

1_LHBN_Abstract_Decolonizing_Indigenizing

The decolonizing and the Indigenizing discourse

In Canada, we have been engaged in a discourse of “Indigenizing”¹ as a means of addressing some issues with Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples. In this paper, I describe the ways in which a research team began to address some of the issues of decolonization, and Indigenization, and the ways we came to talk about them as a contested binary discourses.

The purpose of my research team was to build resilience with Aboriginal youth as a means of suicide prevention, and engage in activities focused on cultural identity. I worked with community partners with a focus on the prevention of harm. Historical trauma and the weakened social fabric of many Indigenous communities, resulting from colonial processes, has set the stage for suicide and related mental health challenges in our communities. The cultural narratives of Indigenous people was to paramount to the work with communities. Their stories can reshape their lives and their futures.

The research made us cognizant of not determining the objectives over the needs of the peoples we were working with; within these communities youth suicides were a regular occurrence. I became, with my team members, responsive and respectful “servants” to the project – never forgetting four Indigenous principles: Friends working together. Reciprocity. Everything is connected - land, air, water, fire, spirit, creatures. “Looking back is looking forward”. These were also discourses that we came to live by.

Elders, youth, and youth workers were engaged as part of the research team. This was one step to the decolonization and Indigenization process. Central to the team was the issue of having voice at all levels of the research, including individuals who had been rendered voiceless by history. At tension in this research, is my own location as part of the academy and thus a part of the institutional problem of colonization.

Acknowledging the colonial past is part of a step to creating a change for our work, and for Indigenous peoples. Decolonization must be agreed to by non-Indigenous people and work towards, as allies. Research can create such alliances. There are four stories that represent themes presented in this paper: decolonization methodology; the warrior and the outsider; Indigenous research methods; and attempts for a decolonized mind (wa Thiong’o, 1986). While focusing on Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples, this paper has implications for researchers working with other marginalized groups and communities.

References

wa Thiong’o, N. (1986) *Decolonising the Mind. The politics of language in African literature*. London: James Currey. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya.

¹ Acknowledging the historical effects of colonialization, residential schools and their devastating effects on Aboriginal children and their families,(Truth and Reconciliation Report, 2016), decolonization and indigenization are actions that have been suggested as one systemic response to these historical effects.