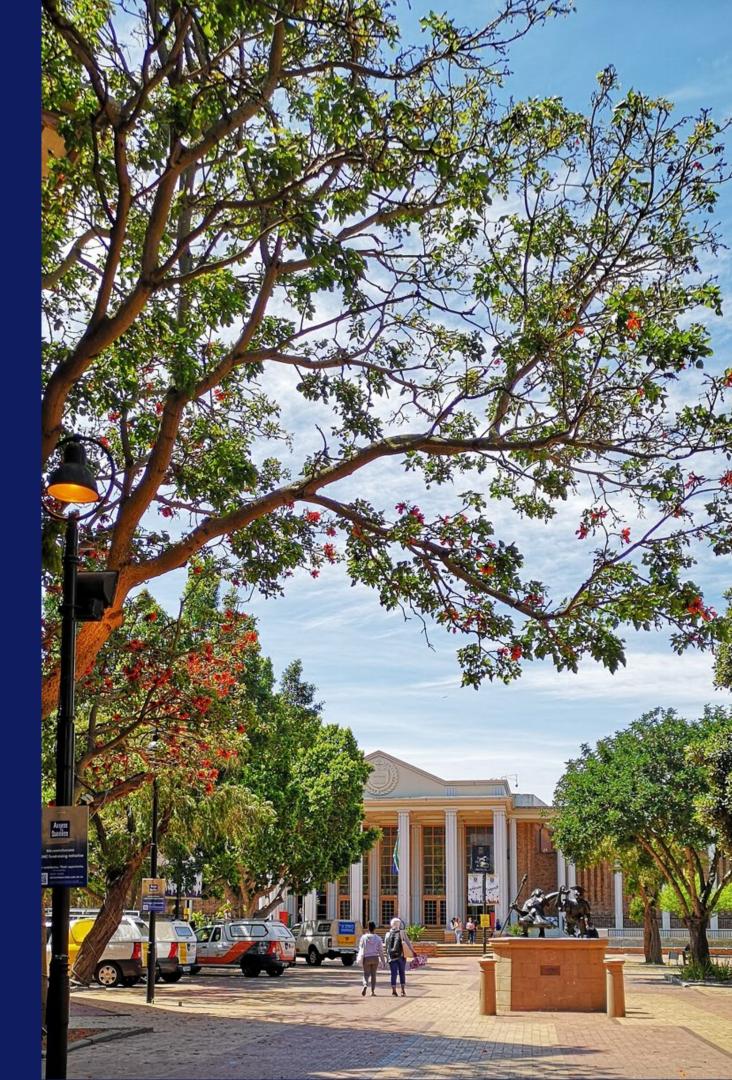# Student social workers' understanding of the concepts of 'culture', 'cultural identity' and 'decolonisation'

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ASASWEI Conference: 26 – 29 September 2023

Durban

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RESPICE PROSPICE

➢ **Decolonised pedagogy** requires:

– exploring meanings attached to concepts that reflect context-related relevance to practice (Razack, 2009).

– encouraging a discourse to integrate the African worldview in an effort to centralize Africa's diversity, its culture and its identity (Chen, 2014).

➢ **In practice**:

✓ Critical engagement with students to include their lived experiences, perceptions and understandings in curricula.

✓ They explore how the past influences present perceptions, practices and experiences, as well as how the present could influence the future.

➢ In terms of the **BSW standards**, such practices contributes to self vis-à-vis professional practice.

Active Force of Currere (the Latin word for 'to run')

➢ The curriculum is informed and refocused through acknowledging individual experience – context (Pinar, 2011).

➢ As such, our thinking of curriculum is s an active conceptual force – the curriculum cannot be fixed, and is influenced by relevance and context (Walling, 2010).

➢ **Value**: An unexpected journey with an unexpected outcome within academia (Adams, 2014).

➢ **Relevance** for decolonizing the curriculum:

– creates a variety of movements that inform our understanding of social phenomena within specific contexts (Le Grange, 2014).

– Developing trajectories to answer the epistemological questions of how we know what we know, and what we need to know to develop decolonised curricula (cf. Morley & Macfarlane, 2010).

➢ **Leading questions**:

– Where will we obtain knowledge and understanding of profession-related concepts?

– How do we include a diverse understanding of the terms?

– How do we use this understanding in the future?

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➤**Envisaged outcome** when using this framework:

- –Learning becomes more than a cognitive experience, involving language and structure to explore what one knows.
- –It changes the way in which students engage with academic material, their own lives and the world (Adams, 2014).
- –This can influence the way in which students utilize these concepts within personal and professional contexts (Smith, 2013).

➤**Steps** (Smith, 2013):

1. A platform for discourses to **explore** their own experiences that influence the way they perceive selected concepts.
2. Encouraging **critical reflections** of how the past and present influence their interpretation of concepts, and how this may influence the future.
3. Developing a **collective description** of the terms under investigation, acknowledging all individual contribution..

Within the theoretical framework of the Active Force of Currere, to encourage a discourse between student social workers to explore

1. their perceptions and experiences related to the concepts of 'culture', 'cultural identity' and 'decolonization',

2. how past experiences influence their present understanding, attitude and behavior regarding the terms on a personal and professional level, and

3. to develop a collective description of these terms.

➤ From an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach was followed, utilising the phenomenological research design.

➤ A purposive non-probability sampling strategy was implemented to access participants from the population of registered student social workers at the UWC (18 third-year students).

➤ Data was collected through World Café focus groups, followed by thematic data analysis.

➤ Data verification strategies: Sampling, interview guide, method of data recording and analysis, member checking.

➤ Ethics: Voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and the management of data (ethical clearance from the UWC).

➤ Culture refers to a way of living based on values that is viewed as important to guide behaviour within a group.

➤ It can include components of traditions by a specific group (i.e. the way people live in a geographical area or ethnic of religious groups), and also beliefs, rules, food, language, clothing, art, and spirituality.

➤ People are drawn to cultures based on

–an identification with the values and ways of living and believing, or

–by a sense of belonging that is associated with being part of a group.

➤ However, culture can be forced on people within a group through, for example, generational expectations and colonialism.

➢ Cultural practices can vary, depending of the context of an individual.

– Thus, one can have different cultural experiences within the family and e.g. the workplace, university etc.

➢ Based on exposure and experiences, culture can continuously change and evolve.

➢ Contacts between different cultures can lead to a better understanding of other cultures, and the discovery of similarities.

➢ However, culture can also lead to categorisation, where individual beliefs are not being taken into consideration.

➢Cultural identity is the way you can identify yourself within a cultural group in terms of

–your position in the group, or

–the group's position in the broader society.

➢It is often perceived in terms of ethnicity, spirituality or social class.

➢Expressions of cultural identity can take on forms of language, rituals, and practices associated with what you believe in.

–The way cultural identify is being expressed is often influenced by whether the expression is accepted or oppressed.

–Cultural identity, as a personal choice, may lead to oppression or discrimination when, for example, age, gender and sexuality are being subjugated based on what people identify with and how they express this identification.

➤ The development of cultural identity can be influenced by

— historical events, such as apartheid and colonialism where a specific group was viewed as less important.

— Social media impacting on how people perceive their own cultural identities, and that of others.

➤ A cultural identity is therefore closely related to self-concept; the way we view ourselves.

➤Decolonization requires

–a mind shift, or a change in perspectives about the world and our place in it,

–unity through mutual understanding and acceptance,

–freedom for all,

–redressing what was wrong in the past,

–empowerment through equality, and

–promoting interdependence by finding ways to work together.

➤Ways to promote decolonization include

–education that includes learning about our heritage, and

–parents being a part of guiding their children towards a fair and just society where we all play a role.

➢Decolonization practices promote

– understanding of culture and cultural identity,

– while also addressing changes in perspectives among different generations.

➢A decolonized context should not be dependent on political processes, but rather on how communities are dealing with the past and creating spaces where people can address the past hurts, and work towards collective wellbeing where Ubuntu is visible.

➢ The more we spoke, the more I felt a fire in me. I want to change things.

➢ I feel empowered through a sense of unity – we share similarities even if we are different and coming from different contexts.

➢ We had to listen to each other, and then we could also relate to each other.

➢ It is an emotional experience to discuss these things. But in a sense almost like an emotional release.

➢ I never even thought about how my own life influence how I look at these words. This should be done in all our classes.