

COUNSELLOR EDUCATION *as* HUMANIST COLONIALISM: SEEKING POST- COLONIAL APPROACHES *to* EDUCATING COUNSELLORS *by* EXPLORING PATHWAYS *to an* INDIGENOUS AESTHETIC

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■ Abstract

This narrative reflection emerged during a time of personally reconnecting with Mi'kmaq First Nation culture and heritage while working in the mainstream roles of counsellor educator and educationalist in Australia. The essay expresses turning points along a path of increasing political and social discomfort with the status quo in counsellor education. Paradoxically, and in parallel fashion, as Indigenous empowerment increased the issues that arise also became more difficult. Staying with these questions long enough to see through the fog seemed important. Disconcerting questions arose related to identity, prejudice, and healing in a field where helping is purported to be the chief focus of our work. The essay examines "Aboriginal Australian" constructs of counsellor education as expressions of liberal humanist colonialism. Pathways towards an Indigenous aesthetic are suggested based in a post-colonial model of culturally-grounded and locally-grown expressions that honour Indigenous ways of knowing. A new paradigm for counsellor education is suggested that listens to recent articulations of global Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and cosmology.

■ Introduction

Pjila'si "Welcome, come in, sit down." I write from a place of sitting in a wigwam of the People. I invite you into this space to dialogue about issues of concern. My first responsibility is to acknowledge the elders of the Mi'kmaq People of the Eastern Door of Turtle Island (North America). During an elder's Sacred Council last year that brought together the People from across Mi'kma'ki, the elders gifted me with Sacred Eagle Medicine of the Mi'kmaq First Nation and a Sacred Eagle Feather dressed in the traditional way. They asked me to carry this medicine with me on my journey back to Australia. They gave this medicine teaching to me and asked me to convey this to the Aboriginal Nations of Australia. They asked me to convey their wishes of prayer, respect, and honouring of the healing of our Nations. So this paper is written from a place of deep cultural respect, particularly for the elders and ancestors of our Nations, to whom we owe all that we know about our rich cultural legacy. To all our relations, I say, Tahoe.

Discussion of a wide range of issues is undertaken in this paper. It is not my intention to take an in-depth treatment of any one topic, but to make a wide sweep of issues, raise many questions, and allow the reader to explore your questions outside the scope of this paper. This paper is written from an Indigenous voice, and by honouring that voice I have allowed the paper to express different perspectives and to engage in a more personal style. Certain readers may find this "inappropriate" for an "academic" and "professional" audience. But I remind the reader that it is important to question our assumptions about language, style, and culture. In the academe we give great lip service to "culturally appropriate" forms of practice. But in reality, when one of us (Aboriginal people) comes forward and writes from a more natural voice even our Aboriginal colleagues may take a hyper-critical stance against our choice of expression. This lack of respect for diversity, even within Indigenous scholarly

circles, is in fact pointing to the heart of what this paper suggests. Reviewers and readers of this paper may make assumptions that reveal more about us as reviewers and readers, about our bias and prejudices, than about what the author is trying to convey. In an older cultural tradition I ask you to take a step back. Imagine you are visiting a foreign country. Imagine you are entering a wigwam of the People, and sit with me around a sacred fire, being open to listen with the heart, and when the time is right to engage in rigorous dialogue. At this Council Fire, let me say this paper raises difficult issues that burden my heart. Wela'lia. Thank you. Thank you for considering these issues with me.

As a mainstream educator, it is quite easy to suggest that the fabric that holds together mainstream educational and social theory is falling apart. Many leading authorities recognise a state of cultural decay, confusion, and identity crisis that is expressed by naming this circumstance as "postmodern". Postmodern is a term that suggests a moment of critical pause. This pause suggests a radical critique and opening to new perspectives. As an educator, I welcome this place of doubt and new possibility especially in a field where humanist colonialism appears to render race, sexuality, and other forms of difference invisible.

To survey the mainstream literature to support the above claims is quite easy. This crisis of identity suggested above touches every part of human life including sexuality (Simon, 1996), value and culture (Fekete, 1987), health care and well being (Fox, 1994), how people experience meaning and spirituality (Griffin, 1988), how we look at cultural change and human relationships (Harvey, 1989), ways of knowing gender and the standpoints of women (Herkman, 1990), expressions of religion (Hyman 1998), new ways to view research and pedagogy (Lather, 1991), and in searching for new ways to do education that are less alienating and more culturally appropriate (Levine-Rasky, 1993). Levine-Rasky was introduced to me during the early 1990s. I did not understand her work at the time. Nor did I grasp the significance nor the connection between the critique of humanist and other Eurocentric theories and how we actually do education in the mainstream. It has taken me these 14 years to understand her critique of liberal humanism. She was saying that how we do education via existing mainstream theories does damage to the felt-reality of people's rich cultural and personal identities. During these years the ironic part is that my education, like that of most people who enter into mainstream fields of the academe, has been steeped in liberal humanism.

The strong critique of these approaches during the 1980s has not changed the way that many of us do education today. Indeed the wisdom of culturally grounded approaches to education based in Friere's (1973) notion of education as a tool for consciousness

raising and political action still poses enormous challenge to the status quo. Thus we are not moving forward. Our models of education are still largely modernist and colonialist constructs that continue to alienate students without any of us necessarily knowing why we feel uncomfortable (McConaghy, 2000). Likewise, in counsellor education many programs are based in liberal humanist and existentialist philosophies (Corey, 2001; Geldard & Geldard, 1998), including the programs in which I have taught for several years. While I am attempting to listen to voices from the margins for insights of ways forward (Battiste, 2004; Battiste et al., 2006), this essay suggests that the status quo in education as well as specifically in counsellor education is problematic and needs to change.

In spite of the tendency of academics to dig in their heels and resist cultural changes that may compromise their status, voices from the margins are gaining strength in articulating alternative pathways to "new forms" of education that respect locality, place, and multifaceted identity (Battiste, 2004; McConaghy, 2000; Warner, 1993). These approaches challenge entrenched sectors of the academe where those in positions of authority and power may prefer to hold off the tide of change. An emerging Indigenous aesthetic is being put forward by an ever increasing body of Aboriginal scholars (Battiste & McConaghy, 2006; Butler, 2004; Orr, 2000). Sadly these voices echo longstanding concerns and continue to shame mainstream systems where entrenched colonial, racist, and discriminatory policies and paradigms continue to operate without regard (McConaghy, 2000).

Notions of "Aboriginal counselling" remain problematic, particularly in the foregoing climate of lack of recognition for decolonising strategies (Peavy, 1993). How the "Aboriginal" is constructed in mainstream academic circles follows closely pressures to create curriculum that meets mainstream demands. In sum, the field of counselling is already largely defined and assumed. Where is there room for an Indigenous aesthetic? In short order, "Aboriginal" becomes a catch-all word that ignores local Indigenous ways of knowing even while rhetoric of support is offered (Battiste, 2004). Mainstream economics demand that Australian universities claim copyright of Aboriginal programs that exist in each academe – in spite of ethical and legal battles to acknowledge Indigenous ownership, governance, and custodianship of land as well as intellectual property. Thus "Aboriginal" is defamed by the mainstream paradigm in spite of the well-meaning efforts of counsellor educators to create programs that assist the Indigenous community. These uniquely mainstreamed notions of Aboriginality conflate with how liberal humanist (Eurocentric) constructs brand and reproduce theories of the universal applicability of "counselling skills" regardless the cultural context. It is often called "multicultural counselling," noted in such mainstream, well respected, texts like the *Handbook of*

Multicultural Counselling (Ponterotto et al., 2001). In the field “multicultural” is a catch-all phrase that often conflates cultural diversity into a disciplinary melting pot. Underneath the assumptions lies an insidious message to those who stand on the margins of the dominant and assumed views – our way of knowing, thinking, and doing is the right way. We will teach you our way. Respect us, or risk being and feeling wrong. We as Aboriginal people wear this tattoo of shame on our bodies even when we attain degrees of “acceptance” and “prestige” in the mainstream. Liberal humanism assumes that “we” are taking a respectful path forward by levelling the playing field through forms of equity. The assumption is that “we” are helping others by learning “core skills” of counselling and communication (defined by the mainstream society and imposed on Aboriginal people). The latter example highlights the difficult fact of life we Aboriginal people know all too well, that when a dominant society sets up the game, the rules of the game, and the expectations about how to play, there is no room for authentic dialogue. The only way forward is to play their game or walk away. When you raise your voice you are often coming from such a radically alternative perspective to mainstream practitioners that they cannot relate. They have never been confronted with how it feels to be in a world made up of a majority of people who think differently to how they think. A white cultural blindness sets up a pervasive cultural silence – a dumb-faced blank-stare that minority people learn to live with in their mainstream colleagues. Often you have to walk away with an empty feeling inside your gut – what just happened there? We doubt ourselves, was that about me? Is there something wrong with me? It can take 10 years of pondering these questions just to realise the depth of layers of our own marginalisation, our own transgenerational trauma and shame, to realise that NO, it is not about me (Atkinson et al., 2006). But walking away in today’s world gets very tricky, because almost every aspect of our lives is controlled by the dominant society, their laws, their media, and their systems of education. Even their way of thinking can come to define our psychic, emotional, and social world.

In addition, the words “constructivist”, “poststructural”, “culturally sensitive”, and “diversity” are bandied about in a somewhat liberal humanist form of amnesia and sustained ignorance that feeds academic prestige but does little to effect social justice (Bowers, 2005a). Little effort appears to be made to deconstruct our own practice as counsellor educators in the rush of dollars to keep our programs “viable”. The close affinity between colonial government agendas and university management is all too clearly muddying the waters of education, and clearly, minority populations are under represented and largely ignored in the academe (Bowen et al., 2005; Side & Robbins, 2007). To weave a new basket from decentred spaces may not be possible under these circumstances.

■ Reconnecting with the Mi’kmaq

This section uses narrative to reflect on personal meaning and identity. In the field of counselling we employ narrative analysis as an everyday approach in therapy and in education – our reason is that narrative engages personal story. Story enables awareness to emerge. In certain sectors of the academe personal story is thought to be weak academically. We do not believe this in counselling. This value has helped me as an Aboriginal person to give myself space enough to hear my own story. My elders have taught me that only when we can share our stories do we find our medicine. Our stories are our medicine (Bowers 2005a, 2005b).

This narrative is informed by critical sociology. Critical sociological approaches (Morrow & Brown, 1993) assist me in articulating this increasing discomfort with the wider contexts that create the ways that counsellor education is currently conducted. This transition in my awareness challenges prior assumptions, and comes with a cost. In certain ways I must change the way that I work, and in doing so, might challenge the ways that others do counselling education. In some ways this has been just too difficult. One chooses to sit back and wait until colleagues retire or move on. In other ways one feels pushed into a corner and you are forced to engage in ways that challenge people to the core. In a field where authenticity is highly valued, it can take a great deal of patience and humility to wait for the right space and time to speak from an Indigenous aesthetic.

Indeed, by coming to Australia during 1998, I did not know what doors would open up to challenge my identity. Through teaching in liberal humanist and existentialist spaces, I was challenged to attend to my discomfort, anxiety, and to grow in some form of authenticity in my own skin. Much like a Roman Catholic may learn the theology of the church only to realise an increasing discomfort and disagreement with dogma, so an academic may journey through a way of knowing that becomes constricted and is eventually seen for what it is – a way of conducting authority, power, and influence whether through religious or intellectual means. In both cases, people today are seeing through religion and science, and are pointing to different directions that might just open up spaces for sharing our stories as medicine in culturally safe places apart from manipulating agendas. This is risky business. The risk comes in direct proportion to the depth of spiritual integrity we bring to our sacred business of teaching and learning. In my case, my story was almost non-existent and silent, covered by layers of transgenerational shame and denial of heritage and culture. My family like many others had been disenfranchised by colonisation. For us the history that is documented goes back to 1652, when the first French man arrived in what they called Annapolis Royal, in what was later called Nova Scotia. He arrived in the

land of my Aboriginal ancestors, the territory of Mi'kma'ki – Red Dirt Country, the Place of the People. But until late 2007, I did not know the extent of my history and how intertwined my family is with the Mi'kmaq Nation. During 2007 a family history was undertaken that gave me the names of my ancestors back to this first Grandfather who came from across the great waters. He married into the Mi'kmaq Nation, and the rest of the history is one of the joining of two Nations into one. A great heavy blanket of silence once surrounded most things Indigenous in my life. Quiet stirrings were shared by my late father, Sonny. We knew in quiet ways what was true, but the politics were too troubling to speak openly. Our identity was put on the shelf.

The silence of the past was first challenged by Aboriginal Australian friends. They acknowledged my spirit. Even after a spiritual and cultural name was given to me in the Mi'kmaw language, the journey of 18,000 miles to Australia opened up the reality of my identity when Aboriginal people here acknowledged who they saw was living in this skin. These challenging words and feelings of acceptance and love moved me deeply, and further prods pushed me to establish contact with folks back home. Then a visit back home to reconnect opened up further doors during 2005. As blown away as anyone could possibly be, I was embraced as lost kin by some very loving and accepting people. Two years later I found myself looking intentionally at my journey of reconnecting through the use of personal narrative and sociological analysis as a form of reflecting on my awareness of culture, identity, history, and place.

While being who I am, in a socio-political sense I identify with Mi'kmaq First Nation and Métis in solidarity with all Aboriginal people. Solidarity at this time of my life expresses best the form of my identity. The word "Mi'kmaq" as I understand it now means "the People". It also identifies the place of our origins – the Red Dirt Country of the Eastern Door. This has profound implications. While it is possible to say "I am Mi'kmaq," for me to say that I am the People is far more than I could ever claim. But our ancestors tell us that we are the People, and as my identity deepens a knowledge of solidarity transforms into a spiritual and cultural oneness with the land and sea that makes us who we are. My Native identity is not because of me personally, but is because of the People. Who we are collectively, in history, and for tomorrow. The only way that makes sense to me is to stand together in solidarity and coalition. We have been so fragmented and torn apart it is even difficult to know who we are. We have all been changed by colonisation. So for me now, solidarity says the most important thing is to protect Native communities, interests, language, custom, culture, and spiritual knowledge. To do this means that people who have been disenfranchised and who are only now reconnecting need to put aside our self-gain and to lobby, fight, and sacrifice our time and energy to assist the common good.

■ Sustaining discomfort

Staying with discomfort is an important part of healing. In our stories of pain and loss is found our medicine (Bowers, 2005a). Through taking the path of discomfort we can find new meaning. This process often radically changes our identity, and transforms us into something we never quite expected. I think this is the meaning behind the metaphor of "Shieldwolf and the Shadow" put forward in a previous issue of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* (Bowers, 2005b). At the end of the story the reader is left wondering, what happened? The sense of discomfort carries forward, even after having enjoyed the odd thriller and suspense of what would happen to the individual undertaking this harrowing path. The identity of the person undergoing transformation was left silent – the reader too might be somewhat changed but not know why or how. Only with time does the story ring true. Like a dream that comes in the night, meaning surfaces when it is time and when ready. Mi'kmaq sensibilities rely on messages from dreams, especially for those who are on the healing path.

At the end of mainstream education programs, many people are also left wondering, what happened here? I suspect this speaks true to many forms of education, initiation, and growth in awareness. But the question has two meanings. For minority people we can wonder, what happened here? And walk away from the experience of education as foreign and largely irrelevant to our life experience (Battiste et al., 2006). Also likely is walking away damaged, whether by conscious and overt prejudice or by covert and silent ideological assumptions. Decoding prejudice can take much effort in times when political correctness works to protect people who exercise covert forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia (Bowers et al., 2005a, 2005b).

Staying with these questions long enough to see through the fog seems important. Disconcerting questions arise related to identity, prejudice, and healing in a field where helping is purported to be the chief focus of our work. How can it be that counselling could be a field where the battlefield of colonialism plays itself out behind the façade of liberal humanism? When you take a sustained look at the history of colonisation, there are always excuses for harmful actions behind what were otherwise felt to be well meaning intentions. Bowers et al. (2005a) suggest that the well meaning intentions of counsellors mask prejudicial treatment of clients, and that counsellors excuse their lack of knowledge of culture and difference based in the assumptions they learned during training – assumptions that are based in liberal humanist myths of ethical practice.

It surely is disconcerting to realise that the paradigm you learned and that is the basis of your work and life's effort is completely inadequate. It is important to not

mince words, and to wake up to certain challenges. All the energy and resources you brought to bear on your education may seem like a betrayal. You start to question everything you were taught, and you feel set adrift without any basis for security. For people waking up from previous ways of knowing that have become no longer useful a crisis of identity is likely. When you are faced with this harsh reality, you begin to face the myths that you were fed in school. But this mainstream form of identity crisis is a small measure of the ongoing Indigenous identity challenge that faces anyone who is black, red, or brown. Not only do you get fed lies about colonial history, but you also receive a myriad messages of overt and covert racism that devalue your way of life, language, culture, and family (Harris, 1990). Working through these insidious myths takes enormous effort, and the energy you spend on this work is energy the next person in the mainstream is spending on getting ahead in life. You are set back before you even start (Battiste, 1977).

However, my elders tell me that our path and the knowledge we need exists and will come to us when we are ready to find them. Pathways towards an Indigenous aesthetic relate to cultural and spiritual ways of knowing that are particular to each tribe and in some ways are universal globally (Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992). These life-ways are wholistic, involving everything from ecology to science to spirituality. These ways that come to us from our ancestors suggest the integrity of Indigenous knowledge or epistemology. How we know what we know as Indigenous people is grounded in our acknowledgment of creation and Creator. Our local environments inform our sensibility, grounding us within a solid universe of integrity (Crocker, 2005). These relationships build up a database of ecological and spiritual wisdom. These cultural and geological laws are part of the land and sea, just as much as they are part of us. My elders tell me that even when we forget the laws, they still live in the stones and riverbeds.

From ancient stirrings to a post-colonial model of culturally-grounded and locally-grown expressions, people today are challenged to honour Indigenous ways of knowing. This challenge is faced while ecological crisis mirrors the human identity crisis – Mother Earth and people together are beginning to awaken to the need for greater balance.

■ A new paradigm

From these insights comes the realisation of a “new” paradigm for counsellor education. In reality there is nothing new under the sun. But we do need a sense of rediscovery of long forgotten truths, but with humility we ought to realise that these truths have never been forgotten by Indigenous people. They may become articulated in a way that sounds new for today’s use of language and context, but the insights have existed

and are known by many. Here it is suggested by our elders that we listen. This is a most difficult task, even for counsellors who you would think are trained to listen.

Recent articulations of global Indigenous ways of knowing or epistemology suggest that we can not separate cultural and linguistic contexts from the practice of counselling and for that matter, education (Battiste, 2004; Butler, 2004; Orr, 2000; Vaughan, 2005). It comes down to simple things that continue to be overlooked and suppressed, things that become normative practices but are based in racist colonial strategies. For example, when we presume to speak and write English exclusively we do a disservice. When we do not learn and support Indigenous languages, we participate in their demise. When we proceed with theories of one size fits all (such as humanist theories related to core counselling skills) we also do great disservice.

Under these assumptions lies a gem of ontology – our worldview and philosophy that supports our way of knowing. European origin theories separate reality into sections, even while making grand assumptions about the whole that prove to be false (Fekete, 1987). An Indigenous ontology works from a wholistic paradigm (Bowers, 2005a). This approach is exploratory and does not make many assumptions – almost like a spiritually and ecologically grounded chaos theory. Indigenous ways of knowing honour the phenomenon that is happening and waits patiently for things to change. This awareness come to me by observing my elders. The ontology makes sense because it is based in a well-rounded cosmology. Our stories of our origins are our medicine, our dreaming. These voices from our families we will remember even after they are lost. Voices from the margins are only just beginning to make sense, coming through our dreams or our nightmares. We are emerging into a postmodern cultural shift of identity – where we can one day just be ourselves, Aboriginal, and proud of who we are. The paradigms of the mainstream are being called into question (Bowers, 2006).

Cosmology relates to our model of the cosmos – how everything fits together (Hornborg, 2006). Cosmology is not easily put into the square of religion, because Indigenous ways of knowing do not fit in comparison to major world religions like Christianity. Many Aboriginal cosmologies provide basic (and profound) ideas about how the universe fits together but then leaves the rest up to the individual to undertake their own vision quest, initiation, and entry into the various worlds of the cosmology. A great deal of personal autonomy comes to play that is unique to these ways of knowing, in comparison to formalised religions where priesthood or ministerial orders convey teachings to the faithful. In Indigenous paths, the Medicine Two-Spirit, Medicine Man or Women, do not provide answers so much as they share stories and layered insights that

open the creativity and autonomy of the individual to find what they are looking for, while also working with immediacy in energy, healing, and knowledge of local plants, herbs, and environmental forces (Lacey, 1999).

In my work I have come to identify as a Medicine Two-Spirit. This means that my way of being is informed by the cosmology of the Six Worlds of the Mi'kmaq (Hornborg, 2006; Whitehead, 2002). This also means that within my spirit are the energies of male and female in varying degrees of balance, which is also an awareness of calling back my spirit for helping and healing others. Many of the Two Spirited have the capacity to love someone of the same gender. I have found similar traditions in Australia (Hodge, 1993). Only when we are in balance and in the fullness of both male and female spirits do we experience and move within the Creator's energy and intention. For other explorations of the Two-Spirited path these resources may be a starting place (Balsam et al., 2004; Brown, 1997; Callender & Kochems, 1983; Hodge, 1993). This is raised here to show that Aboriginal culture and spiritual ways of knowing form in-depth epistemologies that need space and time to explore. This is why the mainstream concepts of "counselling" do not fit as easily for me anymore. Traditional ways of knowing challenges me to explore on the margins of what is known in the mainstream, and to articulate a way forward for Indigenous people that is closer to what we have lost and are remembering in spite of these years of colonisation.

Counselling is a concept and way of working I learned from respected mentors, and as such deeply respected, but it is still an approach that is heavy laden by colonial, European, and American values and traditions. In this way counselling is similar to growing up Catholic – one needs to recover from what you learned early in life in order to find a new way that is more in-tune with your disposition and identity. When people talk about practicing Counselling in different countries without much if any regard for different cultures, it reminds me of former practicing Catholics who, like myself, have often said they are "recovering Catholics" meaning that they have changed their life to such an extent they no longer feel Catholic. They express a need for a few decades to heal from the negative felt impact of being Catholic. Likewise, those of us who were trained in mainstream humanist colonial systems of thinking may need a few decades to transit into something fresh and new.

In my experience it has taken almost 10 years to begin to appreciate the uniqueness of Australian culture, and as such, I have resisted the temptation to practice counselling in any major way within the Australian community. Indeed in certain ways I have experienced more affinity with Aboriginal communities but there too, I have not presumed to practice counselling without extensive energy placed into learning cultural values and ways of knowing unique to each location.

Particularly as I have grown in awareness of Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing, the mainstream approaches to counselling that I learned in graduate school do not fit and are not appropriate.

■ Exploring the medicine way

Ways that are appropriate for me to create safe cultural practices in counselling involve creative arts approaches to working, such as working with clay, weaving, drawing, painting, or the use of music such as drumming, singing, and dance (Vaughan, 2005). Medicine working involves visioning, intuition, immediacy, open expressions of feeling, and ways of channelling pent up emotions (Cortright, 1997). Mainstream culture most often denies emotion and feeling, and sends people to the bottle. Indigenous ways open up energy and let emotion and creativity flow freely, giving this energy back to Mother Earth as sacred gift of life (Keeney, 1999). There are dark emotions, of course, but in this Red Road of healing, there is no evil per se. There is no devil as in the Christian way. In the Native way we have trickster spirits who might lead you down a road to teach you a few things, but no big devil in traditional culture. This is true for the old ways of the Mi'kmaq. So this means today that we are healing from the illusions and false myths of Christian teachings that have twisted our way of knowing, and in healing we call back a wholistic balance to our ways of knowing (Fox, 1983; Fox, 1990). This balanced way allows us to feel whatever we feel, and to know that it is okay.

■ Conclusion

In feeling we do no harm to others and no harm to ourselves. We need to find appropriate and healthy ways to channel that energy. By coming back to the bush we get in touch with our spiritual and cultural way (Keeney, 2000). This is a big part of the Medicine way. This is a truly wholistic way of working. For the Medicine way practitioner this also involves fasting, prayer, personal sacrifice, periods of extended solitude, time in nature nurturing the bush in active ways, waiting, listening, and always learning (Keeney, 2001). These activities open up natural perceptions. This way of working demands great personal dedication and is not taken up lightly. It was told to me by a Medicine man that people on this path ought not drink alcohol, because the spirits of alcohol do not attract the spirits of our people and of healing. For many Aboriginal people the spirits of alcohol are very familiar – and our ancestors know these spirits are harmful. This is a great challenge, temptation, and a source of difficulty for spiritually sensitive and gifted people. This is why personal dedication and cleansing with smoke of herbs assists during difficult times. It was also said to me that people can not easily learn this way through courses

and degrees, even though it is tempting to try to place this awareness within systems that people can access readily for their assistance and well being. However, there comes a time when you cross a threshold when the work no longer relates to a career but is part of a vocation. When this happens, when Great Spirit calls you, your life can often be thrown into extreme crisis as new energy and insight comes to you that your body is not able to assimilate quickly. This comes from my own experience, and from many clients who have come to me for help. When we are open to the spiritual ways of our elders, our lives can sometimes change overnight. We receive knowledge in visions and dreams that come to us spontaneously. It is important for someone around us to understand this is okay. This is actually the truths of our heritage breaking through our trauma-past wanting to reach out for help from us, wanting to help us to enter into the healing ways of our ancestors. There are no books or papers that are written that can help us, because when we have the Great Spirit over our lives we face an experiential transformation of identity. In societies where we have lost and forgotten the initiatory rites and processes of spiritual awakening taught to our ancestors, we are thrown into crisis by this spiritual emergency. But I am suggesting a way lies ahead for articulating and creating greater cultural respect and understanding of these issues by opening up pockets of acceptance and honouring within the mainstream, and Aboriginal, sectors of the counselling and education fields.

In these ways I do not find that mainstream counselling suggests the kind of spiritual and cultural dedication to healing that is necessary and appropriate in Aboriginal contexts. Even in Aboriginal communities that have lost their traditions for various reasons, it is difficult for people who are overshadowed by *Gjintsgam* – Great Spirit, and who are called to the Medicine path. They may be rejected by their communities who have internalised the Christian's fear and hatred for anything "pagan" and "black".

For me I am given heart by a word from Mi'kmaw language, *Matue'q* – live simply, make do, live marginally. This is something that has lived in my heart long before this word came to me, and I never knew where this way of living came from. Perhaps it is common to many Indigenous people. When things get too complicated, it is time to go back to the woods, lakes, rivers, and to live simply, make do, live marginally. As marginalised peoples we have a wealth of knowledge and life experience that mainstream people can not even dream of having – it is time we turned this marginalisation around to our benefit and for our people's healing.

It is helpful to remember that the Indigenous path of healing is an expression of an Indigenous way of knowing – what the mainstream calls a phenomenology. This is a classic method of observation, analysis, attending to feeling and intuition, and making wholistic

diagnosis across a range of insights and capacities natural to the human psyche. Nothing is discounted. Everything that is observed is acknowledged. The natural human abilities combined with this approach to exploring knowledge and awareness are a part of what I prefer to think of as an Indigenous science. In addition, healing abilities and what are called "psychic" abilities are also a part of natural and Indigenous sciences. These approaches need to gain the respect and esteem of our mainstream colleagues, and we need to stand strong in our spiritual and cultural ways of knowing. As such my standpoint suggests that honouring these insights means sharing Eagle Feather Medicine with my Indigenous brothers and sisters who are called to take up this path of healing and to move forward in the healing of our sovereign Nations. Thank you for listening. Our stories are our medicine. Msit Nogama. Tahoe.

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