Relational learning: Embedding Indigenous ways in whitestream social work

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Social work globally acknowledges its need to decolonise its education to produce social workers who can work responsively alongside marginalised Indigenous peoples. Yet the problem is that universities have struggled to operationalise the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into social work education. Uniquely, this study explored relationships that impact on the integration of Indigenous content for academics in social work education. A qualitative approach was used, interviewing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The outcome of the study produced a relational model for academics that focuses upon six key relationships an academic has: to self; with students; to Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures; with peers; with those in power and the whitestream; with elders, kaumatuas and Indigenous communities. With the goal of decolonising social work education, this relational model provides insight into different ways that an academic may develop and embed their integration of Indigenous content into their teaching. This study offers a relational model that could promote curriculum change in social work, as well as in other disciplines beyond Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Keywords: decolonising, social work education, whitestream, Indigenous knowledges, relationships

Introduction

This article was written on the lands of the Kaurna people, and the researchers would like to acknowledge their elders past, present, and emerging. The Kaurna people are the traditional custodians of the land where we, as authors, work, write and live. This study involved 18 participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, from the lands that we now call Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The authors would like to acknowledge that without these participants this study would not have been possible. The term "Aboriginal" is used to identify people of Aboriginal descent from Australia; the term "Māori" is used to identify the Indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand; the term "Indigenous" is used to identify First Nations people more broadly.

The principal researcher involved in this research study, Libby Hammond, identifies as a white female social work educator and researcher. In 2021 Libby completed her PhD titled *A Trans-Tasman Relational Model for Academics Integrating Indigenous Knowledges and Perspectives into Whitestream Social Work Education*. This article is based upon this thesis. "Tasman" is a colloquial term that incorporates both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand; the Tasman is the sea between both countries. Libby has taught topics alongside Aboriginal co-teachers in social work, including decolonising social work.

The second author, Keith Miller, supervised this PhD research project. Keith identifies as a white male social worker and educator; he was born in the United Kingdom and grew up in Australia.

Social work globally acknowledges its need to decolonise its education (Coates et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2013; Green & Bennett, 2018; Ife, 2019; Tascón, 2019). Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand have followed this lead and sought to produce graduates who are culturally responsive and inclusive when working alongside Indigenous peoples, including those who are disadvantaged and marginalised (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2016; Social Workers Registration Board, 2016). Indigenous academics such as Walter, Baltra-Ulloa, Bennett, Green, Fejo-King, Mataira and Duthie point out the need for the profession to address the context in which Indigenous content is being taught, by directly addressing whiteness, and to turn the racial/cultural lens onto itself and not to see "inclusion" of the "other" as the sole solution (Walter & Baltra-Ulloa, 2019). Aboriginal social work academics have appealed for social work education to heed the call to embed Indigenous knowledges into social work curricula, and to acknowledge the role that whiteness and Western knowledge and values have played in social work education. Aboriginal academic Duthie (2018) highlights that, until social work education in Australia takes this appeal seriously and commits to this end with "genuineness, and a sense of obligation" (p. 15), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now live with the impact of trauma, and will continue to live with it into the future. Initially, this study planned to compare the integration process on both sides of the Tasman, with the thought that Aotearoa/New Zealand may hold a key to the integration of Indigenous content in social work. However, it became evident that academics in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly the Indigenous participants in this study, experienced very similar barriers and enablers due to the nature of the whitestream academy. On both sides of the Tasman in the whitestream academy, Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are not central to the teaching of social work, as many similar challenges and barriers exist to align such knowledges alongside Western knowledges (Hammond, 2021). We argue that, by acknowledging these similarities in the whitestream academy on both sides of the Tasman, we may learn from each other ways of operationalising decolonising practices. One of the ways we found was that, if academics apply a relational model to their integration of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into their teaching, it will support the goal of decolonisation and epistemological equality.

Several terms require explanation. The term "whitestream" is used instead of "mainstream" to decentre whiteness. Whitestream education centres white, European, middle-class, analytic/linear practices, principles, values and morals (Milne, 2017, p. 6; Penetito, 2019, p. 144). Whitestream includes and highlights racist aspects of social work education within Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand and continues to perpetuate colonisation. Whitestreaming is not solely the work of white people, since people of colour may play an active role by also promoting and maintaining white models as the "goal and standard" (Urrieta, 2010, p. 181). The term "Western" refers to a socio-political concept with ideas, beliefs, values, knowledges and ways of living that have been influenced by Britain, North America, regions of Europe, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. In this article, the term "decolonisation" is defined as "the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches" (Cull et al., 2018, n.p.), while challenging and disrupting the structures, dominant discourse and power that maintains the status quo of the whitestream. This values and revitalises Indigenous knowledges to a place of epistemological equality alongside Western knowledges.

Distinctively, this research explored the experiences of 18 Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics navigating the whitestream, eight from Australia and 10 from Aotearoa/New Zealand. This occurred at three universities in Australia and two universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand between 2017 and 2021. To understand the challenges and barriers that academics face when integrating Indigenous knowledges

within social work curricula, this research sought to explore the question "How do relationships impact the integration of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives for academics in social work education?". From the data that was collected, six key relationships were interpreted as being key to the integration process: an academic's relationship to self; an academic's relationship with students; an academic's relationship to Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures; an academic's relationship with peers; an academic's relationship to those in power and the whitestream; and, importantly, an academic's relationship with elders, *kaumatuas* (Māori elder) and Indigenous communities. This article is an overview of the six relationships which will be followed by future articles that will expand upon each relationship in more detail.

Background

Globally, social work education has a history of basing its knowledge upon Western ethnocentric knowledges and ideologies, and there is an impetus for social work to be decolonised (Fejo-King & Mataira, 2015; Gray et al., 2013; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Social work in both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand has recognised its need to decolonise its education to produce culturally responsive graduates who can work effectively alongside marginalised Indigenous peoples. The social work governing bodies, Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Aotearoa/New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), have appealed for social work to be decolonised and support epistemological equality, where Indigenous knowledges and perspectives become equal to Western knowledges within the curriculum (McNabb, 2019; Zubrzycki et al., 2014).

Some of the tensions that social work experiences in Australia are due in part to its history, including its involvement in the colonising project and its reliance upon theories and practices established in the Northern hemisphere. Social work has played and continues to play a role in removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and supporting policies that have caused intergenerational trauma, loss of culture and distrust towards social workers (Bennett, 2019; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Tascón, 2019). Consequently, the AASW has called for social work to decolonise its practice and to position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, values and skills at the centre of its learning and teaching processes (Green & Baldry, 2013; Zubrzycki et al., 2014).

Similarly, in Aotearoa/New Zealand social work has experienced a tension between the drive to prepare social work graduates for the increasing labour market and for practice and education to "become more indigenous" so that it can more effectively serve local service users (Beddoe & Harington, 2015, p. 33). An aspect of alleviating this tension is through bicultural practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Māori academic Leland Ruwhiu (2009) argues that "throughout social work history in New Zealand, its theoretical foundations have largely been devoid of any Māori understanding of healing and wellness" (p. 118). More recently, non-Indigenous academic David McNabb's (2019) research found that, in higher education, there was a commitment to decolonising social work education that included *Te Tiriti* (Treaty of Waitangi), biculturalism, decolonising practices, and epistemological equality, yet the programs struggled to operationalise that commitment and sustain momentum.

One solution to operationalise integrating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into curricula is for universities to employ Indigenous academics to teach the content. Yet the reality in the whitestream academy within Australia is that there is an underrepresentation of Aboriginal academic staff (Bennett, 2021; Universities Australia, 2020). As the first author found as she sought to recruit Aboriginal academics for this research project, many social work departments in Australia do not have an Aboriginal

academic at all; therefore, it is more likely that social work students will have non-Indigenous academics teaching them Indigenous content.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand the importance of partnerships and relationships to the integration process was highlighted in an article by Cairns et al. in 1998. This article outlined five types of educational partnerships/relationships to maintain a culturally safe learning environment, ensuring professional rigour and cross-cultural learning within social work education (Cairns et al., 1998, p. 116). The first was the relationship that a Māori academic would have with their Māori community. The second was the intergenerational relationships that connected Māori teaching staff with elders, connecting them with traditional knowledge and guardianship of traditional knowledge. Thirdly, the relationship between Māori students and their family members was specified. The fourth relationship was an educational one between Māori tribes and tertiary institutions that provided tribally based teaching and learning experiences to students. The final partnership/relationship identified was between non-Indigenous educators, institutional structures and Indigenous peoples.

Aboriginal academics and Indigenous academics face numerous complex cultural and systemic barriers within whitestream universities as highlighted in literature from both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand (Bennett, 2021; Green et al., 2018; Kidman & Chu, 2017; Kidman et al., 2015; McAllister et al., 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Naepi, 2019). For example, Aboriginal social work academic participants in a recent study in Australia were reported to say of their white social work colleagues that "at times, social work academics were racist and exclusionary" (Bennett, 2021, p. 8). Aboriginal social work academics are also expected to manage cultural content exclusively, and Indigenous students are not supported into academia (Bennett, 2021). Such research results appeared to support the need for further research focusing upon the context of the whitestream academy, rather than specifically on the content that was being taught. Therefore, this study sought to understand the challenges and barriers that academics face when integrating Indigenous knowledges within social work curricula.

Situating the research

The third cultural space concept, or the cultural interface, was adopted to situate the research, both theoretically and methodologically, in the space in between the Indigenous space and the non-Indigenous space (Bhabha, 1994; Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; Nakata, 2007a; Zubrzycki & Crawford, 2013). Dudgeon and Fielder (2006) engage with Bhabha's (1994) notion of the third space, and they explain that this is a place of tension and uncertainty, where we argue that Indigenous theories and the colonisers' Western theories may come together and find commonalities and work side by side, even under tension. The space in between is neither the space of the coloniser nor the colonised, but a contested space, where difference needs to be understood so new understandings and ways of doing can emerge.

Nakata (2013) explains that if academics focus upon "worrying about and policing whether what we think and do is Indigenous or Western, then our minds are diverted from improving life-enhancing outcomes for Indigenous people" (p. 302). Nakata (2013) highlights the need to work within the third space or "middle ground" and within this space:

> [It] will likely reveal just how intricate and open to interpretation our scholarly dance around worldviews, knowledge and practice is. More attention to that middle ground, the cultural interface, will surely produce more complex and intricate analysis and language to describe and respond to what we find there. (p. 302)

This resonates with the values of social work to focus upon increasing life-enriching outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Understanding the whitestream system and context through Indigenous standpoint theory at the cultural interface allows for an unsettling of Western constructs of knowledge and provides opportunities for Indigenous scholarship to be integrated (Nakata, 2007b; Rigney, 2001); it can result in what Rigney describes as "'undisciplining' of the disciplines" (Rigney, 2001, p. 7) in many areas in academia (Nakata, 2007a, p. 224), including social work. In the social work academic environment, there is a gap in research, as pointed out by Bennett (2021), who cites "the impact of the rapid changes and curriculum transformation in the social work sector" (p. 3). This is due in part to the need to integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing into the curriculum, but it has yet to be fully studied. Aboriginal social work academics' thoughts, views and perspectives are underrepresented within this space (Bennett, 2021, p. 3). Similar to Bennett's article, this study includes the voices of Indigenous social work academics, yet uniquely adds the voices of Indigenous academics from Aotearoa/New Zealand to the Australian context. This study provides a relational model that has the potential to support curriculum transformation both in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand in social work, and also in other disciplines.

Method

Methodology

Both critical theory and decolonising approaches offer analyses that make the power dynamics visible within society and support social justice (Kovach, 2009, p. 92), which resonates with social work.

Critical theory proposes to create space within the academy for decolonising thought and Indigenous knowledges (Kovach, 2009, p. 93). Critical theory "sees power as available to be used, rather than just oppressive" (Payne, 2014, p. 329), and this is useful in analysing discourse through cultural and social relations. Critical theory provided a lens to critically view the data and assisted in creating space to analyse the academy for decolonising thought and Indigenous knowledges (Kovach, 2009, p. 93). Within the context of this study, critical theory was utilised to investigate what is seen as legitimised discourses of power that inform the academics of what to teach, what resources to use and who should teach what. An analysis of power was crucial within this study to reveal what Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) explain as the hegemonic/ideological message that is being imparted in the case of social work education to social work students (p. 291). A criticism of critical theory has been its failure to deliver to Indigenous communities (Smith, 2012, p. 188); therefore, Indigenous critical theory has been applied within the third cultural space.

A decolonising process adds value to the third cultural space. Paulé Ruwhiu's (2019) research advocates for "a decolonising process that is embedded into social work education as a central tenet promot[ing] a structured process that caters to all the participants" (p. 99). A decolonising process ensures that Indigenous knowledges and perspectives are integrated into the whole foundation of social work education. As Ruwhiu (2019) suggests, the decolonising process provides a filter through which to screen other paradigms. This is especially important to ensure that the knowledge is relevant and locally based, rather than a one-size-fits-all international approach.

Research design

The research study included qualitative, semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, with the responses led by the participants, allowing the voices of the participants to be heard, as they brought their meaning to their answers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Ethical approval was gained through the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, project number 7605. Participating universities were selected because they offered established social work degrees and they were geographically diverse. To recruit participants, heads of departments of several universities were contacted in both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Once ethics approval was granted by each of the participating universities, email invitations were sent to academics who taught social work topics to ask if they would like to participate in the study.

Sample

A sample size of 18 participants were purposively selected for their knowledge and experience in teaching social work students, eight from Australia and 10 from Aotearoa/New Zealand. Not all participants had social work degrees, yet they taught social work students. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants were included in this study. As observed by Bennett (2021), there is a small population of Aboriginal social work academics employed in universities across Australia. However, neither of the two participating universities in Australia employed an Aboriginal academic in social work. Therefore, an amendment was made to the ethics approval to seek Aboriginal academics outside of the initial participating universities, and one Aboriginal participant agreed to participate. This is a significant limitation to this study; however, it also highlights the situation for social work education in Australia. Often Aboriginal academics are alone and are the sole voice within whitestream social work departments in Australia. The one Aboriginal participant's voice in this study was joined by six Indigenous voices from across the Tasman, both Māori and Samoan academics from Aotearoa/New Zealand, who shared and supported many of their Aboriginal counterpart's comments, as they navigated a very similar whitestream academy.

Interviews were generally conducted in person, including interviewing the 10 participants in Aotearoa/New Zealand in person; although, due to diverse locations in Australia, one participant was interviewed via telephone and one via Skype. Interviewing participants in person gave a sense of flexibility, adaptability, cultural awareness and space for narrative within each interview, which suited both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

Analysis

Each interview was transcribed and aspects of decolonisation (Kovach, 2009, p. 93) and critical theory (Payne, 2014, p. 329) were used to interpret the findings through a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The coding process was driven by the data and, in the process of making meaning from the data, an inductive method produced clear evidence that relationships played an important role in the integration process, even though the interview questions did not focus upon relationships. The findings were presented in the form of an ecological model that was initially developed based upon the work of Dr George Otero and Susan Chambers-Otero (2000) and Dr Ann Milne (2013).

Aotearoa/New Zealand non-Indigenous academic and educator Dr Ann Milne's power lenses learning model (2004), a reiteration of an ecological model of teaching developed by Dr George Otero and Susan Chambers-Otero (2000), enables educators to reimagine education ecologically by connecting the interrelationships of organisms and their environment. Otero and Chambers-Otero's model provided recontextualisation of education, focusing upon the context in which the learning occurs, in this case

social work within the whitestream academy. This model encourages educators to become multidimensional to think "outside of the box", emphasising the power of the personal and relational in learning (Otero & Chambers-Otero, 2000, p. 3) and in teaching (Milne, 2004). The interpretation of this idea led to the investigation of how social work education and academics teaching social work could become multidimensional.

Aboriginal academic and Associate Professor in Education Karen Martin (2009) also discusses the interface of teaching and learning. Martin (2009) explains that "teaching is intensely relational. To teach well requires some sophisticated and mature knowledge of the relationships to knowledge, to self, to students and to schools and communities" (p. 75). It became evident during data analysis that there were key relationships that were interpretable from the data.

The findings from both countries, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, were presented together to provide an overview of the related themes, rather than presenting the data from each country as a scientific A versus B, or in this case Australia versus Aotearoa/New Zealand type of comparison. I (the first author) recontextualised and reconfigured Otero and Chambers-Otero's (2000) and Milne's (2013) models, placing the focus upon academics rather than students. This led to the creation of a relational model that visually represented key themes from the data, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Relational model
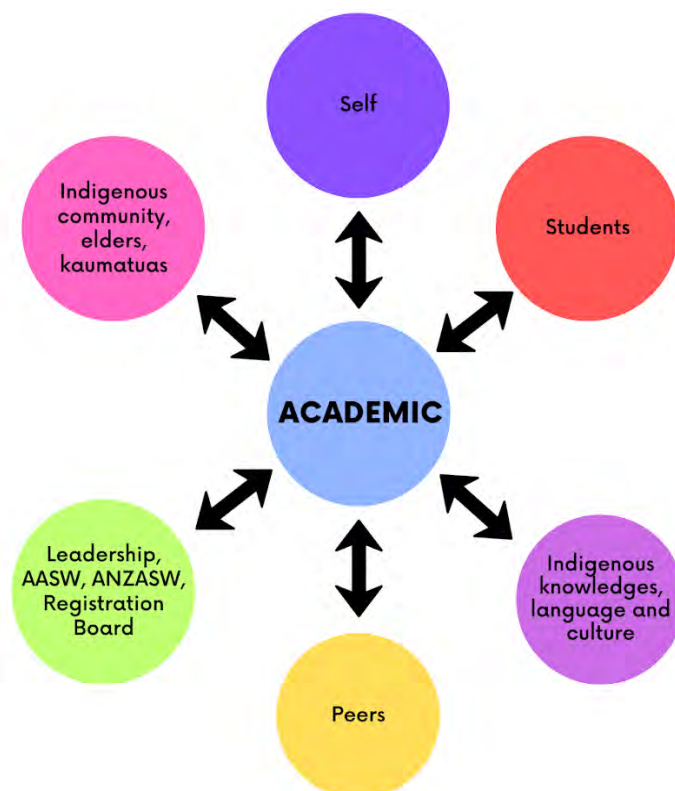
This figure highlights the key relationships that an academic may consider when integrating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum. The Leadership, AASW, ANZASW and Registration Board circle signifies key elements in the relationship an academic may have with power and the whitestream in social work education.

Findings

These relationships were common to all the participants, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, and on either side of the Tasman, as they navigated integrating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the whitestream academy. I have chosen to let the voices of participants be heard, particularly the voices of Indigenous academics, as historically in research their voices have been marginalised. Pseudonyms are used to de-identify the participants.

The academic's relationship to self

Participants reflected upon the way that they taught, and thought about how they integrated Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into their teaching. Their self-reflection and self-consciousness gave them a self-awareness about their own identity, including "being themselves" or being their "desired identity" and presenting a genuine and authentic self to students, including a cultural self. Several academics discussed what was interpreted as a "desired identity"—an identity that reflected how they would like to be seen, not just by students, but also by those in power.

The Indigenous academics, on both sides of the Tasman, felt that one of their main attributes in their teaching was being able to bring themselves to their teaching, since being themselves allowed them to teach Indigenous content more effectively. Sam, an Aboriginal academic from Australia, reflected upon how their cultural identity played a pivotal role in their teaching, and how their teaching was centred upon their identity, their Aboriginality and relationships: "Very much Aboriginal life, lived experience, epistemologies, … so very much talking, yarning, structure, a flexible structure."

The Indigenous participants felt being themselves often challenged the status quo of the academy, as Evelyn, another Indigenous participant from Aotearoa/New Zealand, explained:

> I'm aware that I'm kind of not like a lot of people that teach. So, there are—this is quite shocking—probably three Pacific academics in this university, so I'm not what people usually find themselves sitting in front of. So, I think, good, let's do it differently then, so that's kind of how I approach it. And I haven't heard too many complaints, so I'm hoping it's okay.

Anahera identified as both Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori people, generally New Zealanders of European decent) and recognised the need to understand her own relationship with "self"—her desired self and how she wanted to be perceived in the context of her teaching. Knowing who she was, being authentic and genuine in who she was, also appeared to enable her to teach more authentically and genuinely.

> For me it's just bringing who I am … all of who I am … being Māori, Pākehā, being an older woman, my role, status in life, mother, grandmother, aunty, great aunty, all that comes with me, practitioner, manager … so I use all of that … that's how I teach people … so don't try to be something that you are not. So, from *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world) all those important values [and] principles that underpin Te Ao Māori come with me.

A sense of a "monocultural self" was interpreted from the Euro-Australian participants in that they appeared to be aware of their raced selves. Many had critically reflected upon how their race and culture had influenced their sense of self, their positioning and their privilege. As academics teaching in social work, they were all aware of Aboriginal issues and needs, to varying degrees, but they appeared not to have a sense of bicultural self, as had their Aotearoa/New Zealand counterparts. This was illustrated by Matilda's comment:

Oh, look, my family's Anglo background, Anglo-Australian background. I guess, growing up in a farming community, I wasn't really tuned into Indigenous culture at that time, even though kids around me and families around me were Indigenous. But I do remember going to university was a big turning point for me in terms of reflecting on my values and my position in society, as you do in social work.

Another aspect of the relationship to self that was evident was an academic's need to understand their positioning—their position in society, to Indigenous peoples, to Indigenous knowledges and perspectives, and within the Western academy. Anna, a non-Indigenous academic from Australia, highlighted this by explaining how she made her position clear to students when teaching Indigenous knowledges and perspectives: "I always explain my position, … that I'm not the expert. I am only talking from my perspective, so for me it is really, really important that it comes from the experts."

This positioning, including not being an expert in another's culture, was also mentioned by non-Māori academics in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Non-Māori participants were aware of their responsibility to be fluent in Māori perspectives of social work and Māori ways of working, as a way of working in partnership with Māori people. Jess, a non-Māori academic, illustrated this by explaining, "We are meant to be demonstrating bicultural confidence and competence in this university."

A sense of self appeared to give academics on both sides of the Tasman an authentic, genuine and honest understanding of their teaching abilities and limits in teaching Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into social work.

The academic's relationship with students

There was not one distinct philosophy of teaching that participants used to enhance their integration and teaching of Indigenous content into their curriculum. A theme that was interpreted from the data and proposed as an enhancer to the integration process is an academic's relationship to students.

Hinewai, a Māori participant from Aotearoa/New Zealand, shared how she relates to students to ensure that they feel nurtured and can be open in her classroom: "Your worldview really matters, people do have a different worldview to you, nurturing that openness to learning and being open and just learning what social work is and developing their passion for it."

This sense of care for students' own knowledge along with their capacity to take on new knowledge led Sigrid, a non-Indigenous participant from Australia, to use a relational model of teaching. Sigrid used a pedagogy that drew from her practice with Aboriginal people in view of the significance of relationship building: "It's very much a relational model … there's a lot of opportunity to provide feedback on emerging ideas, values, those sorts of things. So, I look for those opportunities to help shape students into their professional roles."

These student-centred, supportive and reciprocal relationships meant that participating educators were also aware of the challenges that students posed during the integration process. One such challenge was how students resisted being taught by an Aboriginal person, as Sam illustrated:

Students can get this idea, … particularly if you are Aboriginal, "Oh, [name removed] wants me to do this, or the Aboriginal community, who[m] they already view as lesser, inferior, wants me to do this. And I'm not going to listen!".

A similar experience of resistance also occurred for academics in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Evelyn commented:

> There're lots of different people [the students] with different views and some who've had no contact actually with anyone who's different to them and so that can be disheartening … they sound like people in 1980s, saying, "Why do we have to learn stuff about Māori people for?", "Oh, for God's sake, so sick of hearing about the Treaty", … "Oh, we're still going on about the Treaty; it's time to move on". In fact, that's often not the young students.

Challenging students' mindsets, beliefs, values and similar reactions to being taught Indigenous content appeared to be evident on both sides of the Tasman. Academics implemented different strategies in their relationships to students to address the resistance, including having Indigenous people participate in teaching content, ensuring students understood their professional responsibility and obligations, and facilitating students questioning of what the content meant for them in their current context. These challenges are expanded upon by Carmen:

> Some students, particularly in the Bachelor's topic, are straight out of school. But their knowledge about Aboriginal issues is so rudimentary and it's like, "yes, we know they exist", but you know beyond that it's really quite amazing. So little do they understand the disadvantage and the history as well … it was based on a non-thinking attitude. They weren't really thinking it through, and this is what they're going to get if they don't engage with the discussion.

The academic's relationship to Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures

The importance of an academic's relationship with Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures was evident in the way that a critical awareness of each of these components was valued by each participant and each appeared to have an impact upon the integration process. What counts as legitimate knowledge in the whitestream was discussed by the participants in this study, as was comprehending the importance of history. Respectfully handling Indigenous knowledge and understanding the importance of history enabled participants to de-centre Western knowledge and operationalise decolonising aspirations. Legitimate knowledge can take the form of anecdotal stories from Aboriginal people with lived experiences and practical experience—stories that may not have found their way into peer-reviewed journals, but are based upon academics having relationships with Aboriginal people.

Hinewai, a Māori academic, commented upon the lack of articles and the complexity of producing legitimised Indigenous knowledge for use in the whitestream academy: "Even our Māori literature is still, could be better, sometimes, I just wish I had this article on this … we are going to have to write it."

This concern brings up the issue of possession and misinterpretation of language; for example, "Sometimes people can misinterpret it [the words]."

As well comes the dilemma: "Who does it belong to?"

Language was a key element in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. All participants mentioned their relationship to language, whereas it was only mentioned by one participant in Australia. This is likely because Māori language is integrated in the everyday lives of non-Māori people in Aotearoa/New Zealand, whereas there are numerous different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages still

spoken in Australia and non-Aboriginal people do not have the same relationship to language as non-Māori do in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Pania, a Māori academic explains:

> *Te Whare Tapa Whā* (the module describes health and wellbeing as a meeting house)… it's a very easy model to learn and a lot of non-Māori pick it up and go yeah, I know how to do this, but the risk to that … translating the Māori words into English … seeing it from their own lens which kind of bastardised [it], so the challenge we have in NZ is introducing other Māori models of practice and being able to get people to understand it.

Participants acknowledging their cultural identity and understanding their cultured self was important, as was understanding the importance of how their relationship to other cultures impacted upon their teaching. In the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, non-Māori academics, as Te Tiriti Waitangi partners, used aspects of Māori culture within their teaching. An example of this was explained by Pat, a non-Māori participant, who highlighted the need to do "the work" and equip themself with basic knowledge to teach Māori content, under the guidance of a Māori mentor.

Across the Tasman, most of their non-Indigenous academic counterparts' understanding of Aboriginal culture appeared to depend upon the academic's personal experience and their interaction with Indigenous cultures. Aboriginal culture is not homogenous, and each area has its own knowledge depending on the Aboriginal nation. Considering this, Matilda from Australia said:

> [I needed to] really kind of review the way that I'd grown up and the assumptions that I'd made about my own culture and being in that dominant culture as a kid and … picking up … explicit racism, and I was oblivious to that as a kid … And then also having the opportunity to go to community as well … having really close friendships and relationships with Aboriginal people.

Through the process of critical consciousness and reflexivity, participants were able to consciously be aware of how their backgrounds, interests, connections and personal experiences may impact upon their relationship to Indigenous content and teaching Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. It is realistic to reason that if academics do not have positive personal experiences interacting with Indigenous cultures, then this may impede their teaching of Indigenous content.

The academic's relationship with peers

An academic's relationship to peers was interpreted as crucial in the integrating process. Evidence from the interviews showed that supportive, reciprocal relationships between Indigenous peers, between non-Indigenous peers, and between Indigenous peers and non-Indigenous peers all gave collective support to the undertaking of placing Indigenous content into the curriculum. This included relationships both inside and outside of the academy. Aroha, a Māori academic, emphasised the mentoring and learning relationship she had seen in her culture and with her peers that impacted upon her teaching.

> It's really role modelled the *Tuakana Teina*—the older sibling, younger sibling … it's sort of a learning technique where you have … the older sibling, younger sibling thing in Māori society where they would learn from each other, like a reciprocal relationship … having that mirrored in their teaching had a huge impact on me.

This was also reflected within the Australian context, in terms of Aboriginal academics working collectively. Sam, an Aboriginal participant, remarked, "You can see very well-functioning places and

the reasons why—it's usually because they've got a collective … because they've got the biggest body of Aboriginal academics and they're connected globally."

Several of the non-Indigenous academics were aware that their Indigenous peers carried a greater load in the integration process, frequently as mentors and cultural advisors. Some of them were also aware that, as non-Indigenous academics, they needed to step up and take responsibility in teaching Indigenous content, knowing their limits and being guided by their Indigenous peers.

The academic's relationship to power and the whitestream

Relationships to those in power and the whitestream are key in decolonising social work education, as these relationships were interpreted to directly impact the integration process. From the interviews, there was evidence given by four Māori academics who worked collectively to create a Māori staff group within their social work department. This Māori staff group gave examples of how their collective group provided Indigenous leadership in the integration process at their university. One of the most valuable contributions they made to disrupting the whitestream and the status quo within their university was to establish policies that enacted Te Tiriti and to ensure that the changes that they made to the curriculum and teaching would outlive current leadership and themselves. For example, Aroha explained:

> Māori get to say how it's been taught, so we have set that in policy, so it's really exciting because some of the things, like encouraging the use of *Te Reo* [Māori language] and actually reviewing what we are using, and saying, well, that's not actually grammatically correct.

Within this study there were various examples of participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, navigating the neoliberal education system and creatively negotiating the lack of Indigenous academics, resources and funding that restricted their students' engagement with Indigenous content, people and communities. For example, Sam from Australia explained their use of multimedia to bridge the gap when funds were not available to pay Aboriginal guest speakers, "Multimedia is extremely useful. Some people haven't even visually been able to engage with Aboriginal people and things and places and stuff like that." This participant also highlighted the demands placed upon themselves as the only Aboriginal academic in their department. They felt they received less support from those in leadership and felt the constraints of funding, particularly because they were the sole Indigenous academic in their social work department. As Sam explains:

> Even though AASW accreditation and the requirements … mean that we have Indigenous content. There isn't the money for it. I'm the only one … the Aboriginal representative to students and also the teacher, … a dual kind of role.

Academics who have good working relationships with those in power and understand the complexities of working within the whitestream were able to navigate the system more efficiently, which in turn enhanced the integration process. Likewise, having leadership who understood the complexities of the whitestream and how to navigate the university systems appeared to be able to offer better support to Indigenous academics and their careers as they integrated Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into their teaching. These leaders were also those who were able to use their positions to disrupt the status quo to implement changes that outlived changes to leadership.

The academic's relationship with elders, kaumatuas and Indigenous communities

Many of the academics in this study had established relationships with Indigenous people as their mentors in supporting them in integrating Indigenous content into their teaching. These relationships were developed by being involved in activities with Indigenous communities outside of the academy, for example, attending community events and being involved in an advisory capacity on governance boards. Participants took time to maintain those connections and relationships with Indigenous communities.

Pania, from Aotearoa/New Zealand, explained how she remained connected to the community through visiting students on placement:

> I know that a lot of the staff are involved in outside activities with the community … So, when the students go on placements … we get allocated different students to go and visit. So, it keeps us connected to the community.

These significant relationships were pivotal in guaranteeing that the content within the curriculum was responding to the needs and aspirations of the local Indigenous people. These relationships were also a source of learning and support for the academics. For example, Sam from Australia explained, "I talk to elders, community and practitioners about what I'm doing, and they say, 'that sounds awesome'. Then that gives me confidence." This was important as these local Indigenous people may be the people whom students would be working alongside in their future careers.

Discussion

Relationships are evidenced in literature. Karen Martin's (2009) work on relatedness focuses upon teaching Aboriginal students; however, her work also provides knowledge for social work educators as it emphasises the role relatedness plays in the teaching and learning process: "Transformation occurs as the synthesis of teaching-as-learning is driven by relatedness that occurs at an interface to inform the relationships to knowledge, to self and to others" (p. 76). This transformation occurs when educators no longer teach "at", "for" or "to" students but "with" students. Many of the participants in this study used a similar relatedness to Martin, employing a student-centred philosophy of teaching to enhance the integration of Indigenous content into their teaching.

Literature supports a relationship to self and a teacher's/educator's/academic's self-reflexivity (Martin, 2009; Milne, 2017). Social workers have tended to operate out of their own professional, racial and ethnic identity due to their educational traditions, and, consequently, they may not alter "their practice or communication to accommodate different ways of knowing and being" (Adams et al., 2019, p. 58). Academics understanding their positioning—in society, to Indigenous peoples, to Indigenous knowledges and perspectives, and within the Western academy—was identified as important. As emphasised by Green et al. (2013), "social work educators need to be afforded the space in which to identify and challenge their own colonisation … and the impact it has upon them and their practice" (p. 226).

It is important that the responsibility of teaching Indigenous content is shared. As Duthie (2018) highlighted, non-Indigenous social work academics "have a responsibility to contribute to embedding core Indigenous curriculum—a need to step up, embrace and contribute to learning and teaching in the Indigenous space" (p. 114). The best way for this to happen is academics having genuine, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peers.

Reciprocal relationships with elders, kaumatuas and Indigenous communities has been highlighted in literature (Bennett & Zubrzycki, 2003; Green et al., 2013; Satour & Goldingay, 2021; Smith & Smith, 2019) and in this study as key to embedding Indigenous content into social work. Relationships and partnerships between academics and Indigenous communities, their elders and their kaumatuas are a necessary part of decolonisation.

Limitations

This study had several methodological limitations, including being bound by time and context, and being written in English. The fact that there was only one Aboriginal participant was a limitation; however, a strength in this research was that the whitestream academy on both sides of the Tasman was found to be very similar—the barriers that Indigenous academics identified in Aotearoa/New Zealand were the same or similar to those found in literature written by Aboriginal social work academics in Australia. The Indigenous voices of participants in Aotearoa/New Zealand clearly supported the one Aboriginal voice in Australia.

This study has focused upon six key relationships; each are complex and could be the focus of further study. Other relationships could be investigated, including an academic's relationship with country and its impact upon decolonising social work education. Nevertheless, the six areas of relationship considered here are fundamental to embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into whitestream social work education. The content of these six relationships may be expanded upon through further research with the involvement of different universities and academics.

Conclusion

This article explored how relationships impact the integration of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives for academics in social work education. The six relationships discussed in this article—an academic's relationship to self; with students; to Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures; with peers; to those in power and the whitestream; and with elders, kaumatuas and Indigenous communities—have elements that can strengthen the goal of decolonisation and epistemological equality. When implemented, they provide insight into navigating the whitestream for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics. These six relationships interpreted from the data are not exhaustive, but they do provide guidance for academics' self-reflexivity in their navigation of the whitestream and in their integration of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into social work education. The literature covers many aspects of these relationships; however, this model brings the participants' views from both sides of the Tasman into the discussion—views of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics—providing a model that can be implemented mindfully by academics to support and provide direction in their self-reflexivity and teaching. Attending to each of these relationships, reflecting and deepening them can improve an academic's overall teaching.

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