

Knowing the Source of the Water: An Introduction to Honoring Our Indigenous Elders in Social Work Education

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Abstract: This is the introduction to the special issue of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping, Honoring Our Indigenous Elders in Social Work Education*. This special issue was co-edited by Hilary N. Weaver, University at Buffalo School of Social Work; Mary Kate Dennis, University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, and Katie Johnston-Goodstar, University of Minnesota School of Social Work. The issue includes narratives about Indigenous social work educators and/or educational programs who have had a significant impact on the social work profession, social work education and the Indigenous scholars in academia. “Indigenous Peoples” are defined as those peoples and nations which have historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them.

Keywords: Indigenous, elders, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Aboriginal, First Nation Peoples, American Indian Alaska Native Social Work Educators' Association, Maori, Aboriginal Australian, Hawai'i

This special issue of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping, Honoring Our Indigenous Elders in Social Work Education*, is the product of many people who have had their lives and hearts touched by the work of Indigenous social work educators who have come before us. These elders have influenced our profession, our work, and our lives.

In the early stages of this project, one of the special issue editors attended a conference in Singapore where a presenter spoke about elders in terms of knowing the source of the water. This concept resonates with the contents of this volume and the importance of elders within the Indigenous cultures of Turtle Island (aka North America).

Water is a sustaining element necessary for all life. It is crucial to all existence, but we often go through our day-to-day lives without reflecting on its source. Likewise, all we are and the potential for all that we can be comes from a source that is central to our existence but may not be an explicitly visible part of our day-to-day lives. Even though we may not always reflect on the shaping importance of elders in the work we do and the choices we make, their influence, whether explicit, or behind the scenes, has made what we do possible. This volume highlights the implicit and makes visible the contributions of our professional elders.

The American Indian Alaska Native Social Work Educators' Association

For an unknown number of years, Native Americans have found ways to gather at professional social work conferences such as those held by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD), and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The group who gathered at the Annual Program Meeting of CSWE was particularly robust and by the mid-1990s held a day-long meeting that included scholarly presentations, facilitated dialogues, and networking opportunities for Native social workers, social work educators, students, and our non-Native allies. Spirited discussions were held about our preferred labels with some members embracing terms like First Nations and others preferring the term Native American. A consensus was reached to call the group the American Indian Social Work Educators' Association, with the title being modified a few years later to the more inclusive title American Indian Alaska Native Social Work Educators' Association (AIANSWEA). The group (which predated any particular label) has always been open to Indigenous Peoples from around the world and our meetings have included various Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal, and First Nations Peoples.

One of the editors of this volume came to this group as a first year doctoral student in 1991 and has facilitated AIANSWEA meetings for the last two decades. This group has been crucial to her development as a social

work scholar and academician. The group was a source of guidance and nurturance, much as elders in any Indigenous community guide and support youth. For her, it feels like this group, this sustaining community, these elders, have always been present in her life and career. Many of her colleagues have similar perspectives.

Honoring Our Elders Initiatives

A few years ago at one of our AIANSWEA gatherings, we spoke of the importance of Indigenous social work educators who had traveled the paths of social work academia before us. Indeed, there had been some earlier opportunities to publicly acknowledge their contributions and learn from them in organized and visible ways including special sessions within the CSWE Annual Program Meeting where panels of senior Native social work educators spoke about their experiences, challenges, and recommendations. In addition to venues within CSWE, we felt the need to have internal ways to acknowledge the importance of their contributions to our own lives and careers. We wanted to develop an initiative to Honor Our Indigenous Elders in Social Work Education.

A few years passed between our initial discussions and implementation of this initiative. We wrestled with many questions. How would we choose who to honor? What would this honoring look like? By 2013, we had developed our ideas sufficiently to conduct the first honoring event as part of our annual meeting. A photograph of that event graces the cover of this volume. This was followed by a second honoring at our meeting in 2014.

In late 2014, our group learned of the death of one of our members, an esteemed colleague who had touched many of our lives. In thinking about the impact of this loss and even more importantly the impact of her life on those of us in social work education, one of the editors of this volume reached out to a few members of AIANSWEA asking for perspectives on the appropriateness of telling her story, and that of other elders, in a written format designed to honor their contributions to social work education. As someone who had published in *Reflections* early in her career she thought this might be a good venue for this type of written honoring and reached out to the current journal editor for his

opinion. Having received positive feedback from both the journal editor and AIANSWEA colleagues, she decided to move forward with this project.

Using the AIANSWEA listserv, she reached out to potential authors and potential editors. Additional outreach was extended through Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Maori, Aboriginal Australian, and Canadian First Nations contacts as well as the journal's regular channels. This journal is the result of those efforts. The subjects of our Honoring Our Indigenous Elders in Social Work Education efforts at the 2013 and 2014 AIANSWEA meetings are included in this volume, along with additional elders' stories. These additional elders have been honored at the AIANSWEA meeting in 2015 or will be honored at our meeting in 2016. As the stories in this volume tell us, there are many paths that have led us to where we are today. We learn more about the current state of Indigenous Peoples in social work and social work education by hearing the stories of the elders who have come before us. These stories both provide context and describe journeys that have brought us to our current locations.

The Role of Elders in Indigenous Cultures

Indigenous elders have always had and continue to play significant roles in sustaining the vitality of their families and communities. Elders are keepers of cultural traditions and teachings. They are the primary teachers of language, morality, ethics, and responsibilities. They guide younger generations in maintaining our ontology, living our values, and reminding us to focus on what is most important - our families, our communities and our people. They serve as our counselors, providing knowledge, wisdom and kindness when we are uncertain or when we face challenging situations. They also teach us skills and hone our talents and abilities; be that in traditional practices or in providing for and sustaining our families. As Indigenous communities have faced many changes and adaptations over time, elders have stepped in to raise their grandchildren, offer a caring hand, and teach us through their own lives how to treat others with dignity, respect and love.

There are no closer relationships than between a grandchild and grandparents. In some Indigenous tribes any elders can be referred to as "Grandma" or "Grandfather." Elders fill in for each other, caring for the whole community and the future of their people.

There are many of us who live long geographical distances from our reservation or tribal communities. Perhaps we do not have living grandparents; yet, Indigenous elders can step into a guiding role as needed. They are available to all of us and through their generosity and kindness they support us in living our dreams, helping us to take advantage of learning opportunities and reminding us to work hard.

Becoming an elder is a role that Indigenous people grow into as their knowledge and wisdom is recognized by their communities. In the modern majority society, policies and practices related to older adults are determined chronologically by age. In Indigenous societies, eldership is determined by the community when individuals are looked to for their leadership and service to the people. This can be done through leading spiritual practices or sharing their life experiences through storytelling. Elderhood is honored in our communities. As illustrated in this volume, our social work elders play significant, on-going roles in shaping the lives and careers of current social work academics. We honor their work and influences here.

Storytelling in Indigenous Traditions

Traditionally, Indigenous populations have used storytelling as a vehicle for knowledge transmission, describing kinship and tribal history, teaching about the environment, and recounting peoples' journeys and accomplishments. Storytelling creates a space and time for people to be intentional with one another, to share old and new life ways and experiences, along with timeless cultural and spiritual beliefs and ceremonies, creating a connection from the past to the present. Storytelling reinforces language and Indigenous ways of thinking about the worlds in which we live.

Stories are told across the lifespan and as the younger generations age, they assume the responsibility for passing on these stories. Previously, these stories were shared orally but are now also offered in print, audio, and video recordings. This journal, *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, has similar goals of sharing knowledge and experiences by creating connections that unite scholars and practitioners in the social work community. The journal provides a modern

space for stories that honor the Indigenous social work scholars who have been influential in paving the way for other Indigenous people in social work practice, policy, and in the academy.

Native Americans in Social Work and Social Work Education

In many ways, the social work profession and Indigenous cultures have comparable values. Demonstrating responsibility for others and respecting individuality are core Indigenous values that are also found within the social work profession. Indeed, many Native Americans are drawn toward the helping professions out of their desire to support and give back to the communities that nurture them.

On the other hand, the history of the social work profession has also been clouded by the specter of colonization. Social workers have often implemented policies of colonizing powers and contributed to some of the significant problems that trouble Indigenous communities like rampant child removal. Indeed, social work has been a double-edged sword in many Indigenous communities, with the power to advocate and assist in culturally respectful and responsive ways often being eclipsed by the social control aspects of the profession. Even in the face of these significant challenges, there have always been Indigenous social workers who have taken the best of our professional values and knowledge and made significant and lasting contributions to Native people and communities. Some of these Native social workers also taught new generations of social workers, both Native and non-Native, thus helping our profession to better serve Indigenous Peoples.

In spite of the important roles they have played, the contributions of Indigenous social workers and social work educators have often gone unrecognized. A handful have been acknowledged such as Ada Deer, Ron Lewis, and Clorinda Lucas who were inducted as NASW Pioneers. Ada Deer, a Menominee social worker, was instrumental in overturning the termination of her tribe, later served as its President, and also served as Assistant Secretary of the Interior, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She taught at the University of Wisconsin, Madison for many years before retiring. Ron Lewis, the first American Indian known to have earned a doctorate in social work, was known for his work in mental health including

working with American Indian veterans returning from Vietnam. He was an activist involved with the standoff at Wounded Knee in 1973 and the occupation of Alcatraz Island. Clorinda Lucas, a descendent of Hawaiian and Tahitian royalty, was known as the Jane Addams of Hawai'i. She served as Director of the Department of Public Child Welfare in Hawai'i and was the first woman to serve as a member and rotating chair of the Board of Trustees of the Queen Liliuokalani Trust, an organization serving orphaned and destitute Hawaiian children. Other Indigenous social workers have made major contributions such as Evelyn Blanchard who testified in support of the Indian Child Welfare Act and ultimately shaped United States federal policy. Far more still go unrecognized. Telling the stories of a few Indigenous social work educators here is both a way to honor them and to begin to address this omission in the history of our profession.

Overview of Contents

This special issue offers readers the opportunity to learn about a diverse range of Indigenous scholars and research centers that have influenced the social work academic community. The articles recognize and honor the tireless work that Indigenous scholars have offered generations of social work students, educators and practitioners. A common thread that weaves through each narrative is the personal and professional commitment each of these elders made to the betterment of Indigenous communities. These elders lived their values. They were kind and caring. They took on responsibilities of advocating for us – American Indian Peoples, Indigenous Peoples in academia – and helping to make the world a better place for all Peoples. They carved out spaces against all odds. Their stories tell us how they worked in various ways to provide the foundation that we as social workers and social work academics stand on today.

The narrative by Trinidad and Brown offers insight into the importance of the mentoring relationships that Dr. Charlotte Goodluck took on within her community and in academic settings. She was devoted to positively shaping American Indian children through her scholarship and development of the Indian Child Welfare Act. She demonstrated a similar devotion in her academic career through

supporting and mentoring students to be successful in higher education. Dr. Goodluck's intention for life was *hozho naasha* (walking in beauty). Her death was one of the inspirations for this special issue. The narrative authors honor her life and accomplishments and share the caring support they received from her during their own academic journeys.

The story told by Jacobs highlights the life and work of Dr. Lester Barney Brown, an American Indian, two-spirit man who was a mentor to many students in the academy. In his scholarship, he was devoted to developing curricula and offering support to marginalized groups, especially the LGBT and two-spirit communities. He remained dedicated to his students' successes. Through his own modeling and teaching he demonstrated how we can accept others who are different than we are; an important lesson for all social workers.

The narrative offered by Voss and Ambelang draws our attention to Akicita Cik'ala (Little Soldier), also known as Alex J. Lunderman, a Sicangu Lakota man from the Rosebud Indian reservation. He served his community in many roles; as a father and grandfather, an elder, an elected tribal official, a veteran, and spiritual leader. The authors highlight his many accomplishments in life and how those contributed to educating students and promoting social work values on behalf of his community.

Next, this special issue shares the stories of two research centers. In describing the Indigenous Wellness Research Institute at the University of Washington, Johnston-Goodstar tells the story of the founding faculty members and staff and their dedication to Indigenous health and wellness through training and mentorship. This Center creates a unique space for the advancement of Indigenous social work with a mission of bringing communities together in a culturally centered and collaborative research and educational approach. Second, Tovar pays tribute to The Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. This center is committed to the education of American Indian and Alaska Native students. They prepare American Indian and Alaska Native practitioners to work in tribal and urban environments, enabling them to make lasting contributions to the health, wellness, and sustained future of Indian Country. The center

also focuses on research related to American Indian and Alaska Native communities, influencing federal, state, and tribal policy, and working collaboratively with other American Indian and Alaska Native research centers. Both of these Centers have been instrumental in training a network of social work practitioners and scholars, who in turn have a vast and lasting impact on the field of social work.

In another narrative, Tovar and Kastelic share their reflections on the accomplishments of Dr. Eddie Brown, a member of the Pascua Yaqui tribe. They recount his legacy as a social work scholar and policy advocate who has worked in tribal, state, and federal government positions. The authors highlight his tenure as the director of the Buder Center and the impact that his mentorship has had on his students' scholarship and career trajectories.

The story recounted by DeMattos honors Lynette Kahekili Kaopuiki Paglinawan, a Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner, social worker, and educator. She has dedicated her life to integrating culturally-based interventions in her social work practice and has been recognized as a Living Treasure. This article chronicles the many ways she contributes to her communities and how she goes about mentoring her students with an Indigenous cultural framework, thereby fostering the accomplishments of those around her.

The story told by Smalling offers insights into Dr. Priscilla Day, a Leech Lake Anishinaabe woman known for her tireless advocacy on behalf of American Indian children and families. Dr. Day is a leader in many roles related to child welfare and remains sharply focused on the needs of tribes and their children. She has worked in the Center for Regional and Tribal Welfare Studies where she is dedicated to the mentoring and training of students in research on American Indian child welfare issues in collaboration with the tribes in Minnesota. Both personally and professionally, she has nurtured students of all backgrounds to work towards improving the lives of American Indian children.

The article by Dr. Day reflects on the many contributions of Dr. Michael Jacobson, a man of Creek, Seminole, Lakota and Dakota heritage. He is described as an Indigenous activist; a leader committed to social justice, always willing to rise to

meet challenges and take on hard work. We are reminded how he lived his values and did not shy away from advocating for the recruitment and retention of American Indians and Alaska Natives, always pushing for increased visibility of Indigenous scholars and issues at the Council for Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting. He championed Indigenous voices on the national level and paved the path for the Indigenous educators and scholars who came after him.

The Day and Campbell article shares the story of John Red Horse, a Cherokee social worker, educator, and advocate. They describe the importance of his writings about the role of elders in American Indian communities. After fulfilling a variety of leadership roles he has become an elder; a reservoir and transmitter of Indigenous knowledge. He reminds us to stay rooted in our communities and to raise our voices in support of the interests of Indigenous Peoples; often in spaces where these perspectives are not readily welcomed. The authors share how Dr. Red Horse personally influenced their careers while sharing lessons we should all be mindful of.

Fittingly, the story of the first Indigenous educator honored by the AIANSWEA concludes this volume. Barkdull, Ned, Limb, Weaver, and Himonas offer insight in the life and career of E. Daniel Edwards, a Yurok man, who has fulfilled many roles as an educator, mentor, leader and tribal community member. This article highlights his influence on social work education at the University of Utah through one of the first educational support programs for American Indian and Alaska Native students. Guided by his vision, this program has provided mentoring to hundreds of American Indian and Alaska Native students at the BSW, MSW and PhD levels, thereby creating a fleet of social work practitioners and having a broad impact on the field of social work.

Conclusion

This volume contains the stories of our elders and ancestors. They are the source of our water. It is because of them that contemporary Indigenous social work educators are able to do the work that we do. The stories of these elders speak for themselves. They are stories of leadership, advocacy, passion, caring, and simple acts of kindness. We invite readers from all walks of life and all parts of the world to open

themselves to the lessons contained in these stories.

It has been a great privilege to collect the stories in this volume. The editors are humbled by the opportunity to work on this project. Even reading early drafts of these stories brought sunshine to cloudy days and reminded us of the powerful and often difficult steps that have gone into creating the path that we now walk. We are thankful for the ways that our ancestors and elders have shaped our world, our communities, our lives, and our profession. The

responsibility is now ours. As we honor their legacy, we tell their stories, and we will help generations to come to know the source of the water.

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