"Melq'ilwiye" Coming Together: Reflections on the journey towards Indigenous social work field education

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Abstract

This article shares the reflections, based on exploratory research and practice in the Interior of British Columbia (BC), Canada, of social work and human service field education coordinators on reconciling field education programs. Drawn from a larger study, the authors present the findings from in-depth interviews, using an Indigenous intersectional storytelling approach to understand the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous field coordinators in moving towards an Indigenous field education model. There is limited research on Indigenous field education and few publications on the experiences of field education coordinators about this important area of practice. This article draws from the study's previous publications and focuses specifically on the narratives of field education coordinators in order to contribute to the development of new literature on the process of reconciling field education practices. The findings of the study call for a transformation of field education policies and practices in order to support Indigenous intersectional and culturally safe field education.

Keywords: Indigenous; field education; reflexive; cultural safety; intersectionality

Introduction

This article shares the reflections and learning, based on exploratory research in the Interior of British Columbia (BC), of Indigenous and non-Indigenous field education coordinators on reconciling field education programs. For over 10 years, the Interior Indian Friendship Society in Kamloops (IIFS) has accepted social work and human service practicum students from Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) for field placements. This partnership remained unexamined with respect to acknowledging and integrating Indigenous knowledge in field education, and reflecting on power, trust,

and relationship with respect to histories of colonization, past and present. Because there is limited research on field education by or with Indigenous people, this article aims to contribute to the development of new literature on the process of reconciling field education practices, based on the experiences of field education coordinators. Furthermore, it calls for the transformation in social work and human service field education of our policies and practices (Gair, Miles & Thomson, 2005). Cultural safety and intersectionality are two frameworks that are applied towards this goal and further elaborated in the research relevance section of this paper. Just as the aim for field education is to integrate and translate theory and knowledge into practice, we describe our research practices adapted from concepts of cultural safety and Indigenous intersectionality. This article will outline the research process and highlight the findings of interviews conducted with field education coordinators, based on their reflexive experiences in placing Indigenous students in field placements and non-Indigenous students in Indigenous field agency settings.

Goals of the Study

The goal of the original study, including four in-depth interviews with field coordinators, aims to center Indigenous approaches to field education and to identify culturally safe practices for social work and human service students undertaking field placements in Indigenous settings.

The research objectives were 1) to increase the research capacity of urban Indigenous community partners and Indigenous students in order to improve social and health services for urban Indigenous people; 2) to examine the narratives of Indigenous students and community field instructors with respect to identifying culturally safe practices in field education, including the conditions and supports necessary to provide cultural safety; and 3) to critically examine the issues and barriers that Indigenous students and Indigenous community partners face both within the university and within the community, and to contextualize these within the field of social work and human service and its relationship with the ongoing of colonization of Indigenous people. Previous writing addressing the findings forthcoming from these objectives has been documented (Clark, Drolet, Arnouse, Walton, Tamburro, Mathews, Derrick, Michaud & Armstrong, 2009; Clark, Drolet, Mathews, Walton, Tamburro, Derrick, Michaud, Armstrong & Arnouse, 2010).

Research Relevance

Field education remains a central component of social work education and is recognized as the space where knowledge and practice are integrated (Westerfelt & Dietz, 2001; Royse, Dhooper & Rompf, 2007). Students attend classes to learn practice principles, values, and ethical behaviors, and under supervision, apply to their practice what they have been learning in the classroom (Drolet, Clark & Allen, 2012). It is increasingly important for social work researchers, including field education coordinators as faculty members, to conduct research and to engage in scholarly activity, which can include field education. The social work code of ethics emphasizes the responsibility of social workers to understand, utilize, and conduct research. The same is true for field education coordinators in social work and human service education. Increasingly in Canada, many field education coordinators, responsible for the coordination of field programs and placement of students in field agencies, are hired in tenure-track faculty positions with expectations for research and scholarly activity (Drolet, 2012). It is our view that learning in field education will be strengthened and enhanced by social work faculty actively engaged in field education, and by incorporating research into field education, which remains an important and integral component of social work education and commitments to social justice.

In our experience, many social work and human service students enter the university with the best of intentions, which is not enough. The same can be said of field education coordinators. It is imperative to understand better how Indigenous knowledge can be integrated into practice by exploring the experiences of a diversity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, field instructors, and field education coordinators, the latter of which is the focus of this article.

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology campuses are located on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux peoples. As Reid (2003) reminds us, all others are visitors, and the consequences of the settler colonization of these territories past and present continues to have devastating consequences. In spite of commitments to social justice and human rights, social work has been instrumental in the colonization of Indigenous people, including supporting residential schools and the assimilation of Indigenous children; and in many ways continues to contribute to the 'economy' of Aboriginal child welfare (Blackstock, 2009; Sinclair, 2008; Johnson, Tamburro & Clark, 2012). As Indigenous scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) points out, "clearly the policies that gave social workers the authority to remove Indigenous children from their homes and place them into the homes of non-Indigenous people as

foster children or adoptees were consistent with the regime's assimilationist Indigenous policies of the past hundred years" (p.67). Despite anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and Indigenous social work classes, this knowledge is not often translated into field education practice. As noted by Raven Sinclair (2008), "the knowledge remains within the theoretical realm, where students are generally not challenged to translate knowledge into action or change" (p.1). With the continued overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare and child protection cases, and the explicit and implicit role of social work in this, it is imperative that students become aware, not only in courses, but in field education, of the realities and implications of colonization past and present.

The literature reviewed showed an absolute dearth of information on Indigenous field education and on cultural safety within social work field education (Arro, 2009; Clark et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2010; Johnson, Tamburro & Clark, 2012). While Canadian schools are introducing new Indigenous-centered practices and approaches to social work education in the curriculum, there is a need to consider the role of field education, and specifically of field education coordinators. This exploratory study and our new research in this area aim to contribute to filling this gap in the current literature.

Cultural safety is a term developed in the 1990's by Maori nursing scholars and educators (Wepa, 2005) to address and acknowledge the colonial legacy within New Zealand and the ongoing resultant health inequities and structural racism within health care. Cultural safety as such goes "beyond the concept of cultural sensitivity to analyzing power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization, and relationships with colonizers" (NAHO, 2006, p.1). Cultural safety reminds us to reflect on the ways in which our [health] policies, research, education, and practices may recreate the traumas inflicted upon Indigenous peoples (Papps, 2005; Ramsden, 2000, as cited in University of Victoria, 2009). Cultural safety has been applied to nursing and health education quite widely within Canada (Browne, Varcoe, Smye, Reimer-Kirkham, Lynam & Wong, 2009; NAHO, 2006); however, little scholarship exists on social work and cultural safety. Unlike the linked concepts of cultural sensitivity or cultural competence, which may contribute to a service recipient's experiences, cultural safety is an outcome that shifts the power to the service recipient, who then defines whether the relationship is culturally safe for them (Munsford & Sanders, 2010). As this applies to field education, "first the educator must be culturally competent; and second, the student culturally safe in the learning relationship" (NAHO, 2006, p.2).

Intersectionality is another important critical framework that is increasingly being recognized by social work scholars as an emerging and important guiding framework for social work policy, research, and practice (Clark, 2012; Mehrotra, 2010; Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris & Hamilton, 2009).   Intersectionality describes the process whereby oppression is produced structurally through our systems, such as education and our policies within field education, and experienced and resisted individually and collectively through and across diverse social categories of identity.   There is recognition that the concept of intersectionality "complements growing discussions about the complexity and multiplicities involved in being indigenous, in the category of indigeneity, and in indigenous peoples' health and well-being" (de Leeuw & Greenwood, 2011, p.54). Intersectionality, as Indigenous youth activist Jessica Yee (2011) describes, is not new to Indigenous peoples. "It's the way we have always thought."   Indigenous communities prior to colonization had multiple categories of gender, holistic understandings, and approaches to health; many had strong matrilineal traditions and complex systems of governance, systems of treaty, and peacemaking processes.   Intersectionality is important, given social work's commitments to social justice, in order to respond to oppression and diversity within social work education. As defined by the Council on Social Work Education (2008):

> The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation (p.5).

As intersectionality scholar Rita Dhamoon (2009) describes it, "put differently we are never *just* looking at the identities of individual/social group or intersecting categories; rather, we are looking at specific ways, specific moments, and specific contexts in which subjects come into being relationally. And how these processes function, and are resisted, within systems of domination" (p.24). Intersectionality has at its heart a commitment to social justice and to reflexivity. It is this reflexivity and beginning with ourselves as field education coordinators that this article seeks to explore.

The authors recognize their Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities and intersecting social locations that impact us in our work in these roles and as authors:

My work (Natalie Clark) is informed and mobilized through my interconnected identities as a solo parent of three Secwepemc children and as part of the Secwepemc community. My responsibilities and relational accountability for my work is to the Secwepemc community on whose unceded territory TRU resides. My own heritage includes European and Aboriginal ancestry, and as such I also understand and support the diversity of Indigenous students who I support in field education, many of whom due to colonial and genocidal policies have been separated from their communities and seek to know and learn about their culture as an adult. In my work as field education coordinator I strived to bring together my professional, academic and personal analyses, encouraged by Aluli-Myer (2008) to "see your work as a *taonga* (sacred object) for your family, your community, your people – *because it is"* (p. 219).

As a non-Aboriginal field education coordinator (Julie Drolet; 2006-12) in an undergraduate social work program I have placed approximately 600 students in practicum. Over these years I have witnessed the challenges, struggles, and successes of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students placed in Indigenous settings. Creating spaces to acknowledge and integrate Indigenous knowledge in field education in preparatory seminars and work, setting up in-person interviews, and developing relationships between students and field instructors before the placement begins, is necessary. Listening to Aboriginal students and field instructors to facilitate processes that better meet learning goals and objectives is a consideration.

Methodology

The research methodology for the larger study was a mixed methods approach that centered Indigenous knowledge through a community-based-participatory-action-research (CBPAR) approach. CBPAR is chosen for its focus on liberatory action and related dimensions that include power, community capacity building, trust, and relationships. Consistent with emerging research on intersectional frameworks in health research (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2009), this study adopted an intersectional framework that supports reflection on the multiple social locations of both us as researchers and the students we are working with. The study builds on agreements between TRU and the Secwepemc Nation and over 10 years partnering with IIFS to provide training and field education for social work and human service students from TRU.

Educational institutions have a pivotal role in transforming the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society (Mastronardi, 2009, p.43). Another strong partnership that informs this study is the one between TRU and NVIT. In the fall of 1998, the TRU School of Social Work (then University College of the Cariboo) began offering the BSW degree in Merritt, BC, through a partnership agreement with the School of Social Work at NVIT, an Aboriginal public post-secondary institution. In 2004, this agreement was renewed for a further five years, and continues to this day.

Specific to this project, the School of Social Work and Human Service Program at TRU and NVIT formally invited the Interior Indian Friendship Society to enter into a partnership with respect to this research project, by formalizing and expanding the already existing relationship around the training of students in field education. Moreover, a community research assistant located at IIFS gathered narratives and interviews, and a community research-training workshop was organized at IIFS for the research team on Indigenous and community-based research skills.

Principles and ethics to guide the research process were developed in partnership between TRU, NVIT, and IIFS and included ownership of data, ethics, issues of consent, and evaluation. Finally, through the establishment of a community advisory board comprised of Elders, board members, students, faculty, and service providers, the research development process was guided at all stages, including continued articulation of the question and identification of related themes and areas of investigation that emerged from the input of the research partners. Thus, this process ensured that the research methodology was culturally relevant, involved students at all levels, and provided feedback and ongoing ethical evaluation at every stage. In addition, all the research partners agreed to disseminate the results through their networks and organizations.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) speaks to the decolonizing ability of qualitative research, which is based on oral storytelling and narrative, in that the purpose is connected to listening to the stories of the individuals and the meaning of their stories. Oral storytelling and narrative analysis are best situated to listen to the stories and experiences of the many people involved in field education, including the reflexive stories of those of us in the role of field education coordinators. The project utilized a research methodology grounded in an Indigenous Storywork approach (Archibald, 2009). Four interviews were conducted with field education coordinators at three different institutions and from four different programs. This methodology invited an intersectional and reflexive storytelling that allowed each participant to

reflect on their own practices within the university and to consider those practices that contributed to centering Indigenous approaches within field education. By including aspects of our own stories, we are enacting our previously theorized concept of intersectional research teams, which implies we not only consider the full complexity of the location of our participants, but also first begin with who we are and the power, ethics, and diversity of who is on the research team (Clark & Hunt 2007). All of the interviews were transcribed then coded using a grounded theory approach to data analysis. In addition, Storywork methodology invited the listening and re-listening to the stories as recorded in order for the understanding to emerge from the stories. The members of the research team, including the community-based researcher, undertook thematic analysis.

Through this study, it was possible to introduce a number of field activities to foster reconciliation in field education and attend to the principles of community based participatory action research. For example, social work and human service practicum students were provided with a number of supports in their practicum including access to an Elder on campus, Indigenous faculty liaison, talking circles, Indigenous-centered experiential professional development workshop on the legacy of residential schools, and a field preparation seminar on cultural safety that was facilitated by an Indigenous trauma specialist.

The mixed methods data collection included the development of a quantitative, culturally relevant survey questionnaire. The research team is expanding the partnership to administer the survey questionnaire across British Columbia, as well as in Chennai, South India (Clark, Reid, Drolet, Walton, Pierce, Charles, Vedan, Samuel, Mathews, Burke & Arnouse, 2012). This research study aims to expand and center Indigenous knowledge in five diverse sites to begin a reconciliation process between mainstream social work and human service theories, policies, and practices that may be harmful to Indigenous students in their field placements (Clark et al., 2012).

Findings

Other findings from the research have been shared elsewhere (Clark et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2010). However, there are specific findings related to the role of field education coordinators and Indigenous field education. Based on the data collected, there were three key themes that emerged: the importance of reflexivity within the field education role; the importance of developing relationships at all levels, with students, the community, and with Elders and other key supports for wellness; and perhaps most importantly, given that policy and policy processes have

always been central to the colonization of Indigenous peoples (Alfred, 1999; Episkenew, 2009; Lawrence, 2003), the importance of understanding the impact of field education policy on field education coordinators and on the students themselves. This is particularly true where field education is an intersecting site for students, field agencies, and the university. Our interviews with field education coordinators clearly identified a number of structural changes required at the policy level in order to support the development of Indigenous field education processes.

Reflexivity
Critical reflection by field education coordinators on their own social location within an intersectional framework that recognizes the diversity of experiences in addition to those we bring to the role, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, is also important, or as one field coordinator described it, the importance of "locating yourself". Coordinators interviewed also identified the importance of honouring the unique field education coordinator's styles and approaches to field education. As one non-Indigenous field education coordinator shared:

> *I acknowledge that I am not Aboriginal, but I can be an ally … and I have a role to play in supporting.*

Furthermore, field education coordinators often are in the position of supporting students to be reflexive, and with non-Aboriginal students, this may involve confronting and naming racism.

> *Cultural safety is key.*
> *Non-Aboriginal students don't seem to be being well prepared to enter field … in the cultural safety way.*
>
> *Now we have a First Nations course in the first year that is required … and they need that support … what that is going to bring up for them … they need support to understand the circle, protocol … that's the learning … they need supports to stay, what it brings up around their own racism.*

At times field education coordinators described confronting students, and even at times denying placement in Aboriginal settings.

> *Some non-Aboriginal students have an edge, and I just won't place them in an Aboriginal setting … you know playing that role.*

The need for support from other field education coordinators doing this work was also identified as important. As one field education coordinator identified: *doing this job in isolation is not helpful ... it's good to bounce things off of someone who does a similar role to you.* The research findings further demonstrate the importance of relationships across many sites in field education.

Relationships
A key finding in the study was the importance of relationships and time. The importance of relationships and storytelling in Indigenous communities is well documented (Brown & Strega, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 2001); however, Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian values underpin much of the field education process (Bruyere, 1999; Razack, 2005). Field education coordinators interviewed identified the importance of investing the time in developing and fostering relationships with students, Elders, and the Indigenous community. The field education coordinators revealed that their 'caseloads,' in terms of the high number of student placements, is a structural barrier to working relationally with Indigenous field instructors and students. Additional supports and time is a key factor for field education coordinators in working relationally.

Community relationships
According to the field education coordinators interviewed, getting out of the university office to develop and maintain relationships with Indigenous agencies was essential.

> *It helps to network and be out there.*

In working with Indigenous field agencies, the social work field education coordinator makes efforts to recognize and to appreciate Indigenous-centred learning. One field education coordinator described the importance to her of bringing ceremony to the field-education-thank-you-appreciation event that happens each year at the end of the semester to thank field instructors.

> *I wanted them (field instructors) to feel honoured, more than just the food or activities but the feeling.*

Challenges inherent in the role of field education coordinator emerged due to the need for student field placements and the reality that there is often not enough placements for students.

> *This is a balancing act though...sometimes being diplomatic and cheery despite the tensions in order to secure a placement.*

Demands on time to recruit and support quality placements created an overwhelming feeling, often as one field education coordinator described it: *the workload is demanding*. Another said that the process of finding new placements can sometimes feel uncomfortable as she said, *sometimes I feel like I am begging for a placement.*

Relationships with Students
Developing supportive and culturally safe relationships with Indigenous students is essential in field education. For Indigenous field education coordinators in the study, this meant sharing their own culture and practices. For non-indigenous field education coordinators, it was important to learn and to approach the role as an ally.

Field education coordinators do provide Indigenous student support around flexible scheduling and deadlines and also need the time to provide support to Indigenous students around grief and loss experiences.

> *She's from a thousand kilometers away . . . some students will be gone for weeks to be away for a funeral.*

> *Family, community and culture comes first .. . and there are some faculty who are just like nope they missed classes they are out.*

> *I honour and understand your willingness to put family first and I can work with that, and let's make this education work for you.*

Some of the key ways that field education coordinators develop relationships with students are through open door policies, one-on-one time with students, preparatory seminars, and supporting students in their wellness planning. Working with non-Indigenous students placed in Indigenous settings requires supporting students one-on-one, relational support, and sometimes challenging and naming racism and oppression.

All the field education coordinators interviewed echoed the words of one coordinator who said, *it takes a lot of one on one time*. The time was not only structured time through appointments, but more often open door policies.

> *A lot comes from sitting in the office ... casual ... over tea ... stuff comes up.*

Field education coordinators spoke of the time spent in addressing the wellness of students and decreasing anxiety about placement. In the field seminars for students, there is a need to focus on wellness plans as instruments for promoting student health and well-being. Wellness plans are a wise practice that was identified in the research, and field education coordinators saw this as an important part of their role (Fire, 2006). One field education coordinator defined the wellness plan as:

> *Taking care of themselves in a culturally relevant way … at school and in the practicum.*

Another described how she saw her role:

> *I can support their wellness plan by having strong resources from this community for them.*

One field education coordinator described the importance of the plan: *it will help you not just in school but in life.* Investing the time in student wellness and wellness planning was found to be essential, as described by a field education coordinator:

> *Some don't truly understand it until they feel the effects of what you are doing.*
> *I think we talk in social work and human service programs about wellness but we actually don't walk it ourselves or apply it in those ways, so . . . . . I'm really thinking about some ways that we can bring that in.*

Another field education coordinator described the students' feedback to them about the importance of the wellness plan: *The students tell me about trying to take good care of themselves during their practicum … I encourage them in this.* All field education coordinators interviewed spoke of supporting Indigenous students through difficult times that often made the students feel like quitting the program. As said by a field coordinator:

> *Students would share about their children, wanting to go home to their territory…*

Another coordinator described how she would tell students: *I'm here for you. They feel better about this.* Another coordinator who provided a holistic understanding of the meaning of education echoed this:

> *We're here for you . . . your experience here is for you . . . it's not*
> *about the credits, it's for you.*

Relationships with Faculty Liaisons
Another relationship that is key in the field education process is the
faculty liaison. Often the field education coordinator who has developed
the relationship with the student and with the agency is now no longer
part of the relationship as the faculty liaison becomes involved in the
placement in the field. For example, a structural change recommended by
students and Elders in the research, as well as by field education
coordinators, was for students to have the choice of an Indigenous faculty
liaison, and yet in many programs, this is not possible. The need for
recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty is essential in improving
field education, as described by a field coordinator:

> *as one of our aboriginal faculty, they (Indigenous students) were*
> *placed with him. There was some actual thought to the matching*
> *that he would actually follow the aboriginal students . . . . . . I*
> *know that it was a small piece and he had to take it on as an*
> *overload because that's not been done.*

> *Once students start their practicum, I am no longer involved. . .*
> *there is a new faculty person involved.*

This can present challenges, as one field coordinator described it:

> *Some of the faculty liaisons are sessional ... they have not been*
> *involved ... they are bit like an outsider coming in to a*
> *conversation that has been ongoing ... particularly for students in*
> *Aboriginal placements.*

Relationships with Elders and other Indigenous supports
The study found that Elders are key supports for practicum students, and
structural changes are often required at the university to facilitate their
access to and work on campus and off-campus in field agencies. The
relationship with Elders in the program was also a key relationship for
field education coordinators to develop. As one described it, they often
were in the role of supporting students in accessing supports including
Elders:

> *We need to help build those relationships with Elders" ... we*
> *walked them to the counselors or to the gathering place.*

Elders are essential and a best practice as demonstrated by the NVIT Elders council.

They are like a grandparent role ... non judgmental ... the Elders love to feel wanted.

Having Elders in the school is a best practice ... we need more ... and attached
to programs ... we need a gathering place here (in this building) for ... because not all of them are going to the campus gathering place.

I think that they provide that very grounding wisdom piece and comfort for the students. Students just migrate towards them and just by being with them and sharing food with them.

Structural Policy Changes
As already identified in the discussion, many of the wise practices identified by Indigenous students, field instructors, and field education coordinators require structural changes in order to put new practices in place. Some of the specific recommendations included the need for time and adequate release to support the relationship building at all levels. In addition, budget implications included funding for travelling and connecting with other field education coordinators, food for meetings with Elders and community, honoraria for Indigenous guest speakers to facilitate preparatory seminars on cultural safety, and support for culturally centered field events. Given that field education is already often undervalued within social work education, this is an area where frameworks of intersectionality can provide an understanding of how oppression and power operate in universities and within schools of social work. The intersection of Indigenous identity with gender, parenting status, caring for aging parents and Elders is one example. In addition, all four of the field education coordinators were untenured, with one of the positions structured as non-faculty. The ability to name racism in programs and to champion change requires an understanding of the barriers facing those in the role of field education.
Transformation is required in social work field education to go beyond Eurocentric models, and this requires structural changes at all levels of the university. Many Indigenous students face oppression and racism in all aspects of field education. Eurocentric policies, such as missed classes for funerals resulting in failure of a class, are examples of ways in which harm is done. As one field education coordinator identified:

We cannot assume it is culturally safe . . . or that students aren't facing racism".

Another echoed this *"Family, community and culture comes first ... and there are some faculty who are just like nope they missed classes they are out.*

Structural changes were called for on many levels, including from the micro to the macro level.

Discussion

Key recommendations include the need for changes to policy, the need for more Indigenous faculty members, and Indigenous supports on campus and in the community, including Elders and counselors to support culturally safe wellness. Indigenous centered education spaces, such as those offered by NVIT, are often in marked contrast with non-Indigenous universities. For example, university policies may present barriers to offering culturally centred and culturally informed, approaches such as cultural smudges that require burning in university classrooms or buildings. Additionally, while Elders were welcomed to be partners with the University, integrating the structural changes necessary to secure their position and importance was slow in forthcoming. There are now four Elders on campus at TRU, but this stands in sharp contrast to the Elders council at NVIT, comprised of 17 Elders with roles in university governance. Indigenous field education must incorporate cultural safety and centering Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in the university and in the field placement agency. Indigenous field education coordinators in the study identified the key role of ceremony in field education, and yet there is little recognition given to this in any policies or practices within field education.

Ceremony as honour for the field instructors.

I'd like to see us do four talking circles a year

Change the physical environment ... make it a welcoming environment and space ... art ... it is starting ... but more needs to be done.

The policy changes required to centre Indigenous epistemologies, enable a relational ethics of care, and to change policies to reflect the unique

needs of Indigenous students, is imperative. Culturally safe policy needs to be rooted in an awareness not only of past but present colonial oppression, situated and developed within local Indigenous communities and with students and Elders, and must include a holistic understanding of policy while avoiding a Pan-Indian or 'one-size-fits-all-approach' to policy (Clark & Hunt, 2011). Ultimately, there is a pressing need for the structural changes that support the need for Indigenous field education, and Indigenous field educators in these roles as suggested by our research. For non-Indigenous field education coordinators who want to be an ally to Indigenous students, they must begin with themselves. As Settler historian Paulette Regan (2006) describes, "it is virtually impossible for us not to know (about the oppression of Indigenous peoples). What we choose to deny is our complicity in perpetuating a colonial system that is rooted in violence and social injustice" (p.22).

Implications for Field Education

George Manuel (1974), a Secwepemc Chief and international Indigenous activist, stated:

> When we come to a new fork in an old road we continue to follow the route with which we are familiar even though wholly different, even better avenues might open up before us. That failure to heed (the) plea for a new approach to Indian-European relations is a failure of imagination…Real recognition of our presence and humanity would require a genuine reconsideration of so many peoples' role in North American society that it would amount to a genuine leap of imagination (as cited by Regan, 2005, p.3).

Field education sits at the fork in the road described by George Manuel. The question remains whether social work and human service education, and field education coordinators themselves, are willing to take that leap of imagination. Field education is one of the sites where classroom theories get translated into practice. For this reason, it is imperative to explore practical strategies to reconcile field education policies and practices. All partners in field education, including students, faculty, field education coordinators, and field instructors, need to interrogate the oppressive policies and practices that continue to perpetuate Eurocentric practices. In recognition of the need for transforming field programs, adequate human, financial, and technological supports are required in order to address the need for relationships, time, and implementation of the identified emergent, innovative practices discussed in this article. Developing relationships and community knowing remain important

considerations for field education coordinators in all field settings, but are especially important in Indigenous field settings. Respectful relationships require time and presence in the community, which enacts diverse Indigenous values of interconnected relationships.

Yet Indigenous field education coordinators face Eurocentric structural barriers, not only within the role, but also within the university itself, such as isolation, racist policies and practices, and increased practicum caseloads that deter relational development, and create direct harm to Indigenous students.

Centering Indigenous epistemologies within frameworks of cultural safety and intersectionality hold the potential for transforming field education. The narratives of field education coordinators call for us all to reflect on how the university and field education itself reinforces systems of racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism (Hankivsky & Christofferson, 2008). Cultural safety allows the space for students to identify whether they feel safe within social work and human service programs and within field education specifically. Intersectional awareness demands change and new practices for social justice and equity within social work education (Razack, 2001). The results of this exploratory study call for programs that are responsive to the unique needs and experiences of Indigenous students toward the goal of reconciling field education. Further research is required, in particular to consider the impact of intersecting policies. Indigenous intersectional policy analysis may be one way forward for further research (Clark, 2012) to begin to document the ways in which field education policies intersect and where and for whom the policies enable and constrict opportunities for Indigenous students from diverse communities. There is also a need to understand the resistance of students, faculty, and field education coordinators, and to learn from these stories.

Our project has taken some first steps towards increasing knowledge and appreciation of the needs, values, knowledge, experiences, and contributions of Indigenous peoples, in particular the needs of diverse Indigenous students in field education experiences in social work and human service. Through narratives and storytelling, we hope to contribute to a culturally safe and intersectional research framework in our search for answers to what constitutes wise practice within the role of field education coordinator (Clark et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2009). However, there is much work to be done towards taking the leap of imagination as called for by George Manuel.

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