Reconsidering Difference: The curricular and pedagogical significance of holistic insights in the face of colonial exclusions

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Abstract

This paper explores how holistic-guided, sacred, ecological insights can support youth in their healing journeys from the individual and systemic violence of colonial exclusions. Drawing upon guidance from Indigenous sharing circle philosophies and sacred ecological insights, this article contends that the coming together of similarities and differences can generate the ethic of “wisdom relationality” (Kasamali, 2019) and promote healing. This theorizing is guided by the *métissage* sensibility and is supported by research conducted with an Alberta, Aboriginal Studies 30, secondary, high school class. By concentrating on experiences of four former Aboriginal Studies 30 students, this article illuminates their key learnings acquired from reconnecting with the healing energy that flows from Indigenous sharing circle philosophies. The article demonstrates that by reconsidering difference and responding to colonial exclusions from the place of holism inspires the students to achieve freedom, agency and in doing so, restores their sense of balance.

Keywords: Aboriginal Studies, Healing, Holism, Sacred Ecology, Sharing Circle, Wisdom Relationality

Introduction

The article is born out of my lived experiences and commitments to engaging with social justice and intersectional approaches to education (Dei, 1996; Dubois, 1989; Goldberg, 1993; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002; Hall, 1980; Kumashiro, 2004; St. Denis & Shick, 2005; West, 1993) that are purposefully connected to spiritual sensibilities. I experienced much exclusion on curricular and pedagogical sites while growing up as a Pakistani-Canadian Muslimah¹ who identifies with Sufic² orientations in Islam. Bringing together the different aspects of my identity as a Muslim, Canadian and Pakistani woman, was deemed as an impossibility by many educators I encountered during my schooling experiences. Continued lived realities of being storied as ‘a problem’ that required resolution, salvation, and efforts to manage my identity left me feeling devalued, hurt, anxious and unravelled. These feelings worsened following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. I was harassed and cajoled to defend my faith and its people on a daily basis. The feelings of defensiveness and experiences of being misunderstood by the very people, I thought knew me well, furthered my internal emotional turmoil. I found myself feeling trapped.

¹ Muslimah means Muslim woman.

² Sufic orientations in Islam can be understood as engaging deeply with spiritual dimensions of Islam and living in ways that maintain a balance between the material and spiritual. The poet and storyteller, Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, is associated with Sufism.

I wondered how I could connect with Islam's message of holism in unfettered ways. Learning from these wisdoms on a daily basis was essential to maintaining balance with myself and others. In other words, I needed the guidance of my traditions to be fully human.

As I relive these memories in my body, I find myself deeply resonating with Maya Angelou's (1983) powerful words: "but a bird that stalks down his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage, his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing." At times in interacting with others, I was unable "to see through my own bars of rage." Furthermore, I felt as though my "wings [were] clipped" during moments where my faith was undermined, the religious traditions and histories were narrativized and trivialized as unimportant. I realized that the silencing of my embodied knowledge and my spiritual connections on pedagogical landscapes, unfortunately, was leading me to feel imbalanced. My fears of what might happen if I sought to validate spiritual sensibilities and embodied knowledges on schooling sites where I worked, prevented me from embarking on the healing journey that I needed to experience my own freedom and agency.

For these reasons, during my doctoral studies and in my research, I explored the curricular and pedagogical significance of holism. I also examined how holistic sensibilities can bring healing, balance and connectivity when young people are given opportunities to reconnect with life-giving energy (Kasamali, 2019). My profession as a senior high school Social Studies and English Language Arts teacher, in a public school, brought me to the beautiful pedagogical experiences associated with my teaching at high school, Alberta Education's Program of Studies, specifically the Aboriginal Studies 30 course. Aboriginal Studies 30 is inextricably connected to sacred ecological insights and promotes balance and wellness seamlessly throughout curricular outcomes that inspires this article. By focusing on the experiences of four former Aboriginal Studies 30 students³, I explore how learning from holistic insights, as expressed in sharing circle teachings and practice, can bring forth healing from experiences of colonial exclusions for the students on curricular and pedagogical sites. I found out that their learning experiences articulate an ethic of "wisdom relationality" (Kasamali, 2019) that manifests itself when individuals develop greater self-awareness through reconnecting with their shared sacred ecological roots.

This article consists of three parts. Firstly, I contextualize the students' insights by summarizing the literature regarding shared Indigenous spiritual philosophies in order to provide a framework to connect with the holism that undergirds Aboriginal Studies 30⁴. Secondly, I present a philosophical overview of the Aboriginal Studies 30 course, and specifically, unpack its sacred ecological roots. Thirdly, I will share insights gleaned from the students, my research

³ Please note that I did not teach Aboriginal Studies 30. I became acquainted with Aboriginal Studies 30 in response to learnings about the course that my students at the time had shared with me who were enrolled in the course. I eventually spent two years sharing time with former Aboriginal Studies 30 teachers and students via different sections of the course in a very committed way as an interested educator and community member. These learnings inspired my doctoral research and dissertation, *Reconsidering Difference: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Holism* (Kasamali, 2019). Research participants were selected by sharing an invitation letter with ninety-five former and current students from three sections of Aboriginal Studies 30. I initially had six confirmed research participants. Two participants rescinded their participation due to the demands of simultaneously working and schooling (Kasamali, 2019).

⁴ Former Aboriginal Studies 30 students had numerous opportunities to learn from traditional teachings, reconnect with nature and partake in traditional ceremonies. I intentionally provided a context for the students to explore shared Indigenous philosophies to help open up the holistic-guided pedagogical situation in which they were enmeshed.

participants, concerning the métissage research sensibility. To do so, I draw on the four students' explicit responses. Alissa, Chauntelle, Rose and Levi articulate their experiences of learning from the wisdom that flows from sacred ecology and by participating in First Nations sharing circles. These insights will be interpreted through a hermeneutic interplay between Rumi's teachings⁵ as expressed in his short story "The Lion and the Beasts" and some Cree philosophies. The insights highlight that as a result of colonial exclusions, experiences of identity management can be transformed by reconnecting with holistic insights through healing from the wisdom that flows from sharing circles.

Shared Philosophies in North American Indigenous Wisdom Traditions

Indigenous spiritualities, as I have experienced over time, emphasize that all life forms are interconnected and related through a Creator (Basso, 1999; H. Cardinal & Hilderbrandt, 2000; B. Cardinal, 2014; Hanohano, 1999; Kimmerer, 2013; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012; Northwest Territories, 1993; Simpson, 2014). Further, all life forms have a unique purpose and are equal in the eyes of Creator. Within this worldview, it is essential that the roles and gifts of all of Creation are safeguarded, in order to ensure the genesis of life and living because of the belief that harming one life form is understood as harming oneself.

A Dene Creation story, for example, teaches that human beings were the last to be created and because of this, human beings relied on other life forms for survival and guidance (Northwest Territories, 1993, p. xv). In this regard, human beings are not the superior arbiters of life and living but rather, are beholden to other life forms. It is understood that forgetting the specific roles that all life forms play and their shared connection to Mother Earth results in the imbalance and disharmony of the planet.

Simpson (2014) emphasizes that collective survival is directly dependent on the kinship of relationships that all life forms are enmeshed in and the importance of living in humble and ethical ways. These notions can help to explain how difference is generative. All life forms have unique roles and have been gifted with different knowledge systems and ways of life. Survival then becomes possible through connecting with the wisdom and intelligence of these differences. The honouring of different kinship relational networks then sets the conditions necessary for the love and compassion that is needed to sustain life. Drawing upon Simpson's (2014) thinking, living ethically requires honouring difference and living in connection with other life forms. Such teachings may remind individuals that existence is shared rather than self-enclosed. This means that responsibility is enacted when our more-than-human relatives are also protected and consulted for guidance.

Borrow's (2014) beautifully expresses that life and living should not be limited to human-beingness and that there is much to learn from all life forms. Drawing inspiration from these

⁵ I draw upon Rumi's insights because I was born into the tradition of Islam and raised as a Muslim. I grew up hearing and reading Rumi's poetry which is directly connected to Qur'anic teachings and philosophies. Rumi was born in 1201 in Balkh, Afghanistan, during the Persian Empire. Rumi and his family moved to Konya in Turkey when he was a child in order to escape the invasion of Mongol Armies. Rumi received his religious education from his father, Bahauddin Walad, and later on, from his father's friend, Sayyid Burhaneddin of Balkh. Burhaneddin had prophesized that Rumi's union with a Divine friend (Shams Tabriz) would deepen Rumi's spirituality.

holistic insights suggests that there are other ways to live a good life. Reconnecting with life-giving energy and recognizing what promotes survival as part of our individual and shared consciousness may assist with the recovery of embodied knowing and encourage healing. Different Indigenous traditions emphasize the importance of connecting with the mental, emotional, physical and material aspects of self as a way to restore and maintain balance. Medicine Wheel teachings, for example, explain that we have four facets of our being; the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual that must be attended to (Pewewardy, 1999; Wenger-Nabigon, 2010). Pewewardy (1999) shares that “each of these aspects must be equally developed in a healthy well-balanced individual through the development and use of volition. All elements are contained within the Medicine Wheel and all elements are equal within it” (p. 30). Pewewardy (1999) further expresses that the Medicine Wheel symbolizes the entire universe. This holistic worldview helps to remind individuals that all of life’s components are interrelated. Living in fragmented ways ensures that different knowledges as the sources of guidance in our lives are, either intentionally or unintentionally, left out and subsequently results in imbalances.

The Curricular and Pedagogical Case of Aboriginal Studies 30

My decision to learn from the curricular and pedagogical context of the Aboriginal Studies 30 course was inspired by what was missing from my own education. I was desperately seeking a curricular framework that would honour holistic sensibilities and the energy that grants life. I thought that the Aboriginal Studies 30 course was worthy of exploration because the course is directly guided by holism. Consequently, I explored the course in terms of its holistic curricular underpinnings, and identified how the ethical perspectives flowed throughout the curricular content. By doing so, I thought that it presented a unique curricular and pedagogical offering for high school students in Alberta.

A fundamental commitment of Aboriginal Studies⁶ is to guide Indigenous youth⁷ to better understand who they are and to heal from the intergenerational impacts of colonialism on individual and community identity formations. It was hoped that such a course and the learnings, connections and opportunities offered would help Indigenous youth attain a sense of pride and confidence in who they are (E. Goodstriker, First Nations educator, Personal Communication, May 2, 2017⁸). Aboriginal Studies was also “intended to provide a conceptual framework for all learners to enhance understandings of the diverse Aboriginal cultures within their region, Canada and the world” (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 1). Attending to difference was also significant to the course’s design. Course creators desired to foster a sense of cohesion amongst different Indigenous communities while ensuring that the different sensibilities, lands and worldviews that comprised these groups’ ways of knowing and being were not collapsed (E. Goodstriker, Personal Communication, May 2, 2017).

⁶ Aboriginal Studies is offered at the 10 (Grade 10), 20 (Grade 11) and 30 (Grade 12) level in Alberta. My research focuses on Aboriginal Studies 30.

⁷ While Aboriginal Studies was created to support healthy identity formation and healing amongst Indigenous youth, the course is also open to non-Indigenous students. Non-Indigenous students are encouraged to enrol in the course. Student participants’ voices reflected in this article address both Indigenous and non-Indigenous student experiences with the course.

⁸ I spoke with Evelyn Goodstriker in May 2017 to acquire a deeper understanding of the spirit and intent of Aboriginal Studies and the place from which the course emerged. Evelyn Goodstriker was involved with the creation of Aboriginal Studies. She was the former director of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Branch at Alberta Education.

The Alberta Education, Aboriginal Studies Programme of Studies (POS) manifests the holistic underpinnings that guided the Aboriginal Studies' curriculum design. The Aboriginal Studies 30 POS emphasizes philosophical commitments that guide the spirit and intent of the course. The following four objectives indicates that the Programme of Studies:

1. Enables all students to demonstrate an understanding that societies are made up of individuals, but each individual has a responsibility to the well-being of the society.
2. Illustrates the importance of the spiritual nature of Aboriginal peoples and their relationship with all things in the universe.
3. Helps all students to develop respect for the environment and commitment to use resources wisely.
4. Helps all students to appreciate values related to their personal, ethical and spiritual beliefs. (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 2)

The four philosophical commitments and objectives identified above make explicit that Aboriginal Studies is guided by the following ethical perspectives. They embody Spirit, kinship, interconnectivity, and subsequently, highlights difference. These ethical perspectives are enacted in the course's activities. Course activities are guided by traditional teachings, engaging with Treaty and Treaty relationship⁹ and opportunities to learn from nature outside of the formal school day.

Understanding Sacred Ecological Philosophies and Sharing Circle Ethics

As mentioned earlier, Aboriginal Studies 30 was anchored by holistic-guided sacred ecological principles. It is essential to understand such principles in order to better relate with the Aboriginal Studies 30 students' experiences with the course. Participating in the sharing circle helps individuals to remember the life-giving energy that sacred ecological roots bestow. The sharing circle represents "a powerful symbol of the connection between First Nations people and the Creator in many Canadian Indigenous communities" (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2017, p. 27). The circle reflects interdependence between peoples, communities, nations, and the natural and spiritual orders of the universe. The ethical principle of the circle teaches that "everything the power of the world does is done in a circle" (Black Elk, 1995 as cited in Michell, 2011, p. 72). Black Elk (1995) explains that the sky, earth and stars are round spheres and that the birds also make their nests in circular shapes. He expresses that "the sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same and both [are] round. Even the seasons form a great circle from childhood, and so it is everything where power moves." The teachings of the sacred circle are included in many First Nations ceremonies which honour natural law and life cycles (Michell, 2011, p. 73). The sharing or talking circle is understood as a form of relational teaching that connects people through differences and promotes healing. Participating in a circle encourages the regaining of balance because it teaches patience and respectful listening (Graveline, 1998).

⁹ Treaty Relationship refers to living in ways that enact the original spirit and intent of Treaties. While Treaties are often interpreted as historical documents that simply imply agreements amongst sovereign nations, the original intent of Treaties is actually much deeper (Asch, 2014; Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008). Treaties, from a First Nations perspective, are intended to promote living in balance and harmony amongst all life forms. Sacred ecological teachings undergird Treaties. To uphold Treaty Relationship thus implies living in ways that promote the well-being of all life forms.

In addition to patience and respectful listening, the wisdom of the circle promotes healing through teaching the “foundations upon which a proper relationship to oneself and others is developed” (Graveline, 1998, p. 141). The energy of a circle “can create a space that can allow for the unorthodox to enter and the unexpected to happen” (p. 141). The openness and generative potential that is cultivated through participating in a sharing circle teaches that time is needed to connect with one’s embodied knowledges to “to learn, heal, to change and to grow” (Graveline, 1998, p. 140).

The Pedagogical Significance of Healing: Former Aboriginal Studies 30 Students’ Share Experiences, Insights and Wisdom Relationality

The Lion and the Beasts

Those who run from pain
 Fall into the pain again,
 And those who escape from the snake meet only the dragon
 For work is a man-made trap.
 That drains life’s blood with what he thought to be his heart. The door was locked with the
 enemy still in the house. There are too many defects in human foresight
 So better trust only in the greatest Friend.
 Better balance with the sight of God.
 Where you will find your desires.
 So long as the child has no strength
 He rides on his father’s neck.
 He who gives rain from heaven gives also bread.

You have feet, why pretend to be lame?
 You have hands, why hide the fingers? When God gave a spade to his servant
 There was no need of explanation.
 The hand and the spade
 Have implicit use.
 Isn’t it clear enough?
 If we take the hand and the spade to hear
 We’d better devote our lives to their use.

(Excerpts from Jalaluddin Rumis’s story, “The Lion and the Beasts”, Dunn et al., 2000, pp. 32-47)

In order to elucidate my conceptualizations of wisdom relationality, this section of the article concentrates on documenting the student participants' insights¹⁰ related to their experiences of participating in sharing circles while they were students in the course¹¹. The circle is a manifestation of holism which brought deepened understandings of difference and healing for student participants. Student participants' collective voices¹² evoke the interplay between healing and connectivity. Student participant insights reveal a restoration of meaning, purpose and connectivity that is often lost in framings of curricular and pedagogical priorities. Their experiences indicate that holistic notions of difference inspire a deepened sense of connectivity with their inner selves and kinship relations that promote healing and guide more ethical ways to live.

Alissa expresses that “when you don’t have a good relationship so many problems can arise whether that be with an Aboriginal person or how we treat gender or equality or the different pay grades between men and women” (A. James, Personal Communication, April 15, 2017). Alissa further explains that perceived differences of ideology and orientation override the “quality” with which we ought to be honouring each other. With regards to the understanding of traumatic lived experiences and survival, she questions “where information is coming from” and the ways in which we have been taught to come into relationship with that information. She

¹⁰ Please note that former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' insights expressed here reflect learnings gleaned from a series of activities and research conversations that were guided by the métissage research sensibility (Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt, 2008; Donald, 2012). Research conversations and activities took place from April 2016 to April 2017 at various locations in Edmonton, Alberta. Métissage is a theory and textual practice that beckons researchers and audiences “to create plural selves that thrive on ambiguity and multiplicity” (Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt, 2008, p. 3). The origin of métissage is the Latin word *Mixticus*, which means “the weaving of cloth from different fibers” (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p. 3). Greek mythology describes Métis as the “primordial figure of wisdom” and “a trickster with powers of transformation” who resisted notions of purity by. Métissage requires that individuals focus greater attention on group consciousness and reduce fascination with individual identity (Dash, 1995, p. 91). Please refer to my doctoral dissertation, *Reconsidering Difference: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Holism* (Kasamali, 2019) for a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology.

¹¹ As mentioned, Aboriginal Studies is a course that is offered for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. My study purposefully included students from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds. This was intentional for two reasons. Firstly, the study sought to show how non-Indigenous students can also learn from traditional teachings and holistic philosophies. Secondly, students in the high school in which the research was conducted had high populations of recent newcomer students from colonial contexts. The purpose of having a diverse ethno-racial participant group was to convey how difference is integral to collective healing. While lived experiences are different, healing can arise when what is held within is shared and learned from. The following explains the demographic and ethno-racial information pertaining to the four student participants: Alissa James is from Edmonton, Alberta. She identifies as having ties to both Cree and Dene cultures. She was nineteen years old at the time of the study. Chauntelle Atcheynum is from Sweetgrass First Nations. She was nineteen years old and a Post-Secondary student at the time of the study. Rose Salvador was born in the Philippines and migrated to Canada when she was 17 years old. She has a Filipino, Chinese and Spanish background. Rose was twenty years old and a Post-Secondary student at the time of the study. Levi Matthews described himself as having German, Irish, English and Métis ancestry. He was nineteen years old and a Post-Secondary student at the time of the study.

¹² As conveyed, I met with participant students for a series of activities and research conversations that took place over a year. The intent of these conversations was to explore the extent to which student participants connected with holistic-guided sacred ecological insights in Aboriginal Studies 30 and how these learnings shaped their conceptions of difference and connectivity. Research conversations and activities took place in person. I recorded and transcribed recordings. All transcripts were shared with participant students for their approval. The arranging of texts was also shared both individually and collectively with student participants. This is what is meant by Personal Communications. The wonders expressed represent student participants' authentic voices. Please refer to my doctoral dissertation, *Reconsidering Difference: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Holism* (Kasamali, 2019), for further information.

further emphasizes that we tend to have a better understanding of “genocide in Rwanda” but do not have an understanding of the traumas in the places in which we live (A. James, Personal Communication, April 20, 2017).

Alissa’s insights help us to contemplate the relationship between enmeshment, connectivity and healing. In other words, the very fact that we live together ought to offer a more meaningful response regarding how we collectively think about, engage with and learn from traumatic lived experiences.

Alissa underscores that these insights are integral to our collective healing journeys but that we also need to have the “willingness to talk about [our] deep dark emotions” if we seek to acknowledge past hurt and be able to say “although it was bad, I learned how to love myself further and therefore taught my children how to love themselves” (A. James, Personal Communication, June 4, 2016). She speaks to the sharing of these “deeper, dark emotions” in the context of participating in the sharing circle in community contexts and in the Aboriginal Studies 30 classroom.

Alissa highlights that the “emotional and physical connection” (A. James, Personal Communication, April 20, 2017) that the circle brought forth in Aboriginal Studies 30 was a “special space in which students felt safe to openly speak from their emotions and that could not be achieved in situations where students were asked to do group work and merely talk about things” (A. James, Personal Communication, April 20, 2017). Her words indicate the importance of individually and collectively, facing emotions.

Chauntelle, the second research participant, in another way, underscores that sitting and facing others in the sharing circle helped her to face herself and the burdens she was carrying. The intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools contributed to her “identity crisis” and “disconnect” that she experienced while being involved in ceremonies with her family and community during her youth (C. Atcheynum, Personal Communication, April 20, 2017). Chauntelle articulates:

“One thing I really valued about the class is that it emphasized our connection and sort of an Aboriginal perspective was having our sharing circles. You come to school...you read books...you learn...it’s all intellectual...you look at the board...you write down notes...you look at the computer and you soak in all of this knowledge inside your head and it’s a very head space I guess curriculum. And when you walk into the Aboriginal Studies class and you sat in the sharing circle it suddenly became like a five-sense learning experience. You were sitting around people physically connected by the circle. You were listening to them and you were feeling their emotions. And learning from their experiences, apart from the books. Like it might have had sort of a basis...like how has the history of Indigenous people affected your life or how do you think it affected your life and bringing in the contemporary issues and really directing it towards somebody else’s experiences and asking them. I learned more about the people than from the books in that class, and that meant a lot to me, and it became a part of me in a sense rather than a part of my transcripts to get into another educational institution. But it has a lot to do with respecting one another and recognizing that you’re sitting beside two people or six other people. You’re in a classroom with souls who are learning on their own journeys and aside from this class they are going through a hundred other things that you are not aware

of but it's being conscious of that person that is next to you." (C. Atcheynum, Personal Communication, April 20, 2017)

Chauntelle's comments astutely advise that participating in the sharing circle offered a "five-sense learning experience" that was not limited to intellectual approaches associated with virtually all of her other courses. The sharing circle invited "being conscious of that person that is next you." It reveals a deepened sense of relating with her peers. Sitting face to face in this manner for Chauntelle was a reminder that she was connected to her friends, peers and teachers because this practice illuminated the voiced and unvoiced journeys on which each one travelled.

She further explained that emotionally connecting in this manner was important for her because it helped her to work through her "defensive" responses to others who view her people as "stereotypical Aboriginal people" (C. Atcheynum, Personal Communication, April 15, 2016). Chauntelle admitted that she "fell into the trap of viewing other Aboriginal people" (C. Atcheynum, Personal Communication, April 15, 2016) in the same way. She shared that her own identity crisis, and her defensive responses left her feeling disconnected from herself and others. She stated that at times, her disdain towards her own people was lifted while being involved in the sharing circle, and witnessing the responses of deep concern, love and responsibility from her peers. Chauntelle articulates:

Going into classes and seeing people like [Rose] cry was like someone was looking in and it was so beautiful. It was a very compassionate experience and it was inspirational and eye opening. Like there is a lot of love and beauty in the world. You have to have the eyes to see it. When it's clouded by this pain or resentment in your past or other people, it prevents you from seeing the connection that you have and your relationships with other people whether they're sitting beside you or having actual conversations. It's pretty nice. (C. Atcheynum, Personal Communication, April 15, 2016)

Chauntelle's words indicate the generative power of emotions. The excerpt from Rumi's story, "The Lion and the Beasts" emphasizes that "those who run from pain fall into pain again" (Dunn et al., 2000, p. 33). Rumi explains that escaping tribulations only results in a temporary reprieve. Rumi advises individuals to use the gifts that they were bestowed with including feet and hands to bring forth changes in life. I understand these words as turning inward while also utilizing and connecting with the gifts that promote balance. Friends, such as Rose, reminded Chauntelle of the support and understanding that our relations have the potential to bestow us with. We forget our relations and what truly connects us, when we are "clouded by this pain or resentment in [our] past or by other people" which impedes connectivity, as Chauntelle reminds us. I understand Chauntelle's responses to her emotions and to Rose's tears of compassion to mean that individuals may also be connected, by what we are trying to "lift"¹³ in their own ways. While inner burdens might be different, collective efforts to face these difficulties are enacted in the circle. We are guided by the energy that flows from our relations to us. Such energy offers much generative strength and the courage to go on.

¹³ Elder Bob Cardinal is from Enoch Cree Nation. I was blessed with the opportunity to learn from him, through his sharing of Cree traditional teachings, while taking a Holistics Education graduate course in Fall 2014. Learning from Cree traditional teachings and the ways in which Elder Cardinal taught has changed my life. Elder Cardinal teaches that "we are all lifting something [and] have been trained to lift different things" (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, November 8, 2014). Missing the pedagogical significance of his words overlooks what we are individually and collectively working out.

As I think with Alissa and Chauntelle's insights (identified above), I suggest that wisdom relationality offers generative ways in which we can accept our mistakes. Wisdom relationality helps us to understand that daunting lived experiences, ill-advised decisions and errors do not keep us bound. As Rumi expresses in "The Lion and The Beasts" we have the capacity to change if we will ourselves to do so.

Rose, the third research participant, similarly addresses the importance of the acceptance of shared pathways in the service of continued healing as she experienced through participating in the sharing circle. Rose explains that we can live together in better ways if:

We accept the fact that we have our faults. That we are human. That we do make mistakes. That we can be down to earth. Like we can accept all of the negative factors that everyone can tell us and still be strong and proud of it and change our ways if it's really bad. For me, like I see people that have good things and bad things and it's really up to them on how they are going to use it. (R. Salvador, Personal Communication, May 5, 2016)

Rose's wise words reveal the inner strength that is needed to admit to oversights, mistakes, and the importance of learning from them and making life changes.

Levi, the fourth research participant, challenges the value of traditional teaching and learning approaches and suggests the importance of circle philosophies. While "we learn many things in school", "how much do we remember?" He proceeds to share, "I know some things affected me when it was related to a particular situation in the past or a story that I felt but I think playing with peoples' heart strings is something to get used to in situations to get the message across" (L. Matthews, Personal Communication, April 15, 2016). Levi's insightful words indicate that emotional connections in relation to trauma and other learnings, whether they manifest themselves in the curricula or in different moments, can inspire the process of remembering more deeply and profoundly. This involves carefully alleviating emotions that prevent connection with self, nature and others. Learning from emotions can promote a type of connectivity that is needed to open up the heart and inspire healing. Levi's awareness is important to pay attention to because it signals a deeper connection to the heart in relation to individual and shared experiences. His insights also demonstrate an ethic of continued care that is required to build relationships of harmony. Elder Bob Cardinal has patiently shared that "the longest distance we will ever have to travel is from our heads to our hearts" (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, September 13, 2014). This guidance, as I reinterpret it in connection with Alissa, Chauntelle, Rose and Levi's experiences and intuitions, means that it is helpful to do the individual and collective work to "unlock our hearts" (Rahman, 2010). I think that this is an underlying ethical assumption of wisdom relationality. Rahman (2010) emphasizes:

We know from our own experiences that when we are treated with compassion and dignity, our hearts respond in harmony and appreciation. But when we are treated with anger or distrust, our hearts clench in self-defence and slam their metaphorical windows shut. (Kindle Location 971)

Rahman's words, regarding encounters with difference, convey that anger and self-defence beget more anger, intolerance and increased isolation. Such feelings also inform how and what we remember and the ways in which we proceed. I suggest that working from the place

of our emotions, in ways that remove judgment and invite openness and trust, can help to “unlock our hearts.” Rahman further shares that “the only key to a locked heart is forged of qualities that the heart recognizes as its own: compassion, love, forgiveness, and higher understanding. Only that which comes from the heart can open another heart” (Kindle Location 979). Levi, Elder Cardinal and Rahman’s words illuminate how holistic insights open up embodied knowledges. What is carried within can help us to remember more deeply, with greater care and commitment to the service of our relatives and community. Guidance from our emotions, as holistic teachings emphasize, can encourage remembering in more profound ways that is integral to the continued practice of healing.

Wisdom relationality’s unfolding, as expressed above, articulates the importance of always keeping close to our hearts what gives us life and invites connectivity as foundations of balance. Appreciating the presence of such connectivity is made possible through dedicating ourselves to self-study and individually and collectively lifting our burdens. The lion in Rumi’s story “The Lion and Beasts” is reminded that he has hands and fingers to “climb the ladder.” A deeper effort to draw upon our gifts and trust is needed to climb the ladder. Trust can be honoured through our embodied commitments to lifting burdens, as Rumi shares.

Conclusion

Coming into a relationship with holistic-guided sacred ecological teachings can guide a return to the introspection that is needed to heal from experiences of colonial exclusions, such as discrimination, systemic violence, and trauma. Alissa, Chauntelle, Rose and Levi beautifully express how reconnecting with life-giving energy, learning from the wisdom of the sharing circle and individually and collectively addressing their fears and wounds, can bring forth freedom from unending suffering pain and lamentation. Participating in the work to gradually overcome fears of introspection is deeply pedagogical as it offers pathways to remedy that, which keeps many bound to pain and suffering. Alissa, Chauntelle, Rose and Levi’s experiences convey that emotional suppression and remaining at a distance from their shared, sacred, ecological and historical roots furthers an existence likened to “a caged bird [that] stands on the grave of dreams” (Angelou, 1983). Enmeshment in grief, resentment and anger as a result of oppressive external forces may trigger an existence likened to a bird whose “wings are clipped” and “feet are tied” (Angelou, 1983). The Aboriginal Studies 30 students in my doctoral research study articulated that deeply, remembering and internalizing what makes life possible in our shared existence together, seeing the miracles that the sun, wind and water bestows, facing the fragility of life through the ethic of the sharing circle can inspire much courage and resilience to live with hope. The wisdom of the sharing circle, as expressed in student participants’ narratives, can bring forth a stillness and tranquility that is needed to carry on. In these moments, we can remember that we are in fact not alone. This is the ethic of wisdom relationality. Healing through reconnecting with oneself and the energy that flows from kinship relational networks may inspire other ways to gradually heal from colonization’s cruel legacies.

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