

Impediments to a decolonial social work education in South Africa: Views of educators

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Introduction



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- ❖ Two key issues in the decolonization debate in SW education:
 - Definitions
 - Implementation

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 - **Implementation**
 - ⤴ **Impediments** – factors that make it harder for us to accomplish our ambitions for a decolonized social work education

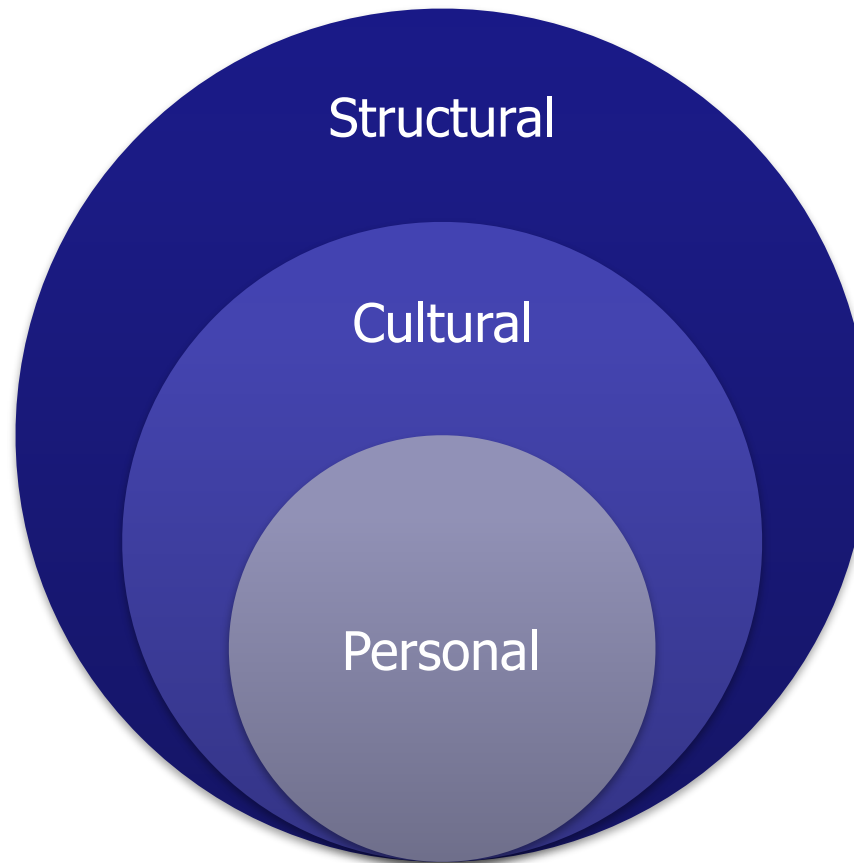
Methodology



- ❖ Four regional workshops on decolonizing social work education 19-23 September 2016, in Cape Town, Durban, East London and Pretoria
 - Attended by 113 academics out of 244 (45%)
 - All universities sent at least one delegate, except University of Zululand
 - Facilitated by ASASWEI Exco
 - Draft report, circulated in October 2016 for comment
 - Final report, circulated October 2017.

Theoretical framework

- ❖ Thompson's (2016) anti-discriminatory PCS model:



Personal Impediments



- ❖ Co-option of educators into a western paradigm through their own social work education
 - Particularly language – we think social work in English
- ❖ The seduction of middle class comforts
 - Movement into suburbs, disconnection from communities of origin, assimilation into an English community culture

Cultural Impediments



- ❖ Higher education's obsession with international
 - Culture of 'west is best'
 - e.g. DSD's link with a US university instead of an African university to assist with decolonisation
- ❖ Social workers are 'nice' people – avoidance of engagement with uncomfortable topics related to whiteness, blackness, privilege, racism, sexism
- ❖ Heightened anxiety (fear) about saying the 'wrong' thing and being labelled a racist
- ❖ Intellectual questions about the content and rigour of indigenous knowledge systems

Structural Impediments



- ❖ Lack of relevant local literature – much local literature is a rehash of international theory
- ❖ Disincentives for publishing in local journals
- ❖ Disincentives for writing local text books
- ❖ Institutional pressure to produce research that speaks primarily to an international (i.e. non-African) audience
- ❖ Heavy teaching loads that leave little time and head space to be creative

Dismantling the Impediments



1. Critically engage university and DoHET systems regarding the disjuncture between the decolonization imperative and the publication subsidy policy
2. Engage in national conversations about what bodies of literature are required that will advance a decolonized social work
3. HODs to lobby Deans for space for academics to engage critically with decolonizing their teaching materials – literature, case examples, slides

Dismantling the Impediments



4. Engage in faculty-level (and senate-level) conversations about our obsession with international recognition. Can we construct a new kind of stature that is centred on indigenous knowledge?
5. Cultivate among ourselves a level of trust and mutual respect that allows authentic and risky communication. Lowering of defences. External facilitators.
6. Make space to engage critically with our own taken-for-granted realities.

Conclusion



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- ❖ Identifying and removing impediments opens up a clearer path towards a decolonized social work education, increasing our chances of accomplishing what we hope to achieve

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