Indigenizing counsellor education: Co-creating a *Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Counselling* in New Brunswick

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The majority of Canadian counsellor education programs are offered at the graduate level and are located in Faculties of Education. The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association website (2017a) lists over 50 counselling-related master's degree programs. These programs contribute significantly to the development of professional counsellors in Canada. The limited body of existing research has provided a preliminary mapping of core education and training practices within these programs (Harris & Flood, 2015). The predominant approach that is taught in these programs is the mainstream, Western worldview of counselling. According to prominent Indigenous counselling scholars, Rod McCormick (1998, 2009) and Suzanne Stewart (2008, 2017), and others, this paradigm does not often recognize the holistic understanding of health and the central place of spirituality that is present in Indigenous communities (Poonwassie, 2006; Schwartz, White & Lutz, 1992; Stewart & Moodley, 2017; Trimble, 1981). This is incongruent with the professional values and ethical guidelines surrounding culturally sensitive counselling competencies found in those same programs (Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006; Smith, McAuliffe & Rippard, 2014). Furthermore, many counselling theories fail to address societal issues of racism, oppression, marginalization and intergenerational trauma which are issues that are particularly salient for many Indigenous clients (Brown, Collins & Arthur, 2014;

Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; McCormick, 1996, 1998; Morrissette, 2003).

There has been an increasing recognition within the counselling profession of the benefits of traditional and Indigenous treatment approaches, which are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural contexts and values of First Nations communities (Hogan & Barlow, 2000; LaFromboise, Trimble & Mohatt, 1990; McDowell, Goessling & Melandez, 2010). Although limited, the existing research on the integration of Indigenous knowledge and practices into the therapeutic setting by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous counsellors has produced positive results for clients (Bruce, 1999; Domene & Bedi, 2012; France, Rodriguez & Hett, 2013; Neumann, McCormick, Amundson & McLean, 2000; Oulanova & Moodley, 2010; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). However, very little, if any, research has systematically explored the presence of Indigenous wisdom within Canadian counsellor education programs. Although individual courses exist in some counselling programs, very little is known about the curriculum of these courses or the degree to which the courses were developed in direct consultation with First Nation communities, and the Elders and Knowledge Keepers within those communities.

This article explores arising developments in counsellor education related to an agenda to decolonize and transform counselling practice by recognizing Indigenous knowledge as being foundational to Indigenous wellness and health. In particular, we highlight as an exemplar the ongoing, collaborative efforts between New Brunswick First Nations and the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) to develop a *Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Counselling*. As will be discussed, there are challenges to creating an enhanced Counsellor education

program that recognizes and honours Indigenous knowledge. Finally, we will examine how Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk), a theoretical approach brought forth by Mi'kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall from Eskasoni First Nation in Atlantic Canada, is being used by New Brunswick First Nations and the Faculty of Education at UNB to meet these challenges (Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2009).

Arising Developments in Counsellor Education

Presently, CCPA is raising awareness of the urgent need for improved Indigenous mental health services in Canada. They state that "a culturally safe mental health framework for Indigenous peoples which integrates Indigenous ways of knowing and beliefs about health, and traditional healing, with approaches from mainstream mental health care" (CCPA, 2017b, p.3) is essential. Within counsellor education programs, there is also an important responsibility to respond to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada Calls to Action (2015). As an example, the 22nd Call to Action asks us "to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients" (TRC of Canada, 2015, p. 163). This statement is directed to anyone who can effect change within the Canadian health care system, and counsellor education programs are within this scope. The 23rd call to action further asks the government to "provide cultural competency training for all health care professionals" (TRC of Canada, 2015, p.164), which continues to be a deficit in many counsellor education programs. Further, there is growing recognition within the field that individuals working with Indigenous people must be aware of the history of Aboriginal-Crown relations,

the ongoing impact of colonization, and acknowledge that the current state of Indigenous health and wellness in Canada is a direct consequence of previous Canadian government policies (Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Stewart & Marshall, 2017).

Development of a *Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Counselling* at UNB

As a result of discussions between The Three Nations Education Group, Inc. (TNEGI) and the Faculty of Education at UNB, the process of developing a six-course Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Counselling (GCIC) to meet the needs and desires of local First Nations began in September 2015. TNEGI identified that there is a shortage of professionals with counselling skills, and the understanding and knowledge to work successfully and effectively with First Nations students, individuals and families throughout the Maritimes. This is supported by regional and national level research that emphasizes a need for culturally relevant mental health, education, and employment counselling support services within First Nations communities (Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). The types of counselling support services that are needed in First Nations communities are complex and vary greatly.

During September 2015, consultations formally began between New Brunswick First Nations, the Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre (MWC) at UNB, and the Faculty of Education (hereinafter referred to as "the Faculty") at UNB. The purpose of consulting with a range of professionals from as many New Brunswick First Nations communities as possible was to determine the general sentiments and support towards a GCIC, collect thoughts on the primary area of focus for the proposed certificate program, who the potential

applicants may be, preferred location and mode of delivery of courses, and thoughts on content and how this certificate program would be different from currently offered courses in counselling. An in-depth review of undergraduate and graduate level counselling programs throughout Canada designed from an Indigenous perspective and serving Indigenous clients was also performed.

As consultations unfolded, New Brunswick First Nations identified that there was a need for more Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals to be trained in counselling skills specific to working with Indigenous people, and that coursework must include both Indigenous approaches to health and healing, and there was also a desire to have culturally sensitive Western theories and skills integrated into courses. Several respondents expressed concern over the fact that this program will be at the graduate level and that a basic entry requirement would be an undergraduate degree. Alternatively, other individuals were glad that this program was being developed at the graduate level and voiced their concerns with certificate programs at or below the undergraduate level. In general, these concerns circulated around issues of undergraduate certificates offering "less than" or "watered down" versions of programs to Indigenous people, without offering any "real" credentials and therefore not helping the people accessing them. These respondents were relieved that applicants to this program would already need to have an undergraduate degree, and some even suggested higher qualifications than are currently required for acceptance to the existing Masters of Education in Counselling program.

Since the majority of consultations were conducted with individuals involved in the Education sector, such as Education Directors and First Nation Education Authorities, it is not surprising

that the area of focus that was identified most often to be of primary importance was training for *current* and *aspiring* Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Teachers. This primary area of focus related to individuals working in both First Nations community schools as well as those working with First Nations students in provincial schools. In addition to the usual, mainstream training for Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Teachers, consultations revealed that those working with First Nations students should also have:

- Familiarity and relationships with the communities, families and students themselves.
- Recognition of the importance of actively building personal relationships, not only with students but with families in the home and communities.
- Recognition of the importance of actively building relationships between schools and families/parents/communities, and acknowledgment of the legacy of negative schooling experiences in the past and how this continues to impact families and students today.
- Familiarity with funding issues/challenges, bursary programs, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada regulations, and implications for guiding students.
- An understanding of how various First Nations departments interact and come together to support youth and families, and a willingness to work with these various departments.
- Have familiarity with Integrated Service Delivery Model in provincial schools and Response to Intervention Model in First Nations community schools.
- Have knowledge of Education Enhancement Teams and the role of First Nation Interventionists (in provincial schools).

- Familiarity with the history of Canada-Aboriginal relationships, specifically within educational contexts, and the implications of this for mental health and wellness of students today. This should include but not necessarily be limited to the history of treaties, history of Indian Act, history of residential schools, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and intergenerational trauma.
- Recognition that racism is alive and well in schools today and negatively impacts students AND have a willingness to be an anti-racist ally and advocate for students.
- A willingness to be an ally for language and culture in recognition of the connection of these with mental wellness.
- An ability to work with children and students in crisis situations.
- A willingness to meet in the home and work with families, too.
- Awareness of the fact that First Nations students receive minimal guidance counselling at the high school level, if any.

During these consultations, key counselling support areas were also identified. Core areas included crisis and trauma counselling, coping skills, child counselling within the family context, marriage counselling, career awareness and counselling for youth and adult, addictions, and support for youth in middle school years. Preliminary discussions also revealed many categories of potential applicants to the program including those who currently have Master's degrees, undergraduate degrees, and individuals who do not currently have an undergraduate degree.

There was some variability with regards to the preference of location for program delivery that seemed to depend on proximity

to the Faculty of Education at UNB in Fredericton. For instance, First Nations communities near this geographical region preferred on-campus classes, with some online content, whereas communities further away tended to prefer a combination of regional sites and online, particularly synchronous, delivery. Despite these differences, overall the consultations emphasized a preference to develop a sense of cohesion and community amongst the cohort by bringing all of the students together for *at least a portion of each course*. A theme throughout the consultations was the recognition that this program is likely to attract individuals already working full-time. Therefore, in order to accommodate the schedules of such individuals, there was an overall partiality towards a part-time, one course per semester model perhaps offered in condensed periods such as weekend sessions or summer institutes. Finally, a preference for a September semester "roll-out" (versus a January or May intake) was also predominant due to First Nation Education funding formulas.

In terms of preliminary discussions about the course content of the GCIC program and how it should be different from currently offered courses in counselling, three major themes emerged. First, respondents felt very strongly that individuals working in counselling support roles with First Nations people *must* know the history of Indigenous peoples in *this* region, including their culture, the disruption due to colonialism, Aboriginal-Crown relations and the connection of this history with contemporary communities and issues facing First Nations people today. Second, respondents frequently spoke of a relational worldview and how this influences what it means to be a counsellor or support person within First Nations communities. Third, and correspondingly, respondents also advocated for the need to provide counselling support skills grounded in Indigenous approaches to helping and healing. As

such, the inclusion of Elders and traditional healers as guest speakers or instructors during the program courses was emphasized.

Challenges to Developing a Program Enhanced with Indigenous Knowledge

Designing a new program is always fraught with challenges that should not go unexamined. Collaborations between universities and Indigenous communities may be particularly challenged – both internally and externally.

Even when trusting, reciprocal relationships have been established for years, university faculty and staff may not immediately see eye to eye with Indigenous community partners on the best way to deliver courses. For instance, during the consultation phase of the GCIC, it became apparent that many communities preferred courses to be offered within First Nation communities. While course delivery through in person, on-campus classes or distance education online are the most feasible modes for the Faculty, conversations around this off-site delivery continued to try to understand the collaborating partners' position. It soon became clear that travel to the university, often from several hours away, would be an issue for many people for a variety of reasons, including access to vehicles, inclement weather concerns, dependent children, working hours close to class start times. In turn, First Nations partners were appreciative of the pragmatic realities of trying to offer courses *in each* First Nation from which applicants enrolled. As a result, discussions evolved to centre on condensed timelines such as weekend sessions or summer institutes, and the possibility of establishing regional sites within one or two First Nations combined with synchronous online support to include others unable to travel.

Timelines also pose challenges. The pressure to develop programs promptly must continuously be counterbalanced with patience and caution to ensure critical thought, and adequate collaboration and consultation, has gone into the process. During the development of the GCIC, this pressure stemmed *both* from within the Faculty and UNB, where the program proposal must undergo a series of reviews from several regulatory bodies, each with their own deadlines, and from First Nations community partners, who are frustrated with lengthy processes and want to see results.

In addition to these internal practical realities, external criticisms, originating outside the development partnership, raise important issues that must be attended to. For instance, one reviewer criticized that the description of this program sounded like "More whites administering to or fixing First Nations people"(personal communication), and while it may be easiest to simply reword the description to emphasize the collaborative process, it is important to know where such criticism stems from and be prepared to respond to this in the future. As Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) write, schools and universities have been both historically associated with "promoting an imperialist view of the world that justifies colonization premised on European epistemological supremacy" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández,2013, p. 75; Wiilinsky, 1998) and are currently "implied in the *ongoing* project" (p.75, emphasis in original) of protecting settler futurity and white supremacy. In turn, Indigenous communities have been marginalized, misrepresented, "researched to death" (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017, para 13) and, in many cases, dismissed and erased by academic researchers and curriculum writers (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). We would be remiss to dismiss the implications of this historical relationship, in favor of relying on the current day relationship that has been

fostered and nurtured between the Faculty and New Brunswick First Nations, or the fact that the impetus for the proposed program came from one of our First Nations partners, because that does not address genuine concerns. Whenever Western education institutions attempt to "include" Indigenous knowledge (or other non-white epistemologies), whether through culture-based models, multicultural education or critical race theory, the mainstream (or "whitestream") existing curriculum has the effect of enclosing and containing the new Indigenous content, often replacing it with a whitewashed version (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Richardson, 2011). Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández caution that the process of

> replacement seems to happen organically, without intent... It happens generally, through the commonplace tendency of appropriation and commercialization of Indigeneity, but also specifically, through the removal of Indigenous bodies" as in when "white settler scholars are hired as experts or to fulfill roles related to challenges of multiculturalism (p.79).

So how do we, or for that matter, how do *any* universities genuinely integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and beliefs about reality into our existing programs and develop new programs explicitly designed to more fully engage Indigenous students and professionals? If the dominance of the mainstream curriculum ensures that it will begin "to absorb and contain, consuming and erasing the other, by always-already positioning the accumulated knowledge as other to, less refined, more subjective and less reliable" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; p. 82) than itself, how do we move forward with more equitable relationships with our Indigenous partners? How do we respond to the TRC's calls to action?

Two Eyed Seeing as One Way Forward

Mi'kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall from Eskasoni First Nation, Nova Scotia, suggest that the challenges discussed above can be addressed through *Two Eyed Seeing.* The philosophy of Two Eyed seeing, originally advanced by Marshall and Marshall in 2004, is to learn to see from one eye the strengths of Indigenous knowledge, and from the other eye the strengths of Western science, and to learn to utilize both eyes mindfully together, for the benefit of all (Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2009). It promotes embracing the contributions of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. Practicing a Two Eyed Seeing approach means that we must "acknowledge that we need each other and must engage in a co-learning journey" (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall, 2012, p. 334).

Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall (2012) acknowledge the tremendous challenge of weaving Indigenous and Western knowledge systems together since today's mainstream knowledges and educational approaches are so dominant. Therefore, they emphasize that a critical question must be asked when attempting to weave these knowledges together in the academic setting: "What can curriculum developers do to ensure that efforts remain true to the ways of knowing and knowledge systems of indigenous peoples?" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p.332). In response, Bartlett et al. (2012) suggest that close collaboration and ongoing consultation with recognized Elders and Knowledge Keepers is essential. They explain, "[c]onsultation with Elders, wherever traditional aboriginal knowledge has a role, is congruent with formal recommendations made by Elders from Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqiyik, Innu, and Inuit communities in Atlantic Canada and approved by the Atlantic Chiefs in September 2011" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). In addition

to ensuring the authenticity of Indigenous knowledge, Elder Albert Marshall suggests that appropriate sources for particular topics need to be consulted. Indigenous knowledge is a collective knowledge. However, each Elder or Knowledge Keeper has a particular expertise. For example, Marshall is the designated voice on environmental matters for the Mi'kmaw Elders in Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia), while another Elder may have expertise on health and healing (personal communication, January 16, 2016).

Final Thoughts

The philosophy of Two Eyed Seeing and the recommendations proposed by Albert and Murdena Marshall, and their colleagues (Hatcher et al., 2009; Bartlett et al., 2012), are particularly salient as the development of the curriculum for the GCIC continues to move forward. If a Two Eyed Seeing approach is genuinely to be implemented, Elders and Knowledge Keepers will be asked to contribute toward the creation of the curriculum, and a step further ought to include collaborative decision making regarding any processes related to the GCIC. For example, who will instruct the courses? How will applicants be chosen? Where will classes be taught and in what manner? Attending to these questions, as well as the criticisms discussed, especially the undesirable potential to "absorb and contain" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 82) and once again subjugate Indigenous knowledge, are challenges that the Faculty of Education and the Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre at UNB must continue to work collaboratively on with First Nations communities in New Brunswick in order to co-create the GCIC. As the proposed program continues to move through various stages that require approval, it is the intention,

vision and hope that this program will contribute toward the decolonizing and Indigenizing of counsellor education.

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