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Article abstract

There are increased efforts on the part of business schools to recruit more Indigenous students and faculty members in response to the call for greater inclusivity. Nevertheless, an inhospitable climate for Indigenous who wish to retain their cultural identity remains a challenge. This article describes the experience of a faculty member from a "recognizable minority" recruited to give an "inclusive" face to a business schools conventional models, and outlines the unwelcoming atmosphere faced by racialized students and faculty members in institutions that at the same time try to mould them into mainstream models. Can business schools allow Indigenous and other divergent voices to challenge and even reform mainstream models?

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ABSTRACT

There are increased efforts on the part of business schools to recruit more Indigenous students and faculty members in response to the call for greater inclusivity. Nevertheless, an inhospitable climate for Indigenous who wish to retain their cultural identity remains a challenge. This article describes the experience of a faculty member from a "recognizable minority" recruited to give an "inclusive" face to a business schools conventional models, and outlines the unwelcoming atmosphere faced by racialized students and faculty members in institutions that at the same time try to mould them into mainstream models. Can business schools allow Indigenous and other divergent voices to challenge and even reform mainstream models?

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, colonization, diversity, worldviews, power, business schools

Résumé

Les écoles de commerce redoublent d'efforts pour recruter davantage d'étudiants et de professeurs autochtones en vue d'une plus grande inclusion. Le climat inhospitalier pour les autochtones qui souhaitent préserver leur identité culturelle reste un défi. Cet article décrit l'expérience d'une professeure issue d'une « minorité reconnaissable » recruté pour donner un visage « inclusif » aux modèles conventionnels d'une école de commerce. Il décrit l'atmosphère peu accueillante à laquelle sont confrontés les étudiants et les membres du corps enseignant racialisés dans des institutions qui tentent en même temps de les mouler dans les modèles dominants. Les écoles de commerce peuvent-elles permettre aux voix divergentes de questionner, voire de réformer, les modèles dominants ?

Mots-clés : personnes autochtones, colonisation, diversité, visions du monde, pouvoir, écoles de gestion

Resumen

Hay mayores esfuerzos por parte de las escuelas de negocios para reclutar a más estudiantes y profesores Indígenas en respuesta al llamado a una mayor inclusión. Sin embargo, un clima inhóspito para los indígenas que desean conservar su identidad cultural sigue siendo un desafío. Este artículo describe la experiencia de un miembro de la facultad de una 'minoría reconocible' reclutada para dar una cara 'inclusiva' a los modelos convencionales de las escuelas de negocios, y describe la atmósfera poco acogedora que enfrentan los estudiantes y profesores de minorías raciales en instituciones que al mismo tiempo intentan para moldearlos en modelos convencionales. ¿Pueden las escuelas de negocios permitir que las voces indígenas y otras voces divergentes desafíen e incluso reformen los modelos dominantes?

Palabras Claves: Indígenas, colonización, diversidad, cosmovisiones, poder, escuelas de negocios

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Indigenous/Indigeneity

It is estimated that there the world's Indigenous population is about 476 million (World Bank, 2019). It is not one population, but a numerous and varied set of communities in many different localities, with vastly different histories and circumstances (Levi & Maybury-Lewis, 2012). The Indigenous share, however, almost by definition, the experience of colonization, "indigenous or aboriginal peoples are so-called because they were living on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere; they are the descendants … the new arrivals later becoming dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means" (General Assembly of The United Nations, 1995). Colonization has bequeathed to Indigenous peoples a varied set of chronic social, cultural, economic and political disadvantages in relation to the settler populations around them. The configuration of their handicap varies from place to place, but the many dimensions of poverty are evident in the striking differences that typify the contrast between these populations and their surrounding settler societies, not only with respect to income, but—more tellingly—life expectancy, health and health care, education and employment, housing, living conditions and opportunities of many kinds (Hall & Gandalfo, 2016).

Indigenous participation in higher education reflects this multi-faceted bias. For example, in USA less than 20% of the Indigenous population advance beyond high school in their education, compared with at least 60% of the general population (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019). Predictably, representation of the Indigenous in the teaching ranks of universities reflects even less their place in the population. In 2006, for example, there were 600 Indigenous faculty members in Canadian universities: 0.9 percent of Canada's university professors versus 3.8% of Canada's population (Henry, 2012). In the last twenty years, Indigenous Peoples in business schools has been and still are highly underrepresented, though their presence in management conferences over the last five years has seen a modest increase.

There are mounting pressures, especially in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to address this imbalance. Canada faced a clarion call in its Truth and Reconciliation report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) for the postsecondary sector to improve access for Indigenous students, staff and faculty, to heighten recognition of Indigenous language, culture and history and include recognition of colonization and its heritage. It is important, however, to recognize different visions of Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). In general, business school policies addressing Indigenous matters are oriented toward an increase in the number of Indigenous students and sometimes faculty members; but the assumption is, largely, that their inclusion will bring with it an adaptation to the prevailing academic culture. Conceptions of Indigeneity are shaped by the explicit utterance I have heard in business schools: "we want people like us." Often, this means that hiring committees tend to favour candidates that pose no threat to the prevailing business assumptions and are willing to reproduce and legitimize the neoliberal agenda.

Several years before Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I participated, as a member of the business faculty, in an initiative envisioned and organized by another faculty, to develop an Indigenous Economic Development proposal for our university. Once funding was obtained, the business faculty came aboard as a partner. During the hiring process, we were able to attract a well-published, Indigenous scholar: a dark-skinned and proud Indigenous woman. During her recruitment visit, she spoke about Indigenous worldviews and social justice issues. Members of the committee, including faculty members—some of them dark skinned—expressed their strong opposition to hiring "that woman, who started her presentation with a prayer." Others rejected to her on the basis that "we don't talk about social justice and those things here," as though talking about "those things" brings bad feelings. It is difficult to estimate how much skin colour, ideology and/or gender played a role in the rejection.

Apparently, some business schools "are doing well" on the matter of "diversity," insofar as "the turn to diversity is often predicated on the numbers game, on getting more of us, more people of colour, to add colour to the white faces of organisations" (Ahmed, 2009, p. 41). The fact is that agreeable words such as "inclusion" and "diversity" can serve to mask biases beneath the surface.

The Experience

As a *"mestiza"*—of mixed Andean Indigenous and Spanish blood—and an anthropologist, I arrived in a Canadian business faculty doctoral program in the late nineties, with research questions shaped by my experiences living and working among *Aymara and Quechua* Peoples. Whenever I mentioned wanting to write

about poverty, Indigenous Peoples and grassroots organizing, my classmates laughed and declared that I was in the "wrong building". The business school was not the place for those subjects.

Later, as a new faculty member in another Canadian university, my own Indigeneity was submerged in the general category of *Latina*, cheerful and no doubt mouldable. My research on poverty was appealing for the faculty member who led the entrepreneurship group. My first week as a new faculty member included a taste of what I would experience for 16 years. I attended a presentation by the leader of the ENT area, with only six people in attendance, including other entrepreneurship faculty members, the wife of the presenter and a senior professor from sociology in another corner of the room. The presentation seemed to me based on narrow representation of how society functions. At the end of the presentation, the sociologist stood to say that what he heard sounded like economic imperialism. The presenter's response was, "We now have an Anthropologist scholar from Peru, and she confirms all this." I was taken back. I did not recognize the "all this" I was supposed to be endorsing.

Membership in the entrepreneurship group was difficult for many reasons. I was the only woman, a lower-class *mestiza*, with English as a second language, among four white men. I was told that the leader set the research and teaching agenda, which we would all follow. Writing on my own, "would be a waste of time." It was expected that I quietly fit into an agenda based on assumptions I found difficult to accept. It was repeated at every opportunity that Indigenous peoples don't have the "right cognitions." Within the group, a climate of dogmatism, power and hierarchy prevailed, and it was clear where I was located in the hierarchy. There were strong incentives, including financial rewards through executive education and the promise of a secure tenure process, for members to conform.

I struggled. I was in an intellectual straitjacket, and clearly being used to validate the global applicability of a model I had my doubts about, simply by my presence on the team. On November 19, 2001, I wrote: "Last night, again, I could not sleep. I had an asthma attack. In the presentation yesterday, there was no room for real discussion. I have to think of the model. If I repeat the mantra and provide examples for feeding the model, then I am 'good colleague'. It is not difficult to do that, but it is morally hard. I spend so much energy trying to fit in the model, but it does not work."

When, finally, I let the leader of the ENT group know that I was going to pursue my own research, he spoke from his position of power in letting me know I had small chances of gaining tenure if I ventured on my own. He added, "I know what you teach." This was immediately post-9/11, and he insinuated that I taught revolutionary stuff consistent with terrorism. About that same time, I recall, one of the MBA students confronted me because of my questioning of the role of multi-national corporations. He also informed me that Indigenous Peoples are "genetically retarded," and that he and the head of the entrepreneurship group were writing a paper on the subject. I never saw it. When I left the ENT group, another former male MBA student, a non-visibly Indigenous sessional instructor, became a business partner in promoting and profiting from the model among Indigenous Peoples.

It was clear that the research I engaged in as a *mestiza* woman interested in understanding and bringing Indigenous worldviews into management was not only unwelcome but resisted. It was as though I was expected to leave "my ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gate" (Kuokkanen, 2007) When it became clear I wasn't ready to fit Indigenous realities into a model based on the deficits in Indigenous culture that needed to be remedied, a campaign emerged around my not being a team player. Ways were devised to undermine the legitimacy of my academic research. When I published a paper in a top business journal, a colleague in a meeting threw a copy to the floor and said: "How does this journal publish this stuff?"

Teaching: Indigenizing Education

Indigenous Peoples' social, economic and cultural histories have been silenced and erased. It is not surprising that business students everywhere grow up knowing very little about Indigenous socio-economic history. At the beginning of one of my classes, student groups develop a tree symbolizing their communities, with the roots representing their social, economy and natural history. I seldom saw my business students identify Indigenous Peoples as part of their local histories, and the exercise provided an opportunity to bring this to the surface. The few students that had something to say often gave voice to negative stereotypes.

In the global south as in the global north, Indigenous students want to acquire business skills to improve the material conditions of their families and communities. The communities many of them come from engage in traditional forms of collective business rooted in Indigenous worldviews and associated values of reciprocity and the common good. These Indigenous enterprises often provide scholarships to their youth to attend business schools. Ironically, when students return to their communities, they question the social and cultural goals built into their Indigenous enterprises, as well as their traditions of management. "We are only Indians," they declare. "Enterprises should be privatized and run by MBA's. That's what business is about!" This is a sobering example of how management education is imported to the global south (Peredo & Moore, 2008) and how a management curriculum dominated by neoliberal perspectives (Fotaki & Prasad, 2015), furthers the conception of the north and the white as superior (Bhabha, 2012).

Business schools are not a friendly place for Indigenous students, especially if they are racially and/or culturally recognizable. Their visibility brings with it structural barriers that other students don't have and those affect their academic achievements. It has not been a friendly place for Indigenous faculty members either, unless they accept assimilation and being used as a token. In that context " ... teaching becomes a furtive, guilty act..." (Asher, 2009, p. 298)

In Canada, in response to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission call for Indigenizing the curriculum, business schools have increased efforts to recruit Indigenous students. However, with few exceptions the curriculum fails to include content that is relevant (Recode, 2016) and appropriate to the cultural and political realities of the Indigenous Peoples. Entrepreneurship programs oriented toward Indigenous Peoples have grown exponentially, with many faculty members driven by the idea that we need to teach "them" to become "entrepreneurs," ignoring the rich economic traditions and histories that were dismantled by colonial powers. Bringing Indigenous speakers and visits to "successful" Indigenous communities can be excellent opportunities to bring Indigenous worldviews and economic practices into the classroom, but only if we are willing to enlarge our way of seeing things (Peredo & McLean, 2010). One barrier is the dominant school of thought that "Indigenous peoples just need to learn business," with the rest, as one dean explained to me, "just ideology." Without questioning that assumption, a visit to Indigenous communities can be moulded to reinforce that perspective.

The rush to Indigenize the curricula in Canada are seen by some business schools as a business opportunity to expand their executive education business programs, and thus enhance their profitability, by providing entrepreneurial education to Indigenous Peoples, often with generous government subsidies. This is also seen as a market opportunity to engage with the extractive industries, including tailored executive programs for their employees aimed at enabling them to negotiate with Indigenous Peoples and gain access to their natural resources. In that environment, Indigenous faculty members, mainly dark-skinned women with experience in working with and researching Indigenous communities, are not included. Their talk about the history of colonization and cultural values does not connect with "real business."

Are all Indigenous the same? I know of one well-known, woman Indigenous leader who was attracted with a big title in a business school. She found herself in a basement office, and although her name was on some of the school's initiatives, she had little to do with them. Who runs and teaches those programs? A male Indigenous instructor or consultant who speaks "real business" and non-Indigenous faculty members who do little or no research on Indigenous issues but enjoy the financial benefits that executive education brings as they understand "real business." They are rewarded for "helping indigenous people." Race, gender, class and ideology intersect to play a role.

There are other contradictions. While on one hand Business Schools in the global north express a desire to recognize Indigenous interests, they are not bothered by donations from extractive industries who have received attention for human rights abuses involving Indigenous communities, and environmental destruction in associated lands in the global south (Corntassel, 2014). A senior, Indigenous woman faculty member who points to such a contradiction is silenced, disciplined and replaced by a junior, white male faculty member whose role would be to "help the extractive industries to negotiate with Indigenous Peoples who don't understand the benefits of partnering with real businesses."

There are many proposals as to how to Indigenize research and teaching the academy. The fundamental question is, are business school really able to open up to Indigenous epistemologies, knowledges and practices that do not conform to mainstream business assumptions? Indigenous bodies are not enough. A deep engagement with Indigeneity means listening, demarginalizing and providing

spaces to those who stand for more just that adapting Indigenous Peoples to mainstream business. Otherwise, "inclusion is ultimately the low-hanging fruit of Indigenization" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

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