Participatory Program Evaluation: Centering Critical Perspectives in Developing Socially Just and Collaborative Solutions

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Abstract*:* MSW students take research and program evaluation courses designed to develop their research-informed practice and practice-informed research skills. Textbooks center Euro-western ways of knowing, which can be supplemented by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) approaches to research, evaluation, and community-engaged change processes. My article describes and analyzes organizational contexts, course structure, and critical pedagogies that enable authentic justice-centered graduate student co-creation of egalitarian learning communities that seek to name, challenge, and dismantle structures of exclusion, injustice, and marginalization. My insights as an instructor focus on what perspectives are centered and transformative approaches that acknowledge holistic (including affective) engagement in change processes. My pedagogy normalizes feeling unsettled with relational and dynamic collaborations that require students develop the elasticity to accept community partner feedback and revise research methods and practices accordingly, which are essential skills when working with BIPOC communities seeking justice.

Keywords: community engagement, decolonizing, research methods

"Stephanie" is the fifth MSW student in office hours this semester wrestling with a mismatch between practicum and classwork. She is a white middle-class student who was working with autonomy on iterative assignments; however, she is experiencing resistance in practicum. She read widely, responded to required online discussion prompts, workshopped ideas weekly with peers in class, and consulted with me as her instructor. Her practicum supervisor demanded her work take a more Euro-western approach with a narrow definition of evidence-based practice that does not use the available cultural adaptations (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Royse et al., 2016). She is disillusioned and looking for motivation and direction in finishing her program evaluation proposal, which requires some sort of care and tools for navigation (Berg & Seeber, 2016). I realize in hindsight that I needed to adjust the course content to include 21st-century learning that incorporates holistic self-regulation and motivation in social justice–focused practice for "self-directed learners who have a heightened ability to adapt to changing social and contextual conditions" (Brandt, 2020, p. 3). Holistic approaches are more in alignment with critical, decolonizing, and Indigenous curriculum; however, these intellectual (i.e., cognitive) curriculum changes require acknowledging the associated emotional labor in the implementation process (Brandt, 2020; Linklater, 2014).

Naming Social Work Practice Contexts

Stephanie's cohort of students was wrestling with developing collaborative solutions to problems experienced by local communities with high numbers of Native Americans. Student projects focused on high rates of child welfare cases and family separation, child placement in group homes and non-Native families upon termination from the programs, high suicide rates

with younger and younger incidents, substance abuse, incidents of violence and sexual assault, as well as diseases such as cancer and the associated grief and loss (Linklater, 2014). Students often work in non–social work host systems and agencies including schools, after-school programs, campus student services, medical and mental health settings, shelters, treatment centers, in collaboration with lawyers and judges in courtrooms, crisis intervention and treatment centers, research centers, senior centers, and hospice (Netting et al., 2004).

The agencies are situated within different practice and legal contexts in small cities and Native American reservations. Each of these settings have their unique practice and mental models that originate from the controlling systems and their associated positivistic approaches to prevention, intervention, and evaluation of programs such as medical models in hospital, assimilation-focused education settings, as well as the rule of law in legal settings (Linklater, 2014; Netting et al., 2004; Royse et al., 2016; Senge, 1994). MSW-level practicum students' schoolwork is often tied to program implementation within existing systems, and students may quickly grow their sphere of influence in leadership roles (Netting et al., 2004). As a result, I work with students on paying attention to the way they and others in their agency think (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Senge, 1994). MSW-level graduates frequently work in transdisciplinary environments with the potential to develop solutions that transcend any specific discipline; however, working together across fields and knowledge bases takes considerable time, effort, and commitment to centering various ways of knowing and practicing (Fricker, 2007; Marsh et al., 2016).

Many students are new to social work and are learning basic competencies and practice behaviors, critical thinking, and inclusive practices that have the potential to create individual, family, group, community, and societal healing and change. Students are ready to embrace and implement critical perspectives and frequently notice their practice environments struggle to work well with Native American clients. Some practice settings utilize evidence-based prevention and interventions; however, many organizations do not have the capacity to implement cultural adaptations, culturally grounded or embedded practices, and more holistic approaches (Linklater, 2014; Marsh et al., 2016; Royse et al., 2016). Yet, academic research describes high dropout rates among Native American populations utilizing Euro-western treatment approaches that do not incorporate traditional healing, cultural identity, or community resources and supports (Linklater, 2014; Marsh et al., 2018; Quinn, 2019).

I want to support our practicum students as they develop the skills to more effectively work with Native Americans. I notice the patterns in program evaluation topics in a déjà vu manner as students shuffle in and out of agencies, but the issues remain consistent. I spent many hours debriefing BIPOC and occasional Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two Spirit, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) practicum student experiences and played an advocacy role within both field agencies and our program field office. As a field liaison conducting site visits and as assessment committee chair monitoring our data for accreditation, I see field instructors regularly mark "not applicable" or "no basis to judge" on student evaluations of practice behavior questions focused on diversity and practice-informed research and research-informed practice.

I worked in two other academic communities where I gained an understanding of regional dynamics and local histories in rural and urban contexts. Students and sometimes staff populations often represent these identities in our programs and assert their voices as groups experiencing and working towards liberation from oppression. However, faculty leadership from diverse groups is often less representative, as our institutions are slower to recruit, hire, and retain diverse faculty without concerted effort (Jacobson, 2012; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008). I went to school in an institution with diverse faculty representation, so I know it is possible but has not been my experience within my former institution. As a result, I regularly needed to reflect on their academic institutional context.

Owning Institutional and Departmental Histories and Realizing Responsibilities

The students enrolled in the course represent the diversity of the institution and program—such as students who are Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, white, LGBTQIA+, and have disabilities. My former institution is situated on land that is the ancestral territories of the Salish and Kalispel people, who were forcibly removed and relocated from the land. The university was among the first with a Black Student Union, African American and Native American Studies (NAS) programs, and an annual student-led powwow that all formed over fifty years ago. Student demand for an NAS program and course offerings began in the 1960s and was implemented in 1970. The university has had Native American faculty in mental health–focused professional degrees (including social work) since the 1970s; however, it has low promotion, tenure, retention, and rehiring for Native American faculty in some disciplines despite institutional commitments to diversity, as well as social justice efforts and commitments at the departmental level (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Jacobson, 2012).

The university graduate program in psychology emphasizes recruiting and training Native American students via the Indians into Psychology (a federally funded program formed in 1992 and locally in 2000) and also informal LGBTQIA+ mentoring. However, most graduate students who are BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ in other disciplines at the institution—including social work— must navigate two worlds of their identity without formal mentoring, peers in the program, or programing designed to help them navigate institutional structures (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Jacobson, 2012). BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ students experience marginalization and oppression within the dominant culture of the campus and practicum settings, but rarely receive support as they need to integrate culturally relevant practices within their substantive area.

The social work department that is the focus of this reflection generally has eight tenure-track lines with a high turnover rate. I ranked third in terms of seniority after seven years in the department. Five new tenure-track faculty were hired in the last five years to replace two faculty who retired, two who resigned within six years of being hired, and one who moved into a center director role. Eight additional faculty left their tenure-track positions in the previous eight years. Many of the faculty who were not retained represented diverse perspectives including Native American, African, Jewish, and LGBTQIA+. Many of the prior faculty included critical pedagogy and Indigenous approaches in their classrooms; however, the high turnover had an impact on the consistent implementation of the stated social justice focus of the MSW curriculum (Harris & González, 2012; Jacobson, 2012). Faculty generally acknowledge that the

high faculty turnover rate is rooted in long-term departmental climate issues that impact faculty retention for those either playing ally roles or representing diverse identities (Jacobson, 2012). A former faculty member archived the institutional governance process and district court records since the 1970s and 1980s at the campus library, which document the stories behind the high turnover patterns, as well as the correlated conflicts and tensions associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts (Jacobson, 2012).

As a result of high turnover, the department faculty have both sets of expertise and persistent shortcomings rooted in the decades of departmental DEI history that consistently repeat themselves. The department is in a small city and a state that some describe as having one long "main street," so we remain connected relationally to former faculty in informal ways within the organizations and social networks that we participate in professionally and personally. We may not have worked directly with the 19 or more tenure-track faculty who worked in the department over the last 14 years; however, the departmental history is "baked into" the way we conduct our daily practices and processes. Harris and González (2012) describe, "the culture of academia, ultimately, is impervious to change because its power structure is designed to reproduce itself" (p. 7). Our inclusion of critical and Indigenous perspectives in our curriculum varies from year to year, but we had the roots of community-engaged and Native American faculty-led initiatives in the department since the 1970s (Jacobson, 2012). I did not learn of these efforts from within the institution; rather, the stories emerged in more casual ways like recognizing the name of a former Native American faculty member in photos posted on social media with her peers from the 1970s who have since become a part of my national mentoring and support network.

Prior to making these national connections, I found myself standing in a void, without the institutional memory and mentorship from other diverse faculty within the department who had successfully navigated the dynamics within this context. I found my company among books and articles by Harris and González (2012) in *Presumed Incompetent*; Jacob (2012), who described departmental faculty dynamics through a small group theoretical lens; and Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2008), whose case examples served as a testimonio to me (Burciaga & Cruz Navarro, 2015). These authors served as mentors—as words on a page—that provided the stories that I needed to hear to know how to navigate my current context. A national BIPOC colleague also named my sense of survivor's guilt, as I chose to stay in the department in a similar diverse embodiment and gained tenure despite facing similar challenges. My family wanted to stay in the area, so I had to chart a course that enabled me to stay when others chose to leave or were pushed out due to the tensions related to DEI efforts. I worked within a broader campus, state, and national network of community-engaged and diverse scholars, so I was able to find mentorship and build my own social network that kept me grounded. As a result, I was able to continue to rebuild the community-engaged and critical perspectives (Harris & González, 2012) in my own teaching despite the continued revolving door of faculty and course staffing.

Research Course Sequence

The high changeover rate resulted in course instructors that changed frequently in our department, which means sometimes course sequences are synced up and sometimes disjointed when another instructor or departmental climate issues make collaboration unrealistic. The

previous instructor of a required introductory research course worked with me to ensure students had a grasp on key research concepts and included an introduction to decolonizing research methods via readings from Tuhiwai Smith (2008) to prepare them for expectations to design a community-engaged and critically informed program evaluation in my course. The research course faculty left after working as an ally on DEI issues and the course was then taught by someone resistant to the DEI efforts. As a result, informal student complaints asserted the courses did not smoothly align now that the course was taught by a heterosexual white cisgender male who taught a "basic research course." His course undoubtably privileged Euro-western ways of knowing—given his casually mentioning never having seen a Native American prior to working at this university—and did not have an assigned textbook or transparent reading list (Linklater, 2014).

As a result of faculty intellectual differences in approach, our course sequence was a source of confusion for students. Harris and González (2012), Jacob (2012), and Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2008) normalized the experience of faculty and student dissonance with differences in approach becoming a tension projected on the diverse faculty. I tried explaining how the issue was emerging in my classroom and what I was doing to address it; however, I could not help but sense the underlying message that I was doing something "different." White student complaints at this university and others like it focus on and problematize the "different" pedagogical practices of "minority" faculty rather than the problem with normalizing whiteness (Jacobson, 2012). Harris and González (2012) note,

> Hiring additional faculty of color is necessary, but does not solve the problem. Rather, what is required is transforming academic culture so that it welcomes and embraces those who are currently regarded as "other" and increases the opportunity for alternative points of view to challenge dominant ideologies and deep-rooted social hierarchies. (p. 8)

I knew my class curriculum and pedagogy aligned with the department values articulated in my position's job posting, which stated commitments to social justice as well as a variety of research methods. I was transparent in my job talk about my decolonizing teaching pedagogy, which included situating Indigenous ways of knowing alongside Euro-western worldview and ideology (Ponterotto, 2005; Tinker, 2009). I included some decolonizing content each semester, as I taught undergraduate research and the graduate course in program evaluation and action research. However, instructors in our program—as I imagine is true in all programs—vary in their pedagogy and socialization practices with the social workers in their classrooms. As a result, students may naturally experience confusion as they navigate contradictory expectations from one course to another—just as they can also expect varying expectations from one supervisor to another or one agency to another. However, I could also sense an unrealistic expectation that I could somehow fix the current embodiment of DEI tensions and the associated emotional residue, which were common structural problems and power dynamics related to diverse identities and perspectives that are never a quick fix (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008).

As a result, I had to make the critical frameworks even more explicit to help students successfully navigate between the two courses. I added social justice–focused readings, lectures,

and replies to questions asked by students in class about what knowledge is considered credible as appropriate references, which I saw as a form of epistemic justice as described by Fricker (2007). The prerequisite instructor told students with no uncertainty that they could not cite non-peer reviewed sources, including dissertations or theses in their course papers; however, dissertations, theses, program evaluations, community reports, Indigenous Research Methods (IRM), and other sources of grassroots and practice-informed research were considered valid sources in a program evaluation context. I had to help students understand the differences between good research, as defined in well-funded knowledge producing research contexts, versus the practical program evaluations in agencies with limited research budgets, time, and access to doctoral-level researchers (Royse et al., 2016).

BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ faculty and students often navigate experiences with marginalization and connection to their identity, culture, and community while "living simultaneously in two worlds" in academic settings (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000, p. 165). Marsh et al. (2016) described, "the blending of Indigenous and Western research methods, knowledge translation, and program development is a concept called Two-eyed Seeing" (p. 4). As a result, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ students in predominantly white, heterosexual, and cisgender institutions often benefit from focused cohorts of students that help them navigate the two worlds and implement their social justice commitments with their communities (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Students who are not BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ may also benefit from critical and decolonizing pedagogical approaches. However, white, heterosexual, and cisgender students may be inexperienced in navigating classrooms, communities, and organizations that do not center, normalize, and privilege their own worldview and experiences (Jacobson, 2012).

Restructuring the Program Evaluation Course

I decided to restructure the program evaluation course given the dynamics noted above. The course included program evaluation and action research when I arrived; however, I broadened the curriculum to include community-based research (Strand et al., 2003), critical participatory action research (CPAR; Sandwick et al., 2018; Torre et al., 2012), and both quantitative and qualitative IRM (Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018; Walter & Anderson, 2013). I was committed to facilitating the program evaluation course in a manner that focused student learning with community engagement and impact. As a very recently tenured faculty member, I felt I had more freedom in how I responded to nudges to resolve student confusion. I was able to talk directly about landmines I previously avoided, as a means of explicitly teaching about our academic versions of controlling systems and structures (Harris & González, 2012; Jacob, 2012; Netting et al., 2004). Students have a foot in both agency contexts and their controlling systems, as well as academic controlling system dynamics (Harris & González, 2012; Netting et al., 2004). If I was asked to explain why students were confused from the prerequisite course to the program evaluation course, I had to role model taking risks in creating a culture change in our public institutional context by centering decolonization, feminism, and Indigenous ways of knowing and engaging that they can apply to their practice contexts.

My restructuring of the course included moving to a blended online and in-person model with required one-on-one instructor consultation at scheduled meeting times and engagement in class

in small groups. I began requiring a one-on-one meeting for all students in the class at the advice of national community-engaged research colleagues who were aware of the dynamics in my department and my commitments to critical community-engaged approaches. The meetings served a dual purpose that included consultation on their project and maintained my awareness of student affect throughout the semester related to course concepts and process (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

I learned from teaching online undergraduate research courses that some students benefited from the pre-recorded lectures available to re-watch until they understood less familiar key course concepts. Additionally, students enrolled in the program evaluation course in previous years often showed up late for 8:00 am lectures with coffee in a disposable cup, sent non-verbal cues indicating they found the content irrelevant with unengaged or dazed looks, and demonstrated that they had not completed the readings. I also struggled with the 8:00 am start time, so on the first day of class I proposed we structure the class in a hybrid format with one hour of lecture and discussion board activities followed by in-person work in small groups of students in similar practice contexts. Since this was my first course with the students and they had been a cohort together for a year, I asked how they liked to make decisions and proceeded to follow their lead. Students could engage as active, self-directed learners who began to apply the course content before the start of the in-person class, which built-in more student responsibility, accountability, and engagement with the later start time and hybrid format (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Brandt, 2020). Students could focus on the most relevant content and were not required to engage with lectures on less relevant topics. I followed best practices in the online format, which meant I kept my lectures brief and focused on the most essential points that ended before students tended to lose interest or capacity for new concepts (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

I had been utilizing the small group structure for the course for a few years, since learning how isolated students felt in developing their program evaluation proposals during story circles at the end of class. Students needed a regular space, with relationships they trusted, to name and normalize the tensions and struggles they felt applying the critical methods in practice. The small group structure gave students a sense of belonging with others navigating similar substantive areas and organizational climates, which resulted in increased engagement with the course materials as they gave and received peer-feedback (Brandt, 2020). I floated around from group to group to consult and then had whole-class discussions, which sometimes included additional spontaneous resource sharing from myself or students that emerged from the themes in one-on-one consultations that week, online posts due before class, or our small group in-class discussions. For example, students inquired about transformative mixed methods design as potential knowledge development processes that could result in shifts in processes and outcomes (Creswell et al., 2007; Martens, 2010; Sweetman et al., 2010). Another student shared a resource on focus group data analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). I often posted resources on the online course platform during class breaks and collectively coached the class at their learning edge for the day, which was often associated with applying liberatory, decolonizing, and critical research methods and concepts. Our experience aligned with Jacobson's (2012) observation that "group work with a decided focus on social justice is implicated as a critical approach for addressing problems created by injustice," as group work "fosters social inclusion, mutual aid, and social action" (p. 278).

Critical Pedagogies in a Public University Context

Public universities often tie their community-engagement mission to land-grant and agricultural college grant histories without acknowledging that public universities are all situated within Indigenous ancestral territories (Lee & Ahtone, 2020; Mitchell, 2017). Yet, collaborative work with diverse communities requires acknowledging history to address those communities' problems (Hill Collins, 2013; Strand et al., 2003). BIPOC and feminist scholars often enter the academy with the intention of liberatory or decolonizing pedagogies that include participatory learning, "teaching for a change" (Hill Collins, 2013, p. 127), an emphasis on wellness/healing, and giving back to and transforming communities (hooks, 1994; Linklater, 2014; Rendón, 2009; Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018). The legacy of BIPOC scholars now inform the critical pedagogy of scholars who teach CPAR, IRM, and decolonizing research and practice to meet the demands of the next generations of diverse students (Rendón, 2009; Sandwick et al., 2018; Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018).

Contemporary practices in many professional schools focus on evidence-based practices that incorporate professional wisdom, the best available empirical evidence, and client/participant values and preferences (Royse et al., 2016). However, the best available empirical evidence within a global colonial society is often rooted in existing power structures and information-machinery that privilege information, money, and people in a top-down manner that emphasizes production and consumption of knowledge (Berg & Seeber, 2016; hooks, 1994; Sohng, 1996). As a result, decisions that have an impact on people often do not include their input and consideration of their perspectives, worldview, or experiences (hooks, 1994; Sohng, 1996; Tinker, 2009). Participatory democracies, Participatory Action Research, and program evaluations situated within local community organizations are a means of knowledge production that is accessible to graduate students who can collaborate with community members experiencing the issue as co-leaders or co-researchers who pursue answers to local problems (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Hill Collins, 2013; Sohng, 1996).

Indigenous populations typically have worldviews different than settler colonial cultures (Linklater, 2014). All groups have a worldview which (a) includes "assumptions about the order of nature and the place of humanity within it"; (b) decides "how order relates to and is affected by the passage of time; (c) "determines what is virtue and what is deviance"; and (d) "asks ultimate questions of life, death, and meaning" (Tinker, 2009, p. 1). Research paradigms are rooted in a worldview where positivism presumes deviance can be described and prescribed with an intervention (Ponterotto, 2005). Positivism presumes objective and quantifiable observations with experimental control (Royse et al., 2016). Positivism that frames deviance from non-Indigenous perspectives may be viewed as a form of domination, labeling of deficits, and white supremacy (Mitchell, 2017). In contrast, Indigenous statistics focus on interconnected structural causes for disparities (Walter & Anderson, 2013).

Constructive-interpretivism creates a thick description, providing deeper insights into lived experiences, which aligns with views of humans as interdependent and in harmony with nature in a manner that is often consistent with Indigenous worldviews (Linklater, 2014; Ponterotto, 2005). For example, Indigenous worldviews often take community responsibility for

maintaining relationships focused on building knowledge and healing, rather than punishing or criminalizing misbehavior (Linklater, 2014).

Critical-ideological approaches focus on dialogue, unequal power, an unapologetic activist scholar agenda, freedom from oppression, and pressure to change the status quo in a manner consistent with decolonizing and CPAR approaches (Ponterotto, 2005). Decolonizing practices include taking responsibility for naming colonial contexts, unsettling settler normalcy and innocence, changing power structures, and critiquing and revising data collection and analyses processes (Linklater, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Land acknowledgements are a common practice in university settings, which may raise public consciousness of Indigenous connection to land, sovereignty, history, and cultural rights as a small step towards sustained and equitable relationship, reconciliation, and just outcomes (Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018). However, Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that reconciliation is a goal that is a settler move to innocence. Decolonizing efforts should instead focus on including Indigenous content in the curriculum with culturally relevant pedagogies, Indigenous land ownership, as well as sovereignty over organizational structure, processes, and research (Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Hill Collins (2013) also writes about the idea of unsettling conversations and transformative work from a Black perspective. Smith and Tuhiwai Smith (2018) provide specific guidance on reflection questions from Indigenous perspectives focused on "whose interests are the focus … who has responsibility … and who they are accountable to" (pp. 10–11). Decolonizing methodologies offer a means to dismantle racism within institutions, which in professional schools like social work include the university and our organizational partners in the community. However, students need frameworks to understand community-engaged practices that include collaboration and partnership with those closest to the problems in order to create change, rather than use, tokenize, or merely consult (Kranias, 2018; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Marsh et al., 2016).

Graduate education often includes research and multicultural training, which may include community-based research concepts, particularly in higher education and professional schools (Mitchell, 2017; Strand et al., 2003). Student activism during the 1960s resulted in ethnic studies programs that included an emphasis on equitable dialogue, community engagement, centering BIPOC knowledge, community partnerships and leadership, critical consciousness, and analysis of power and causes of social problems, equity, racial, economic, and social justice, as well as activism (Mitchell, 2017). Mitchell (2017) describes that "community engagement strategies have been a part of the teaching and service missions of institutions of higher education since their inception" and that "the tenants of intersectionality can be employed to inform and create a community engagement practice that addresses the interconnected structures of inequality in order to affect meaningful change" (p. 35). Students have been agents of change on campus and in engaged communities for at least half a century (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). The writings of BIPOC community–engaged scholar graduates describe possibilities for graduate student socialization into community engagement (Evans et al., 2009). However, students attend class and practice social work in colonial contexts that we rarely explicitly name.

Transformative Pedagogy and Research Methodology in Colonial Settings

The CPAR and IRM supplement the more positivistic framing of Royse et al. (2016), which was the textbook in my MSW program and the course I inherited at this institution. Royse et al. (2016) describe how students can develop an ability to critically evaluate empirical evaluations and research to practice settings, which is commonly described as research-informed practice. Practice-informed research and critical perspectives on practice contexts receive less attention in the chapters focused on assessing client needs and satisfaction with programs, as well as understanding organizational processes through logic models (Royse et al., 2016). The logic modeling process is a useful tool for students to understand their practice context and ask questions of agency leaders, and it is a means for students to articulate social problems, underlying theory, organizational processes, and measurable outcomes (Royse et al., 2016). However, the organizational and societal context is rarely explicitly situated within colonialism (Linklater, 2014). Colonial processes tend to develop consistent organizational cultures that can be analyzed and understood within the various educational, medical, legal, and organizational settings (public, non-profit, and private). Students can learn to understand and analyze their role within organizational and disciplinary contexts to assess what current realities are and what might be feasible to change within a year or two (Linklater, 2014).

Royse et al.'s (2016) ethics chapter provides an appropriate example of seeking approval for research in reservations from the appropriate tribal authority; however, the community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) content centers positivistic perspectives that presume research rigor is a mismatch with community collaboration. CBPAR is described as capacity-building and participant-driven with commendable goals, but also as an unrealistic and likely conflict-ridden process (Royse et al., 2016). Ethical frameworks provide guidance on what you ought to do given the givens; however, mainstream ethical frameworks often maintain the status quo and are "incongruent with the survival ethics required by the marginalized" (De La Torre, 2013, p. 8). In contrast, ethics from the margins can disrupt normalized and legitimized discourses with representation and voice that is a better match for populations experiencing marginalization and oppression (De La Torre, 2013). In contrast, CPAR provides an integration of ethics and science that enables a more relational, responsive, and active approach to fulfill community responsibilities in a less-fragmented manner (Rendón, 2009; Sandwick et al., 2018; Torre et al., 2012). CPAR can lead to policy change, research-informed practices, and practice-informed research (Sandwick et al., 2018).

Individual Academic Identities and Standpoints

I continually work, sometimes mid-lecture, mid-dialogue, or even mid-sentence to reframe with critical perspectives in order to create more culturally safe spaces. My own commitments to decolonizing and Indigenizing my teaching is rooted in both my own complex intersectional identities that result in experiences with oppression, discrimination, and marginalization within settler colonial contexts (Crenshaw, 2011; Mitchell, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Palmer (1998) asserts that "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10); "good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness" (p. 11); and "teaching is always done at the intersection of personal and public life" (p. 17). Mitchell and Coll (2017) describe similar

concepts including authenticity, positionality (identities within sociopolitical systems), power, and vulnerability. I intuitively recognize diverse students' experiences as a result of my own lived experiences with my intersectional identities, which results in connection and ease in helping navigate a genuine set of practices students believe are relevant to the communities they work with and for (Mitchell, 2017). Student areas of social work practice often overlap with their own identities and maintain sustained commitments to their own civic engagement (Mitchell, 2017). The process is a form of referencing and integrating their own experiences with outside perspectives as a way of validating their experience and strengthening their professional voice. In essence, the critical reflection in the context of one-on-one and group work is a form of multicultural sustained relationships and mutual aid that simultaneously centers and supports BIPOC students and raises the consciousness of non-BIPOC students who seek to spend their careers working with BIPOC communities (Jacobson, 2012). However, I seek to be consistently aware, as Palmer (1998) notes:

> For years, African Americans were silent in the presence of whites—silent, that is, about their true thoughts and feelings. For years, women were similarly silent in the presence of men. Today, all of that is changing as Blacks and women move from the margins to the center and speak truths that people like me need to hear. (p. 45)

Community-engaged work that centers BIPOC voices in classrooms, and community-based research, has shifted from an emphasis on ethnic studies to many disciplines in the last two decades—to now include BIPOC asserting the need to center their voices in the social change movements to address their experiences with oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. Affirmative Action scholars state that generations of BIPOC people are now tenured professors, lawyers, judges, and business owners who write, engage with their communities, and influence the ways we go about our public/professional and personal lives (Crenshaw, 2011). My own commitments to critical approaches to community-engaged teaching are rooted in supporting emerging BIPOC leaders who can spend their careers seeking the societal and institutional changes needed in order to bring wellness/healing, transformation, and social justice to their own communities.

Examples of Transformative Program Evaluation Methods in Indigenous Contexts

Public universities in regions where graduates of professional schools will likely work with a high percentage of Indigenous populations require curriculum development that prepares students to be emerging leaders with skills for effective engagement in diverse communities (Hill Collins, 2013; Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018). CPAR, community-based research, and decolonizing research methods and practices provide a great starting place to help students think through approaches to program evaluation and research that are "transformative rather than ameliorative" (Mitchell, 2017, p. 38; Strand et al., 2003). Tuhiwai Smith (2008) provides guidance on twenty-five decolonizing practices and research methods such as celebrating survival, connecting, democratizing, and Indigenizing.

Students and scholars often seek to reframe engagement to be more culturally safe. Focus groups can be redesigned to incorporate more relational circles with a shared meal to build trust,

respect, humor, and support (Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2009). Circle rituals can begin with a land acknowledgement led by a local leader, make local smudging materials available, and provide research participants with a small gift as a means of creating a healing and reciprocal process (Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2009). Circles create research settings for sharing stories and experiences holistically, which allows research to emerge from the organic process of the group where participants can share and be heard (Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009). The researcher is relational, participates in the research, and develops a sense of support among the group and a reflexivity that allows the circle participants to struggle, name the origins of problems, create, respond to, and ask their own research questions (Baskin, 2005). Hearing others' stories may bring up memories or emotions, which can result in mutual sharing of experiences and can create a healing and/or transformative process (Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009).

The relational focus of IRM includes (a) emphasis on giving back to community that may involve "addressing structural inequalities and social change" (Baskin, 2005, p. 177); (b) participants checking and approving transcripts and research findings for accuracy as participants engaged in the "interpretation and analysis" (Baskin, 2005, p. 180) of the data via their sharing and listening; (c) confirmation that data analysis results represent the story told and the needs of the community as a group that co-creates the group story and knowledge developed; and (d) open lines of communication for follow-up by participants as requested, as they may want to share additional stories or experiences after the initial data collection occurs (Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2009).

Graduate Student as Knower and Equal

Instructors are able to create community-engaged and socially just outcomes via institutional change and knowledge production efforts when Indigenous people and other groups that experience marginalization's perspectives are centered in higher education and curriculum (Mitchell, 2017). CPAR and decolonizing research and practice approaches inform pedagogy focused on critical dialogues between students, community partners, and instructor. Contemporary community engagement work requires frameworks that are strengths-based; center groups that are underrepresented and working toward social justice on their own terms; and include an analysis of power, positionality, systemic causes of disparities, needed institutional changes, and critique of inclusion assumptions (Mitchell, 2017; Smith & Tuhiwai Smith, 2018).

Indigenous pedagogy includes using stories as a means of student reflection on worldview and motivations that can be reevaluated in the safety of a classroom setting (Fire, 2006). I noticed students get the punchline of the case examples centering Indigenous ways of knowing, without my playing a direct role, given the more explicit focus on Indigenous and decolonizing perspectives. The use of story in teaching gives students a chance to see their own reaction to the story and what they would do to identify key issues to address or change (Brandt, 2020; Fire, 2006). Engaging in the case study discussion in small groups, then debriefing as a larger class gives students the chance to engage in the process of decolonizing practices where "more than the reflexivity of locating one's self in one's work one must locate and examine one's

motivation, one's agenda, one's worldview, and the larger social context, including the historical context, when working with Indigenous communities" (Fire, 2006, p. 5).

Students can apply CPAR skills in collaboration with Indigenous communities within organizations where they have practicums and sustained existing relationships (hooks, 1994; Rendón, 2009). Students can work in substantively focused small groups and discuss real-world engagement and problem-solving that enable fluid, dynamic, and critical development of their projects (hooks, 1994; Rendón, 2009). hooks (1994) notes that "when a classroom is truly engaged, it's dynamic. It's fluid. It's *always* changing" (p. 158). Students who commit to developing their program evaluations in collaboration with community partners—and with the critical feedback and accountability of peers in weekly small groups—focused on applying key CPAR concepts to their program evaluation work. Palmer (1998) describes critical classroom engagement with peers on a subject of interest to students, as "community can do much to rescue us from our ignorance, bias, and self-deception if we are willing to submit our assumptions, our observations, our theories—indeed ourselves—to scrutiny" (p. 104).

Creating Change in Graduate Higher Education and Community Organizations

Critical and community-engaged research is an excellent means of developing students as leaders who can collaborate to develop best practices rooted in community needs/values, professional wisdom, and the best available empirical evidence (Royse et al., 2016). Students socialized with critical perspectives and experiences with civic engagement that address community-defined problems have the frameworks necessary to be change agents (Strand et al., 2003). Programs with commitments to social justice can be guided by "intersectional community engagement" to remedy social problems (Mitchell, 2017, p. 41; Strand et al., 2003). Community-engaged partnerships can help create intersectional coalitions focused on creating equitable and just communities (Mitchell, 2017).

The specific course modifications had several positive outcomes; however, the course could add more explicit reflection on insider-outsider identities for researchers working in Indigenous communities (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Non-Indigenous students reported feeling unsettled with a research project that was continually shifting and changing to include more critical reflection, inclusive methods, and social justice–focused outcomes normalizing genuine and dynamic engagement that disrupts ethnocentric worldviews (hooks, 1994; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Program evaluation in practicums is a means for ongoing collaborative community change work to create a more equitable and just world (Mitchell, 2017). Social work faculty can revise and restructure explicit and implicit curriculum to create institutional change starting with disrupting the colonial frameworks embedded in the curriculum and processes of our own classrooms, departments, universities, and practicum placements. Students and field instructors need to experience guided and supported challenge and cultural safety in order to create similarly transformative experiences for their clients and participants. Students engaged in a critical and community-engaged research process can then develop the capacity or elasticity to accept feedback and revise their research and practices accordingly, which are essential skills when working with BIPOC communities (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Jacobson, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith,

2008). Similarly, diverse students often need the social supports of mentors and peers to name their experiences, receive guidance in navigating institutional structures, and work towards developing culturally grounded interventions focused on wellness and healing (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; hooks, 1994; Marsh et al., 2016). Instructors play various roles meeting students at their learning edges including coach, motivational guide, facilitator, consultant, and mentor (Brandt, 2020). Students who build support systems with a sense of belonging and responsibility are more likely to engage in ongoing efforts to co-create just, equitable, healthy, and whole communities wherever they work (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Hill Collins, 2013; Netting et al., 2004). My best mentoring relationships are reciprocal; students, faculty, and community partners in good elastic relationships can work together to create more socially just and healed communities.

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