4.2: A Glance at the Literature

There are a number of differences between Indigenous and other types of leadership styles. One such example is the use of traditional imagery and storytelling (Julien et al., 2010; Nichols, 2004). Lessons are taught through stories and also have a connection with the land and Indigenous identity (Nichols, 2004; Wolfgramm, Spiller, & Voyageur, 2016).

From the Field

Consider the importance of being open to different styles of learning and listening to other perspectives.

As a non-Indigenous person, I remember the first time I spoke with an Indigenous Elder about his perspectives on individuals and a particular issue I felt was important in the correctional setting. The Elder asked me to sit with him and drink some tea as we talked. Initially I thought I was going to interview this person, but instead it was a conversation with a humble and experienced man who had decades of experience under his belt. His unassuming nature made me feel at ease and the way he spoke and addressed me made me acknowledge how much more I needed to learn. As I asked him questions, he would share stories with me that made me realize that I needed to look at the questions I was asking in a different way.

—Anthony de Padua, RN, PhD

Nichols (2004) conducted focus groups with Native American nurse leaders and found that the point of reference for the Indigenous nurse leaders were the individuals they worked with: their families and tribal communities. The Indigenous nurse leaders were tied closely to their communities and their view of leadership was about leading the organization and community as a whole.

Felicity (1999) and Nichols (2004) also reinforced the holistic view of Indigenous leadership and leaders’ concerns for
the community. Julien and colleagues (2010) took this notion of holistic leadership a step further by describing spirituality as a central element of Indigenous leaders’ practices and beliefs:

One respondent noted that, while his non-Aboriginal colleagues had a tendency to focus on processes and were greatly motivated by outcomes that were purely profit-driven, he felt his work was a spiritual endeavor. He expressed that “the work we do—it’s not about education, it’s not about research—it’s about spirituality; the other things are just part of the whole process.” (p. 119–120)

Julien and colleagues (2010) also described time elements that Indigenous leaders value. The knowledge that departed Elders had shared needed to be considered, built upon, and valued. It was also important to consider the impact that resolutions would make on future generations (i.e., seven generations into the future).

Nurse leaders need to consider the population being served, as explained by nursing theorist Madeleine Leininger. Her transcultural nursing theory encompasses “the concept of cultural competence, that is, the nurse’s ability to incorporate considerations of an individual’s cultural background into nursing practice [and leadership]” (Johnson & Webber, 2015, p. 207).