



Ontario College of
Social Workers and
Social Service Workers



Rethinking Social Justice: On the Path to Change



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Presentation Overview

- ▶ Some definitions
 - ▶ Overview of historical and current social work policy and practice and the resultant impact on Indigenous communities
 - ▶ Personal reflections from 40 years of practice
 - ▶ The path forward - a challenge for social work practitioners
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Definition: Social Justice

“Social workers believe in the obligation of people, individually and collectively, to provide resources, services and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and to afford them protection from harm. Social workers promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups.”

(Canadian Association of Social Workers
Code of Ethics, 2005: 5)

Definition: Social Change

“Social change is the set of adjustments or adaptations made by a group of people in response to a dramatic change experienced in at least one aspect of their lives.”

(Steckley & Letts, 2010: 442)



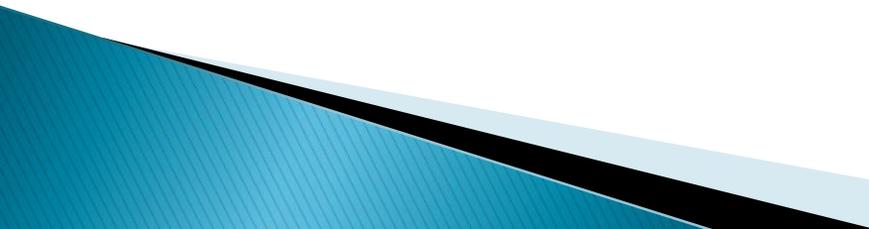
Applying a Historical Lens

»» Macro, Mezzo, Micro Responses

Social Work Practice Categories

- ▶ **Macro** - Intervening in large systems, including lobbying to change government policies and organizing wide group activities
 - ▶ **Mezzo** - Engaging with small to medium-sized groups such as neighborhoods, schools, or local organizations, for change
 - ▶ **Micro** - Engaging individuals or families to resolve their unique issues
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Macro Level: Historical Social Policy

- ▶ **Indian Act** - Sets out the political/legal relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples and between Indigenous peoples
 - ▶ **Residential Schools** - Designed for the purpose of assimilating Indigenous people into the dominant culture
 - ▶ **Child Welfare** - The “Sixties Scoop” removed thousands of Indigenous children from their families and communities and continues into this millennium
 - ▶ **Social Inequity** - Political disenfranchisement, inequitable access to health care, housing, child care, education, access to safe drinking water, economic power
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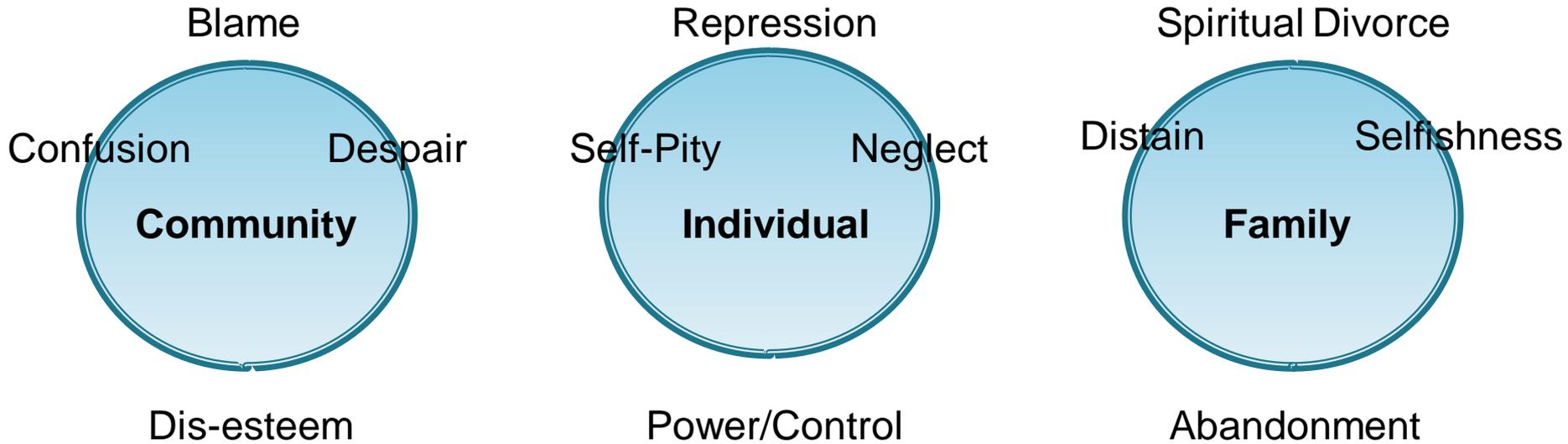
Mezzo and Micro Level: Social Impacts

- ▶ Social Determinants of Health – disparate status (Canada 4th vs. Indigenous communities 78th)
- ▶ The rate of death from injury is four times greater for Aboriginal infants (Canadian Council on Social, 2002)
- ▶ 55% of First Nations children living on reserve are overweight or obese (Healthy Weight for Healthy Kids, 2007)
- ▶ The suicide rate for Aboriginal youth is five to six times greater than their non-Aboriginal peers (Report on the Health Status and Health Needs of Aboriginal Children and Youth, 2005)
- ▶ Aboriginal women are three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than non-Aboriginal women (Addictive Behaviours Among Aboriginal People in Canada, 2007)
- ▶ The rate of incarceration of Aboriginal men is eleven times the rate of non-Aboriginal men (Reclaiming Connection, 2005)
- ▶ Many First Nations seniors deal with unresolved issues due to traumatic experiences as a result of colonization and the residential school experience and live without access to appropriate resources to maintain proper health (First Nation Centre, 2010)

Mezzo and Micro Level: Perceptions of Social Work Interventions

- ▶ Indian Agent accomplices:
 - "Social Work has negative connotations to many Indigenous people and is often synonymous with the theft of children, the destruction of families, and the deliberate oppression of Aboriginal communities." (Sinclair, 2004: 49)
- ▶ Naive advocacy efforts:
 - Canadian Welfare Council and the Canadian Association of Social Workers presentation to a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons (1946-1948) condemning the use of residential schools and demanded Aboriginal people receive the same services available to non-Aboriginal people, including services of the provincial departments of health, welfare and education to residents of reserves, including child welfare services,
- ▶ Radical civil servants:
 - "When the Indians are encouraged to evaluate their situation, they become dissatisfied with their health services, housing, schools, the function of their church mission, discrimination, etc. Those responsible in the establishment are prone to agree with the Indian Superintendent that the community development officer is a troublemaker. Why should a civil servant be allowed to get away with it? He does not for very long - he either leaves the service or falls in line with the system and functions as a project officer, which is acceptable to the system." (McEwen, 1968: 29)

Summary of Social Policy Impacts



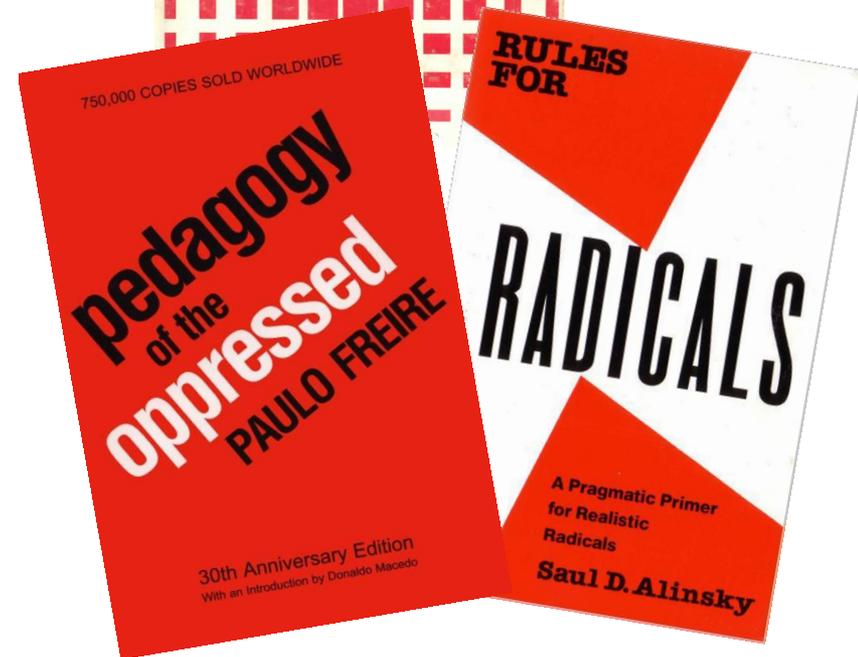
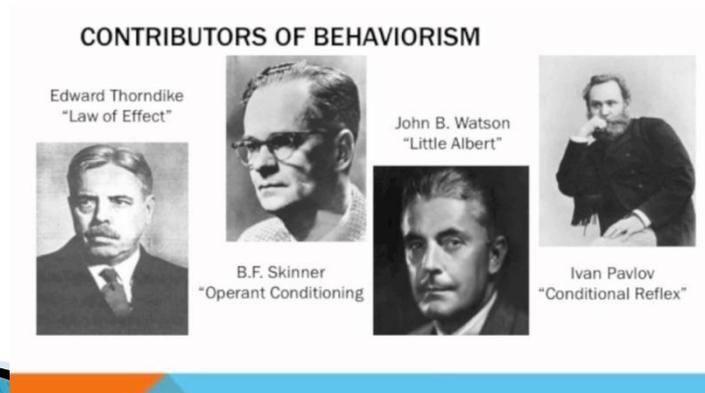
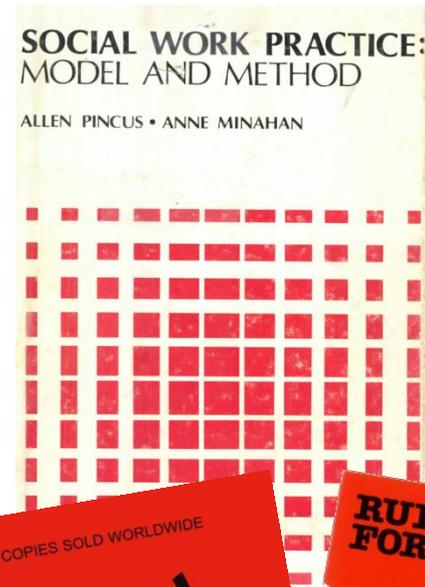
(Morrisseau, 1998: 8)

Historical Approaches to Social Work Practice

»» Macro, Mezzo, Micro Responses

Social Work in the 1970s

- ▶ The Welfare State
- ▶ Behavioural Theory
- ▶ Systems Theory/Family/Group Work
- ▶ Oppression and Radicalism on the fringe
- ▶ “One size fits all” toolkit



Macro Level: Reclamation of Native Culture

“One of the most severe problems the Native person is faced with today is that he is defined outside himself. That is, other cultures and other people have defined who he is supposed to be as well as what he was supposed to have been.

He has been defined, categorized and mythologized by books, movies, missionaries, educators, anthropologists - and every other "-ologist".

He has been set apart by legality and even by economic status. And within most of these existing categorizations of Indianness is a disturbing confusion between the past and present, or between heritage and culture.”

(LaRoque, 1975: 8)

American Experiences

- ▶ Black Civil Rights Movement
 - ▶ Vietnam War
 - ▶ Resolution 108 (Termination Act)
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Canada's Awakening

- ▶ 1969 White Paper, sparked Native Consciousness

Macro Level: Social Movements

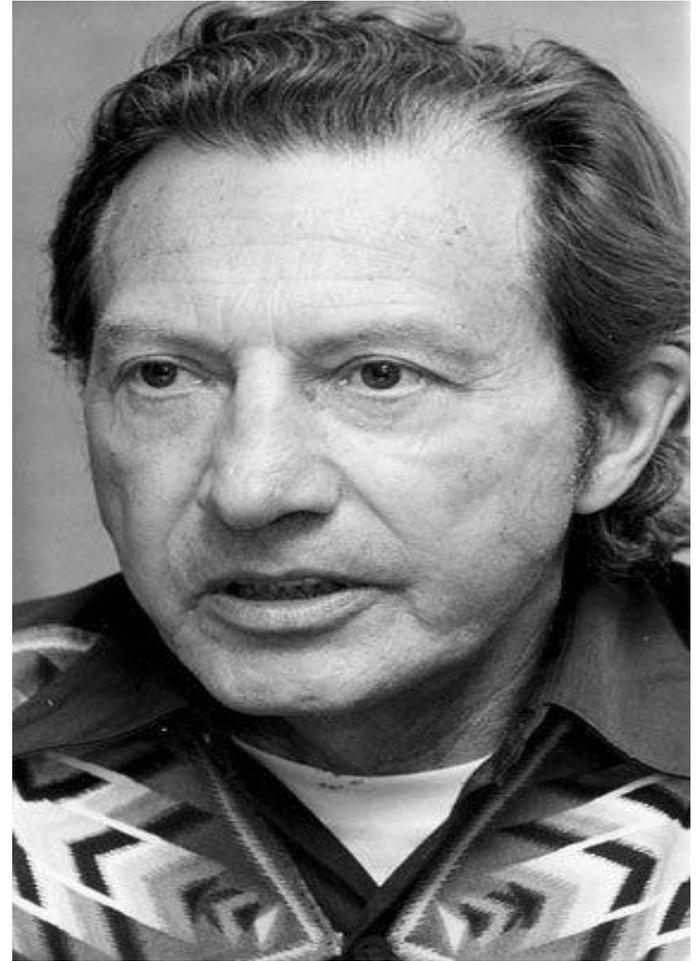
- ▶ “A **clearly discernible organized purpose** distinguishes a social movement from other disorganized collective behavior such as riots, fads, disasters, and panics (Marx & McAdam, 1994).
- ▶ The **change factor** distinguishes social movements from collective behavior aimed at responding to specific needs about which there is a general consensus (i.e., campaigns to raise funding for cancer research; Diani, 1992).
- ▶ Because social movements involve this drive toward social change, they are invariably going to **arouse conflict** in ways that these other types of collective action do not (Diani, 1992).” (Wilkes, 2006: 513)

Macro Level: Organize

- ▶ National Indian Brotherhood (Assembly of First Nations)
 - ▶ Native Women's Association of Canada
 - ▶ Indian Eskimo Association
 - ▶ Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
- 

Howard Adams, A Case Study

- ▶ “I was very moved when I heard Malcolm X speak to the students about black nationalism. Afterwards, I wanted time to think of the beautiful things he had said. The ideas he expressed about black nationalism were so important that I could not put them out of my mind. I kept trying to fit them in to the Indian/Metis situation at home. Nationalism seemed to be the spirit that motivated the black people to a new sense of pride and confidence. Like the black people, I began to reject my feeling of inferiority and shame, and to become proud of my Indian heritage and native nation. In Berkeley I read everything I could find on the Metis and Indians of Canada. I spoke with pride of my Indian heritage.” (Adams, 1989:153)



1921-2001

Howard Adams, A Case Study

- ▶ “From my experiences in the black civil rights struggle and the Berkeley campus revolt, I had learned a great deal about civil disobedience – boycotts, demonstrations, picketing, sit-ins, and so on. Now that I was back home in my native society of Saskatchewan I offered the skills and benefits of my schooling to my people in their struggle for equality and liberation. Experience in the civil rights struggles had provided me with the political skills essential to organizational work among colonized people.” (Adams, 1989:154)

Macro Level: Protests

- ▶ Kenora, Ontario – 1974 -“80 Anishnawbek warriors occupied and reclaimed a local park to draw attention to police brutality that Native peoples endured within the town, as well as to draw attention to the poverty and problematic social conditions in nearby reserves (Trumball, 1974).” (Wilkes, 2006: 517)
- ▶ Ottawa, 1979 -“When the demonstration was met by Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in full riot gear and no politician agreed to meet with the group, people across the country, both Native and non-Native, were shocked, many into action (Harper, 1979). The federal government eventually agreed to regular meetings with the leaders of the National Indian Brotherhood...” (Wilkes, 2006: 518)

Case Study - Elder Vern Harper



The Native People's Caravan



"The tension and frustration grew and then subsided. The police again closed ranks and the demonstrators calmed down."

Diary, Parliament Hill, September 30, 1974

We have given them 25 minutes to get Judd Buchanan to come out and see us or else.

They have taken Gordon Stonechild and one other brother into custody. When we came up the steps, Kelly and Gordon, who were carrying the upside down flag, were forced back and attacked first. That's when Gordon was taken and Kelly knocked down and stepped on and treated very rough. They used force to keep us back but our brothers are brave and fought back. The reason we stopped was because we were told to by our people

We have asked for our brothers back several times but have got no response. They are very silent.

The drums are going again. This makes me feel good and adds strength to my spirit. I am not afraid. I don't want to die but I have come for a reason, for my people, all of my brothers and sisters There are 15 minutes left. There are

screams about Trudeau, that asshole, throughout the crowd. We want to talk to Trudeau but he doesn't come out. I wonder why. They said they couldn't speak to us because we were violent and we carried arms but we have no arms now and still they don't talk. Instead they have arms. They have the Army here and the RCMP. They have guns with knives on the end of them. Also when the Army came they had a band bring them on but our drums drowned them out. They also tried to drown us out by ringing those stupid bells but they couldn't and stopped.

There was a sound of glass breaking but I don't know who or what it is. There are a lot of brothers here from all over. There are also big guns here like cannons.

The only things we have to defend ourselves with are a few clubs. But we will not back down.

Member, Native People's Caravan

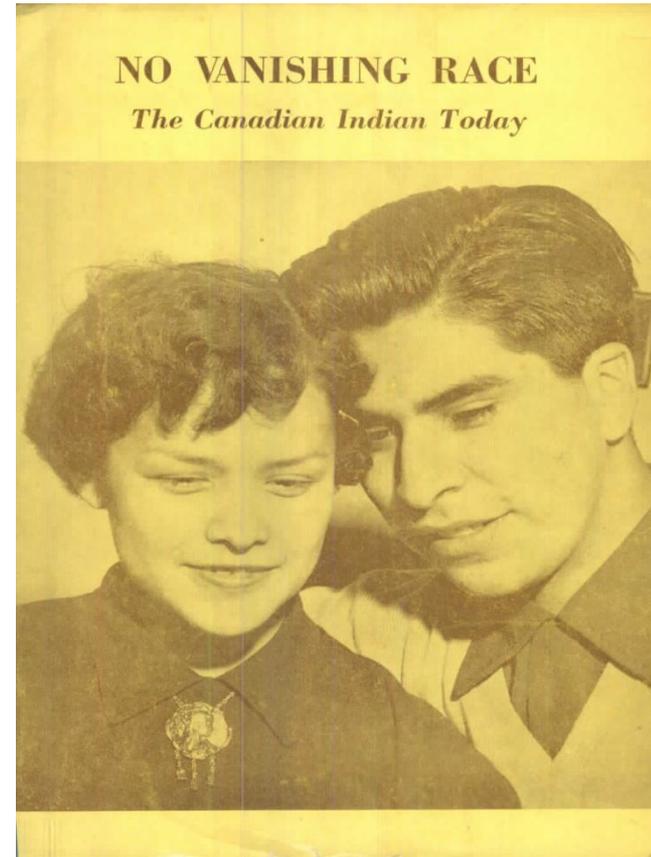
More Recent Protests

- ▶ Oka - Kanesatake Crisis, Quebec -1990
- ▶ Stony Point Reserve - Ipperwash – Ontario – 1995
- ▶ Brantford, Haudenosaunee - Ontario - 2006
- ▶ Idle No More – Ontario - 2012



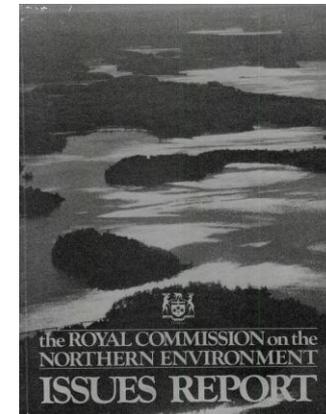
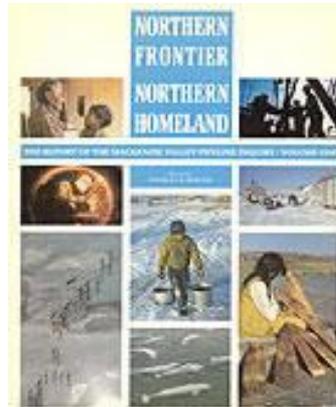
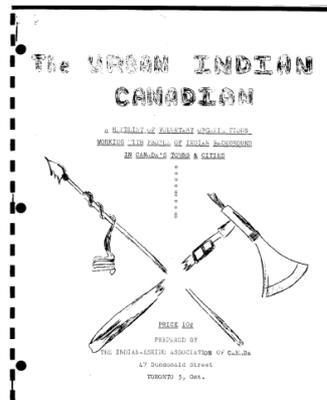
Macro Level: Native Publications

- ▶ No Vanishing Race the Canadian Indian Today, 1955
- ▶ Citizenship Projects Among Indians, 1965
- ▶ Beyond Words, 1968
- ▶ Urban Indians Victims of Poverty, 1969
- ▶ The Unjust Society, 1969
- ▶ Without Reserves, 1969
- ▶ Two Articles, 1969
- ▶ Ruffled Feathers Indians in Canadian Society, 1971
- ▶ EducationAndTheFirstCanadians-1971
- ▶ The Rebirth Of Canada Indians, 1972
- ▶ Indians on Skid Row, 1970
- ▶ Reservations are for Indians, 1970
- ▶ The Only Good Indian, 1970
- ▶ Indian Life and the Canadian Law, 1973
- ▶ Natives Without Homes, 1974
- ▶ Defeathering the Indian, 1975
- ▶ Broken Spirit, 1978



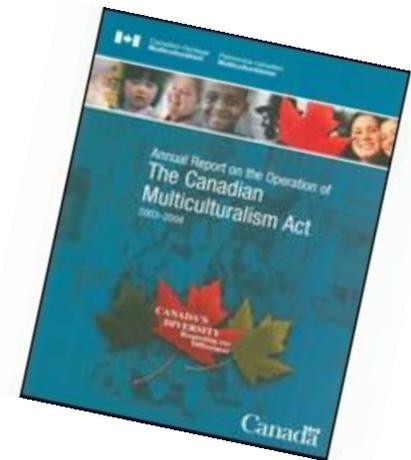
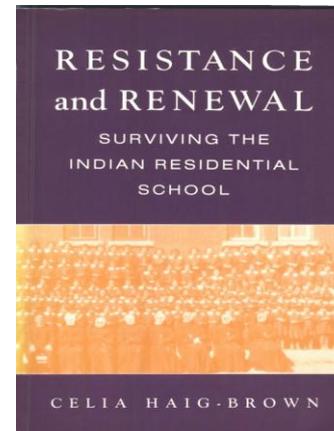
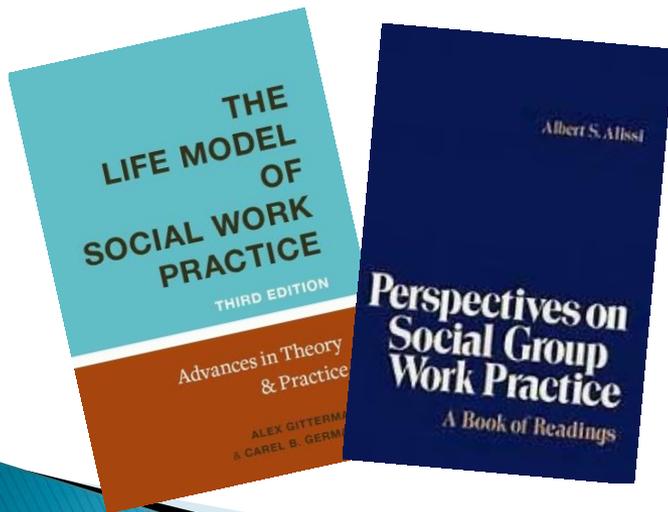
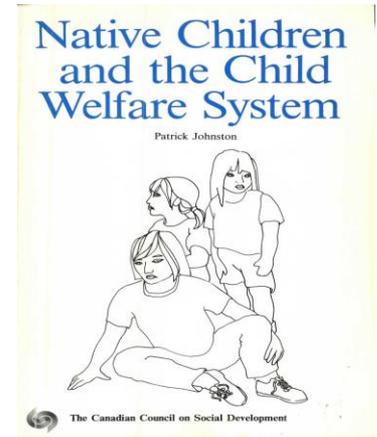
Macro Level: Government Reports

- ▶ Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies (The Hawthorn Report), 1967
- ▶ Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada Reports, 1960 – 1971
- ▶ Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, 1977
- ▶ Ontario Royal Commission on the Northern Environment; Issue Report, 1978



Social Work in the 1980s

- ▶ Decentralization of government services
- ▶ Multiculturalism
- ▶ Various practice theories
- ▶ Emergence of Indigenous issues (esp. Child Welfare)



Macro Level: Native Protest

- ▶ Meech Lake Accord 1987-1990
- ▶ “Well I was opposed to the Meech Lake Accord because we weren't included in the Constitution. We were to recognize Quebec as a distinct society, whereas we as Aboriginal people were completely left out. We were the First Peoples here - First Nations of Canada - we were the ones that made treaties with the settlers that came from Europe. These settler people and their governments didn't recognize us as a Nation, as a government and that is why we opposed the Meech Lake Accord.”

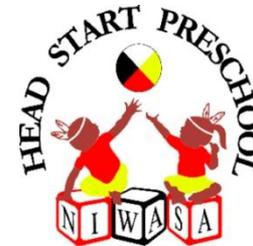
Elijah Harper. All Our Relations. CBC.
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2672432466>

Elijah Harper



1949-2013

Mezzo Level: Native Organizations Emerge

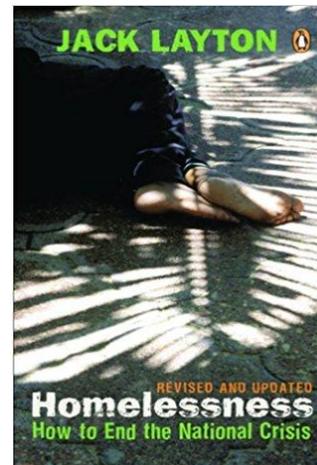
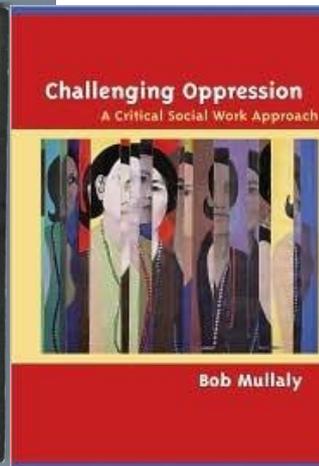
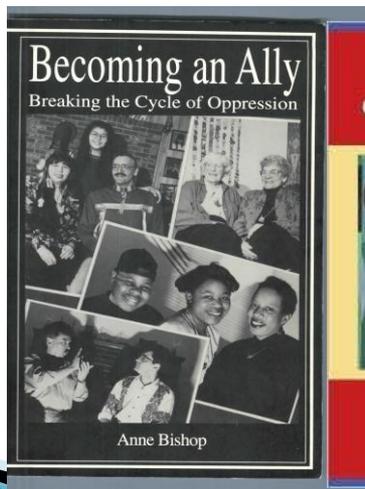


Ontario Native Literacy Coalition
Moving forward to better serve the native stream.

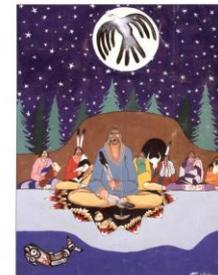


Social Work in the 1990s

- ▶ Explosion of practice theories and social policy issues
 - Anti-oppression, diversity, structuralism, solution-focused brief therapy
 - Homelessness
 - Mental Health and Addictions
 - HIV/Aids
- ▶ “Native Social Work” practice emerges and Indigenous scholarship expands



Breaking The Silence
An Interpretive Study of Residential School
Impact and Healing as Illustrated by the
Stories of First Nations Individuals



Assembly of First Nations
1994

Macro Level: Federal Government

- ▶ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report (RCAP), 1991–1996



- ▶ Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1998–2014

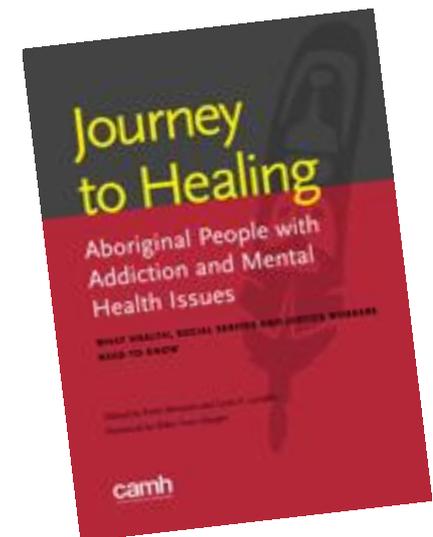
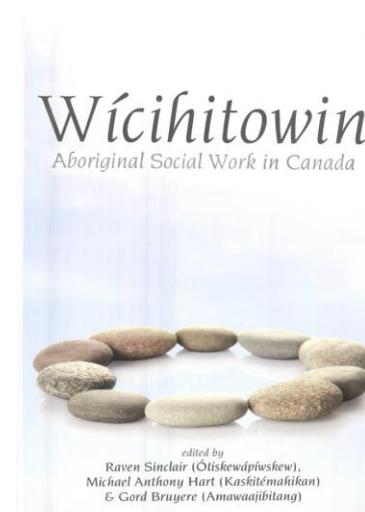
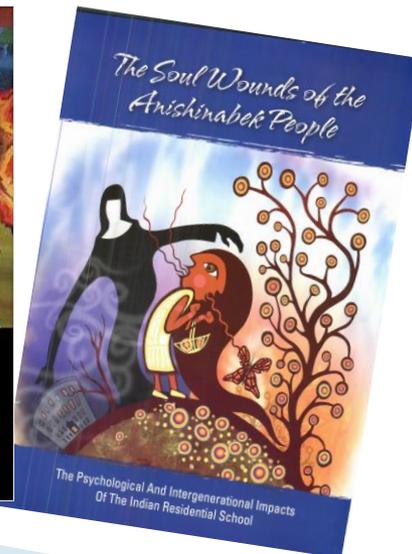
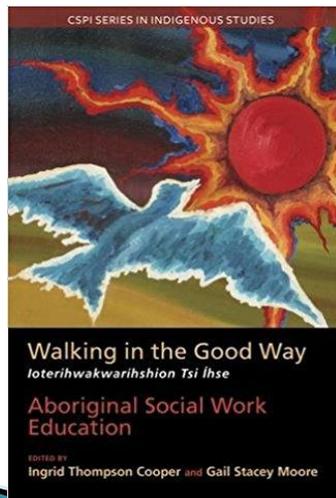


Macro Level: Federal Court Decisions

- ▶ April 23, 1999 – (Gladue v. Her Majesty The Queen) - The courts shall consider all available sanctions other than imprisonment that are reasonable in the circumstance should be considered for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders
- ▶ May 20, 1999 – (Corbiere v. Canada) - Non-reserve Aboriginal status qualifies to vote in Band elections

Social Work in the 2000s

- ▶ Therapeutic interventions - CBT, DBT, Concurrent Disorders
- ▶ *Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers* is formed
- ▶ Expansion of post-secondary Indigenous Social Work courses
 - Indigenous social work schools (i.e. Laurentian University)
- ▶ Emergence of intergenerational trauma research



Intergenerational Trauma

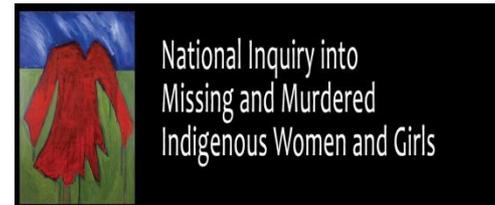
- ▶ “Intergenerational or multi-generational trauma resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as “normal” when we are children, we pass on to our own children.
- ▶ Children who learn that ... or [sic] sexual abuse is “normal”, and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical and sexual abuse on their own children.
- ▶ The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools.”(Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999: A5)

Macro Level: Court Action

- ▶ April 6, 2009 - (Court of Appeal, British Columbia ruled in the case of *Mclvor v. Canada*) - the Indian Act discriminates between men and women in regard to registration as an Indian
- ▶ June 26, 2014 -(*Tsilqhot'in Nation v. Her Majesty The Queen*) - First Nations own their ancestral lands, unless they signed away their ownership in treaties with government
- ▶ April 17, 2017 – (*Congress of Aboriginal Peoples v. Her Majesty The Queen*) Métis and non-status Indians are under the jurisdiction of the federal government
- ▶ 2009 – 2017 (Ontario) Sixties Scoop, Children's Aid Societies Settlement

Macro Level: Government Reports

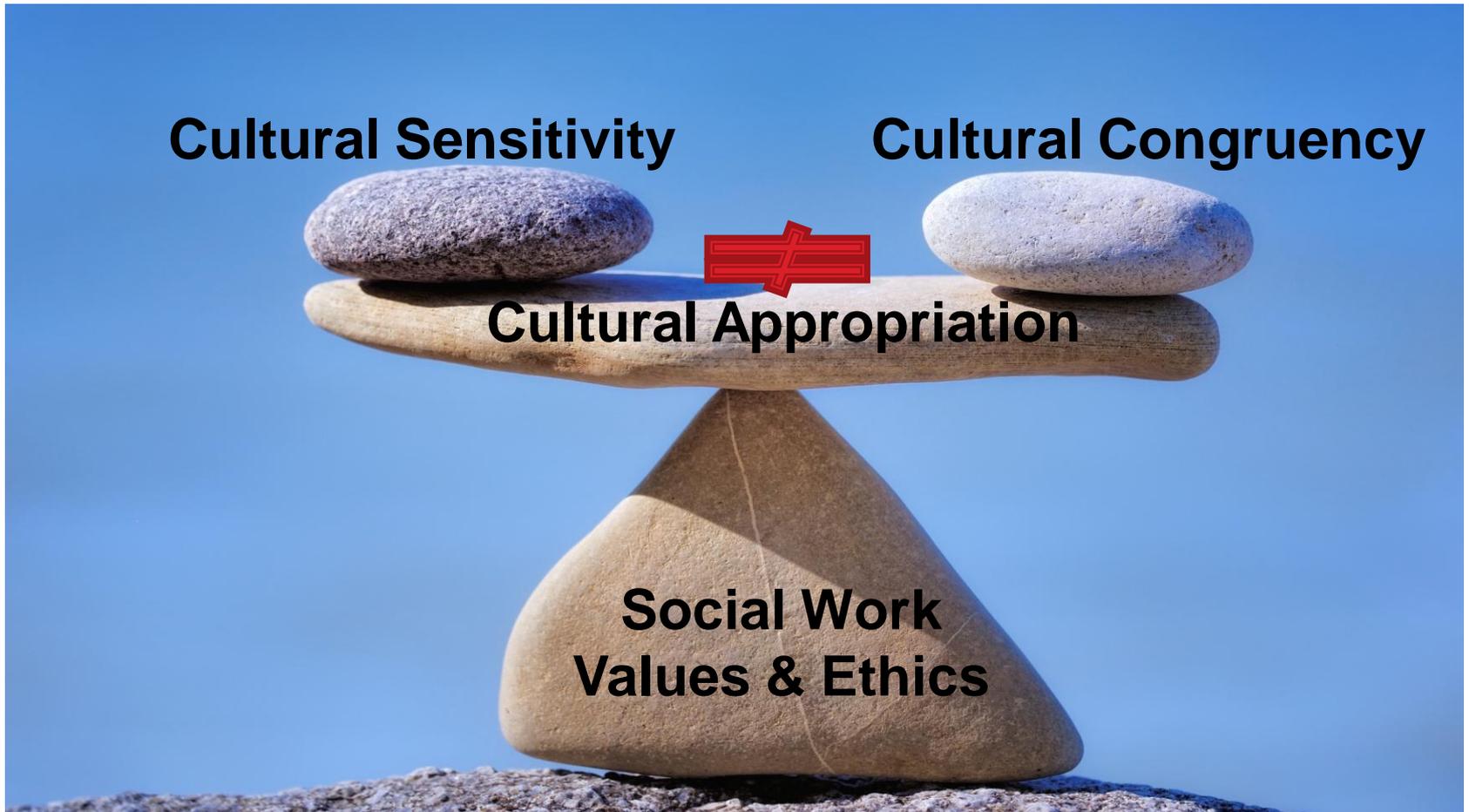
- ▶ The First Nations Governance Act (Bill C-7), 2002
- ▶ Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Report, 2008 - 2015
- ▶ Jordan's Principle (Memory of Jordan River), 2016
- ▶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2015 - pending



Building a Responsive and Resilient Indigenous Social Work Practice

»» Elements for practice

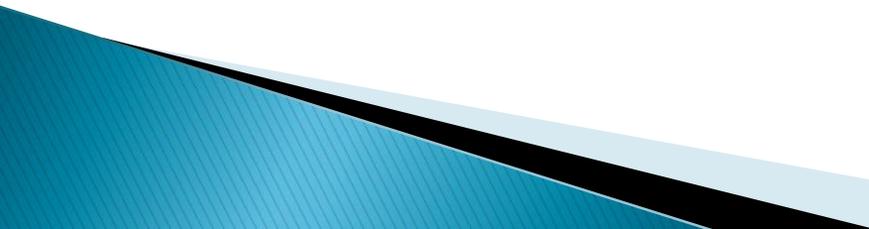
Balancing Culture and Practice



The Five Cornerstones for Aboriginal Social Work Practice

- ▶ Understanding of Aboriginal worldview and how it differs from the dominant Euro-Canadian worldview
- ▶ Understanding the effects of colonization process
- ▶ Understanding the importance of Aboriginal identity or consciousness
- ▶ Understanding cultural knowledge and traditions and promoting healing and empowerment
- ▶ Understanding diversity of Aboriginal cultural expression

(Adapted from McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003:19)



Effective Aboriginal Social Work Practice

“In the Canadian social work context that implies that as Indigenous social work educators and practitioners, we need to understand our personal histories and cultures and how the colonization of our lands has affected us as individuals, families and communities. It also requires us to have an understanding of the historical impact of colonialism in the contemporary social, political and economic contexts and to assess how these dynamics have influenced and are currently manifesting in the social work milieu.”

(Sinclair, 2009: 19)



A Word About Cultural Safety

- ▶ “Cultural safety within an Indigenous context means that the educator/practitioner/professional, whether Indigenous or not, can **communicate competently** with a patient in that patient’s social, political, linguistic, economic, and spiritual realm. A culturally unsafe practice can be understood to mean “any actions that diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity and well-being of an individual” (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2002: 7).” (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008: 5)
- ▶ “Cultural safety requires that health care providers be **respectful** of nationality, culture, age, sex, political and religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. This notion is in contrast to transcultural or multicultural health care, which encourages providers to deliver service irrespective of these aspects of a patient. Cultural safety involves recognizing the health care provider as bringing his or her own culture and attitudes to the relationship.” (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008: 5)

Risks to Effective Social Work Practice

- ▶ *“Paralysis* is a guilt response that takes in the criticism and deeply experiences the shame associated with it. The problem with it, is experiences the shame associated with it. The agree with it and offer sympathetic responses. Many people in this situation feel overwhelmed with the enormous process of changing the institution they work in, afraid of the bewildering implications for their own future and the possibility they might cause the same offence some time in the future. To avoid these risks and open conflict, they do nothing and feel impotent. Unfortunately the passivity functions as a form of control, because it further entrenches the status quo.” (Tamasese and Waldegrave, 1993: 32)
- ▶ *“Individualising* is a closely associated response when threatened with criticisms of cultural or gender oppression. "Liberal" white people and "sensitive" guys, somehow, separate themselves from their cultural and gender histories, and claim they can only be responsible for their personal behaviour. They, then, attempt to be individual paragons of cultural or gender equality. The problem with this approach is that it cleverly sidesteps the institutional and collective reality of the problem of discrimination.” (Tamasese and Waldegrave, 1993: 32)

Opportunity: Decolonization

- ▶ “One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. **Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another**, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.” (Freire, 1968: 3)
- ▶ “Decolonization is the process of the oppressed **regaining self-determination and independence** in social, economic, cultural, and political structures, and an identity as individuals, families, communities, and nations. Strategies for decolonization range from Aboriginal self-government in areas of social, economic, cultural, and political systems to consciousness-raising regarding oppression. The process of decolonization will be different for various Aboriginal populations because of the diversity among Aboriginal peoples and their beliefs.” (Verniest, 2006: 10)

“Helpers recognize that they need to develop an understanding of each individual they are working with, including that person’s personal, family, community and national history and how that history affects the present.”

(Hart, 2002: 107)



Final Thoughts

We are part of a historical process - no matter how small or great our contributions to the professional social work relationship may seem.

Through each interaction, together we are making history with our clients.

Only by understanding the past, can we build a better pathway forward.

