

Jewish Dyad Learning as an Indigenous Religious and Spiritual Based Pedagogy for Social Work Students: A Workshop

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Purpose

The purpose of the workshop is three-fold:

1. To experience learning space inspired by the Jewish Study Hall and particularly by the *hevruta* or dyad learning pedagogy.
2. To define and elaborate upon the relationship between indigenous knowledge and pedagogy and the social work profession.
3. To examine the relevance of indigenous knowledge to the development of social work students' personal and professional identities.

Background

During the 2014 IASSW Conference that convened in Australia, IASSW members voted to recognize indigenous knowledge as an underpinning concept of social work knowledge and practice. Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Passed down from generation to generation this knowledge is closely interwoven with a people's cultural values and their spiritual and religious world.

Religion and spirituality have become increasingly important to the social work profession. Yet, unfortunately, few colleges and universities in the West encourage students, faculty or practitioners to explore spiritual and/or religious beliefs as a method to broaden and deepen personal and professional identity. This state of affairs can be attributed to the many practitioners, policymakers, academics and pressure groups within the profession who

express concern that prioritizing issues of religion and spirituality can lead to dangerous consequences, particularly for clients. Without ignoring these and other potentially dangerous consequences, it is important to attempt to understand the constructive place of religion and spirituality in the professional socialization process.

Over the last two years the School of Social Work at the Sapir College in Israel has conducted a Beit Midrash or Study Hall for Judaism and Social Work, for students, faculty and graduates. The initiative was developed by faculty and students who were interested in learning about the relationship between indigenous Jewish knowledge and the social work profession.

The Study Hall is a place or space where Jews, traditionally men, have gathered for centuries to engage in the study of classical Jewish texts. It incorporates a form of text study known as the *hevruta or dyad learning* as pedagogy for knowledge acquirement.

Hevruta learning engages two learners in collaborative interpretation of text. The process is carried out independently from the learning instructor and is known to enhance a sense of presence activating one's relationship to the self, the other and the text. Within The Sapir College Jewish Study Hall this process serves as the basis to then discuss the relationship between indigenous knowledge and the social work profession. The Study Hall is convened throughout the academic year. Participation is on a voluntary basis.

Research recently completed by the authors found that there is a significant link between indigenous knowledge and personal and professional development.

Moreover, the research suggests that The Jewish Study hall offers the students a

safe space that complements the learning spaces most commonly employed in traditional social work education.

Workshop Methodology

The workshop will combine both didactic and experiential methods. The workshop will begin with an overview of the topic and a brief presentation of the research findings. Participants will then be invited to study ancient and modern text through the dyad learning methodology and to reflect on the text in relation to the self. Finally, participants will discuss the relationship between indigenous knowledge and the profession and its role in the development of the social work professional.