOUS INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

Being Indigenous, the Indigene are not metaphors. Those of us who are indigenous have experienced the everyday realities of continued colonization, which has shaped the ways in which we think of ourselves, one another and the 'white stream' and the ways in which we write, speak, and come to research. Those of us who are not Indigenous have been profoundly shaped by our witnessing of colonization, by our roles as accomplices, abettors, exploiters, romanticizers, pacifiers, assimilators, includes, forgetters, and democratizes (Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Berkman, 2008, pp. 159-160).

Intersectionality is not new to Indigenous peoples' it's the way we have always lived (Yee, J. 2012). Intersectionality has been central for thousands of years in Indigenous and tribal communities. Intersectionality as a theoretical construct was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) and was developed out of the lives of African-American activists to describe the oppression produced structurally and, experienced and resisted individually and collectively through and across diverse social categories of identity simultaneously. There is growing recognition that the concept of intersectionality "complements growing discussions about the complexity and multiplicities involved in being indigenous, in the category of indignity, and in indigenous people's health and well-being" (de Leeuw & Greenwood, 2011, p. 54).

### INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS

Leanne Simpson (2000) outlined seven principles of Indigenous worldviews. First, knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities. Second, there are many truths, and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences. Third, everything is alive. Fourth, all things are equal. Fifth, the land is sacred. Sixth, the relationship between people and the spiritual world is important. Seventh, human beings are least important in the world. Cultural studies courses focus on the interplay of traditional values, identity, spirituality and the creative imagination in art, literature and oral story. They provide insights into First Nations worldviews, perspectives and ways of knowing and being.

### CHALLENGES

- The recognition of a multilingual nation and the definition of a linguistic policy that promoted a linguistic diversity.
- The access of the non-indigenous peoples to know indigenous languages and indigenous peoples to know local languages in order to create awareness of the value of indigenous languages
- The implementation of a social work education that considers indigenous languages and their culture.
- Social work literature borrowed from west

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increasing improvement in Indigenous participation across all degrees and BSW course
- Improve the quality of teaching Indigenous Knowledge's in schools collages
- The minimum standard of quality in Indigenous literature in higher education to be incorporate The participation of indigenous professionals for the design and implementation of the curriculum
- Specially targeted curriculum materials were needed, as was the widespread dissemination of Indigenous literature in social work education.

### CONCLUSION

The social worker who were taken, for the most part, acquired western knowledge but lost their Indigenous knowledge and culture. Those who were not taken maintained their Indigenous knowledge but gained insufficient cultural capital to negotiate with the European society. Addressing these dual aspirations for revitalizing local Indigenous knowledge and acquiring Western cultural capital knowledge are a key to Indigenous survival, on their own terms, and remain a challenge for education programs into the future. There have been improvements in the field of Indigenous education over the past 30 years. But equally as important, Indigenous people must be listened to and their suggestions carried out. Non- Indigenous people working in the field must try harder to pass on their knowledge and skills, let go of control, and trust the judgment of their Indigenous contemporaries.

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