



Students' Experiences of an Anishinaabe-Centered Social Work Education Program

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WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This article, which is the second in a series of three, examines the social work education program at the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare at University of Minnesota, Duluth (the Center), and its effect on 8 students. 8 students were interviewed, more were served.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

The Center's Anishinaabe-centered social work curriculum aims to support students' cultural and professional identity development, address Indigenous erasure, strengthen and build tribal capacities, and reduce overrepresentation of Indigenous children and families in the child welfare system. The Center decolonizes social work education by aligning social justice values with the needs and desires of Tribal communities" through

- The history of genocide of Indigenous people
- Current child welfare policy
- Effects of erasing Indigenous people and culture
- Anishinaabe language, spirituality, and culture

Indigenous participants and White participants described similar experiences:

- A welcoming and supportive atmosphere that encouraged meaningful relationship-building
- Learning about the transformative Anishinaabe worldview
- Exposure to accurate U.S. history and child welfare policy regarding Indigenous peoples
- Moving beyond shame

Each group also had unique takeaways:

Indigenous Students

- Experienced healing and empowerment
- Felt nurtured/supported in their development as Indigenous people and professionals
- Cultivated cultural and spiritual connections and practices
- Learned how to teach erased history

White Students

- Increased "heart" education
- Noticed culturally based assumptions
- Experienced profound shifts in cultural identities
- Recognized others' cultural perspectives for personal and spiritual growth

It is completely transformational to my own self-understanding, my own understanding of what it means to be in the helping profession (White alum, p. 10).

Everybody needs to heal from what happened. I think we created this environment [for healing] and that's why the Center has been so successful and continues to be (Indigenous MSW student, now professor, p. 10).

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Child welfare workers are called upon to be open and willing to learn from Indigenous knowledge and cultural and spiritual perspectives. This knowledge can be embedded into anti-colonial practices that uplift all children served.

A commitment to continuous learning includes challenging the status quo and implementing new practices to better meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families.