

Journal of American Indian Education

Volume 38 Number 2
Winter 1999

BOOK REVIEW

Reimer, Catherine Swan. (1999) *Counseling the Inupiat Eskimo*, Westport, CN: Greenwood Press. (163 pages).

Catherine Reimer's new book, *Counseling the Inupiat Eskimo*, is an in-depth study and exploration into the Inupiat of Alaska's concept of *well-being*. This study provides a context supporting Reimers' many examples and instances of culturally relevant counseling practices that can be employed to enhance rapport and to create more substantial counselor and client relationships.

The author makes clear that the intent of her book is to promote more effective ways of alleviating some of the social and psychological issues pertaining to her people. Her intent appears to be well grounded in a belief that researchers from different cultures often propagate misconceptions and, although well intentioned, fail to apprehend the significance of "good personal outlook" (or *well being*) inherent in the Inupiat perspective. Using actual statements from subjects in her study, she develops an understanding of these concepts with the reader, demonstrating how non-Inupiat counselors may miss them. Thus, ethnographic narrative is the backbone of the book and Reimer effectively uses native voice to suggest ways to approach prevention. However, she also offers the caveat that a classically "preventative approach" may not necessarily be the best in terms of Inupiat worldview.

According to Reimer, the crux of Inupiat worldview is the act of interpreting what the environment is trying to tell you. Reimer's summaries at the end of each chapter of the book constantly revisit this crucial element of Inupiat psyche. In this way, she continually reinforces the notion that counselors, Native and non-Native alike, must constantly negotiate through this critical aspect of Inupiat psychological functioning in order to effectively deal with issues relating to *well being*.

The author proposes that the subsistence lifestyle of the Inupiat Eskimo is interwoven with the concept of *well being*. By way of contrast, and supported by Inupiat voices, Reimer demonstrates some of the differences in the evolution and cultural adaptation of other North American native cultures. As the Inupiat worldview is deeply embedded in an ideal that connects subsistence and *well being*, the totality of this view is tuned to the natural environment in which the Inupiat live. The author also insists that humor and happiness are part of *well being* in the Inupiat life view but that its essential presence and its expressions are often misunderstood and misinterpreted by non-Inupiat. While this reviewer understands that other North American native cultures expound similar beliefs, the significance of humor is inadequately addressed in this book if a counselor is seeking necessary insights and tools to restore humor into the lives of the Inupiat.

Reimer is convincing in her exposition of a basic dilemma posed by the way that counselors are professionally trained and their interaction with the Inupiat's spiritual and physical quest for *well being*. While clinical training dictates that clients should express feelings of negativity, such as, anger, denial or grief, the Inupiat quest involves the search for and revelation of happiness and the expression of behaviors related to them.

Thus, it appears that these two approaches are at odds in the client-counselor relationship, with the dominant clinical focus on releasing negativity opposing the Inupiat quest for *Ahregah* (being brought to well being).

The author explores native sociology and cultural belief systems and argues that they continue to provide a solid base of moral values to preserve native psychological and social integrity. This is true for other North American native cultures as well as the Inupiat. Although she acknowledges the power of acculturation and its effects on native culture, such as the Inupiat's adoption of Christianity, Reimer claims the existence of an embedded Inupiat worldview that persists in spite of the effects of acculturation and Christian spirituality. To illustrate this, Reimer claims that the Inupiat are "good Christians" while continually referring to the centrality of the "the Inupiat way," which appears to be an elusive mix of Christianity and older traditional Inupiat beliefs and practices.

The Counselor must look well beyond the surface to truly understand this unique Inupiat view and to hear beyond mere words used to describe *PWB* (personal well being) or the quest for it. As she interprets the Inupiat text of her informants, she also infuses her own personal knowledge about what they are saying. This is effective in conveying to the reader a greater understanding of the quest for well being that goes beyond the surface constructs associated with acculturation. This interpretation is an effective device in informing the outside world and the non-native counselor about these issues.

Although the author states that "shamanism is frowned upon," many of the traditional healing practices she describes in her book are similar to those used by

shamans of other Native American cultures. Reimer's reluctance to acknowledge these traditional healing practices as shamanistic in nature may be a result of the considerable respect she shows toward the people she interviewed. She applied an Inupiat standard to healing as well as good counseling, concluding that both processes are interrelated and that effectiveness is based on a deep understanding of Inupiat world view. She suggests that, in practice, the counselor team with the healer to help the client, one deferring to the skills and insights of the other as aspects of differing problems emerge. This is a useful suggestion, especially if the counselor is not native and does not have a full understanding of the native worldview.

In terms of solutions, Reimer suggests that counselor research needs to be better grounded. There is a serious lack of the appreciation of diverse cultures in traditional counselor training. Native counselors should be trained to determine and measure their effectiveness in comparison to non-Native counselors. This will help identify important aspects of effectiveness. However, care should be taken not to segregate counselors and clients based solely on common ethnicity. To assume counselor effectiveness because of common ethnicity could result in more problems. Counselor effectiveness should instead be developed around skill and knowledge needed to appreciate the client's worldview or culture.

After reading this work, a major question remains unanswered: What are the beliefs about personal well being held by the younger Inupiat generation? The author alludes to them throughout the book, but really focuses on the older generation in deducing Inupiat worldview and beliefs on personal well being. Nonetheless, it is inspiring to realize that this treatise on counselor effectiveness calls for sensitivity to

worldview and suggests ways to integrate it. The book also provides many practical suggestions to improve counselor effectiveness with native clients.

Although this book is specific to Inupiat culture, the information and insights are highly generalizable to other native cultural contexts. This book will inform both practitioners and students and will provide a good frame of reference, especially for counselors new to working with native people. Also, reflecting the uniqueness of the Inupiat, Reimer concludes that the bridge between Native and Christian spirituality has been linked, especially in the minds and teachings of the Inupiat Eskimo. It is *Ahrega!*

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