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# Decolonizing Time in Post-Secondary Classrooms

Laureen Blu Waters,<sup>1</sup> Randy Pitawanakwat, MEd<sup>1</sup>, Darcey Dachyshyn, PhD<sup>1\*</sup>

**Citation:** Waters, L. B., Pitawanakwat, R., & Dachyshyn, D. (2021). Decolonizing Time in Post-Secondary Classrooms. *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*.

**Editor-in-Chief:** Mona Nouroozifar

**Guest-editor:** Bahar Biazar

**Received:** 08/27/2021

**Accepted:** 09/22/2021

**Published:** 09/30/2021

<sup>1</sup>Seneca College, Canada

\*Corresponding author: Dr. Darcey Dachyshyn, [darcey.dachyshyn@senecacollege.ca](mailto:darcey.dachyshyn@senecacollege.ca)

**Abstract.** None.

**Keywords:** Decolonizing, Post-secondary, Education, Indigenous, Aboriginal



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Time: a simple enough concept and one with concrete understandings, especially in post-secondary contexts, where certain questions are common, such as: “What time does class start?”, “When is our meeting?”, “How much time do we have for this project?”, and most significantly in the context of education, “When is the assignment due?”

All of these questions can be answered with certainty. For many, having clearly defined time parameters contributes to their wellbeing. While for others, the notions of time that rule academic settings can be a source of overwhelming stress. In this paper, we seek to explore how Indigenous views of time could contribute in positive ways to everyone’s emotional health if brought into post-secondary settings.

Keeper, the Elder in Richard Wagamese’s novel *Keeper’n Me* (1994) says of time:

*... we got a diff’reent way with time. Never had no punchclocks like the whiteman uses, never had nothin’ like time management stuff I heard about one time, nothin’ like that. Us we lived with the seasons. Always knew what needed doin’ by time of the year not time of day. Always got things done, always survived. Was like that long time here.* (p. 11)

In the novel, when the Raven family is forced to leave the land and live in the city because of flooding from the installation of a hydroelectric dam, the protagonist Garnet says:

*Now according to Ma, learning to live by the clock sure was a hell of a lot tougher than living by the sun and the seasons the way they’d been used to.* (p. 17)

This is the point in the novel when Garnet’s parents lose the ability to care for their children, *in a good way*, resulting in family disintegration.

The expression *in a good way* (*Minobimaatisiwin* in Anishinaabemowin) appears throughout this paper. We want to pause a moment to explain why. The teachings and the message behind this expression revolve around the choices we make and the experiences we have. To live life in a good way is to accept the understanding that the choices we make involve our Ancestors and our Descendants going back and going forward seven generations. To live in a good way is to express gratitude for the gifts of our Ancestors, while also accepting the responsibility of, in turn, one day becoming an Ancestor to others. It is about mindfully choosing in each moment to encompass all things in everything we think, do, and speak. Whether as teachers, parents, community members, or individuals, to live in a good way is to consider all things that have come before us and all things that are going to come after us. It is our contention that teaching in post-secondary settings in accordance with living life in *a good way* would contribute in positive ways to everyone’s mental health.

We write this paper together as an unlikely trio, brought together by chance—or by design of the Ancestors, depending through what worldview you choose to look. We are Elder Blu Waters, Randy Pitawanakwat, and Darcey Dachyshyn, and we offer these reflections on time in hope of

making way for decolonized classrooms that create safe spaces for health and healing.

I am Elder Blu Waters, and my spirit name is Earth Song. I have mixed Indigenous ancestry with family from the Eskasoni Mi'kmaq First Nation on Cape Breton Island, the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, and the Red River Métis in Manitoba. I am from the Wolf Clan, and I am a 2-Spirit, neither man nor woman, gender diverse person. I am the Elder on campus at Seneca College and I work out of the First Peoples office located in Odeyto: a space where we bring cultural knowledge to students and provide a place for them to connect, reconnect, or stay connected with their Indigenous ways of being as they navigate through the colonial post-secondary school system. I conduct traditional ceremonies and provide traditional counseling and traditional knowledge to both students and staff.

In working with administration, faculty, and staff, it is important to provide them with Indigenous understandings, ways of being and knowledge. They can then in turn incorporate those teachings into their work with all students (not just Indigenous students) so that we can all understand whose land we occupy and the critical importance of passing on the information and ideas that have sustained Indigenous people since the beginning of time.

My name is Randy Pitawanakwat, and I am Anishinaabe from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory and Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. I am a full-time faculty at Seneca College with the role of helping faculty to bring more Indigenous content into their courses, and to create ways to decolonize their pedagogical approaches. I work out of Odeyto, the First Peoples office. Currently, I co-facilitate two professional learning opportunities for employees, *Skoden* (lets' go then) and *Stoodis* (let's do this). Prior to my work at Seneca, I worked with the Indigenous community in the Toronto area for over a decade as a social worker. Much of my knowledge comes from a collection of understandings from oral tradition and experiences throughout my life in Wiikwemkoong and Atikameksheng Anishnawbek.

I am Darcey Dachyshyn, and I am a descendent of colonists of Ukrainian ancestry whose great grandparents were sent to Western Canada to take land from First Nations and Métis people and turn it in to farmland. My grandfather farmed alongside a Métis road allowance community and my parents enjoyed much wealth gained from the resource extraction of the oil industry. I am fully a product of colonization and acknowledge that I benefit greatly from this.

I joined Seneca College as a full-time faculty just as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada brought forth the 94 Calls to Action. I used my privilege as a full-time faculty to insist that students from the programs in which I teach are provided with knowledge of the colonial history of Canada and the ongoing impact this has had and continues to have on First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Afro-Indigenous people. Working in collaboration with First Peoples staff to design curriculum and pedagogy

for students led to the conclusion that we needed to provide faculty and administrators with the knowledge, skills, and insights to deliver this content in a *good way*. This led to the creation of *Skoden* and *Stoodis*, and the connection between the three of us.

*Skoden* (let's go then) is a 12-week program wherein Seneca employees gather weekly to consider how to decolonize and Indigenize the programs and courses they are responsible for. Through a lens of looking back to understand where we go forward, participants learn about Indigenous knowledges, Canadian colonialization, and the Indigenous resurgence. This learning opportunity is intended to assist the efforts of the First Peoples team to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA Calls for Justice, and to improve student experiences. Teaching, talking, and sharing about and for reconciliation provides staff an opportunity to consider how to decolonize and Indigenize curriculum and pedagogy through the support of the Indigenous community at Seneca College. The ultimate take-away of the class is that reconciliation is not merely an Indigenous issue or responsibility—we are all treaty partners. Participants are empowered to make informed decisions and changes based on their new knowledge, are given resources, and are provided with a space to ask questions and make mistakes.

When the 12-week *Skoden* experience ends, *Stoodis* (let's do this) begins. This is an ongoing community of practice where Seneca College employees who have completed *Skoden* regularly meet to build on the Indigenizing and decolonizing efforts. Many of us in *Stoodis* have read *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) and regularly share with each other ideas we have from the book that could apply to our work in post-secondary education. One day the following passage was shared, which led to the idea for this paper:

*The time when the Original Instructions were given we might call "a long time ago." For in the popular way of thinking, history draws a time "line," as if time marched in lockstep in only one direction. Some people say that time is a river into which we can step but once, as it flows in a straight path to the sea. But Nanabozho's people know time as a circle. Time is not a river running inexorably to the sea, but the sea itself—its tides that appear and disappear, the fog that rises to become rain in a different river. All things that were will come again. (pp. 206-207)*

The following is what has come out of the conversations about time the three of us recorded on Zoom. The transcriptions of these conversations were then edited into the form of this paper.

**Elder Blu:** In colonial society, we focus so much on time that we place time ahead of everything—to the point where our physical and emotional wellbeing is at risk. This focus on time is really shortening our lives because it creates such stress. You know, clock time is a foreign idea to Indigenous people because when we want to gather, we go by the sun.

We still follow the protocol in ceremony of stating that we will begin at mid-day, and then we end when we end. If we are being present and thoughtful and courteous to everyone's thoughts, ideas, and needs, then giving a timeline really restricts one's ability to say what they wish to say and to receive the teaching they are meant to receive at this time. Everyone's voice is valuable and if we put a time limit on someone's contribution, it can really restrict the outcome.

Teaching and learning cannot be hurried. Thoughts cannot be rushed, because when we rush, we don't take all things into consideration and mistakes are made. It is important to consider not just the immediate action but also how knowledge and actions will impact life further down the road. This is the trouble we are in with resource extraction. People never thought ahead to the consequences of hydraulic hoses breaking and those fluids leaking onto the land and then seeping into water systems. Because we did not take the time to listen to all perspectives, we have now destroyed an area of Mother Earth.

Post-secondary classes are the same way. Instead of taking the time needed for all the learning and all the perspectives necessary to move forward in a good way, we are regulated by the clock. When the time is up, the class is over no matter what is being discussed. That can be devastating for someone who is struggling with a concept. Sure, the professor might provide resources to help the student after class, but we believe in the importance of learning taking place in the context of the sharing circle. People need time in the context of community to take up the learning in the way that is best for them. In the meantime, the people in the hallway are getting frustrated because they want to get in and extract information from their professor, so everyone feels pressured and regulated by clock time.

The students and professor waiting in the hallway for their time to enter the classroom are impatient because they are on a straight-line trajectory to course completion and are feeling held back. This self-serving posture of success is not based on others' wellbeing but rather on immediate gratification and individualistic progress. This idea that I must take care of me because I am more important than anyone else and my success and my journey is what matters most, seems to dominate society. We see the effects of this individualism as being a loss of community input as people work away in their own silos. People are not working for community in ways that would contribute to everyone's wellbeing. We are working on our own.

I know we have strayed away from time, but everything is connected. This focus on the individual rather than the collective means we end up living in gigantic houses with three people in them, and this is the same with our minds. We get this single idea, and we forget about everything else. In colonial culture we focus only on what we can gain. We think, "what can I get so I can succeed?", and it doesn't matter about someone else because only *my* time is valuable. But we know that is not a reality; everyone's time is valuable. In an Indigenous worldview, we focus

more on what we can give back because of all that we have received. Colonial thinking is not like that.

Post-secondary settings tend to be rigid and separated into different disciplines. But the Indigenous worldview, which is now backed up by complexity science showing how all things occur together in systems, shows us how interconnected everything is. You can't just study a single discipline and think you are going to solve some of life's big problems. We all must be a little bit more knowledgeable in everything that we do. It's not good to solely focus on one discipline because we're limiting the opportunities to be able to make better choices. If we are giving students only one perspective, we're not giving them an opportunity to have their learning relate to multiple ways of living and being.

**Randy:** Coming back to time, in Anishinaabemowin, we have a word for birthdays; however, it is a modern translation that describes what a birthday celebrates, rather than a word that has been passed down for generations. That word is *Mino Dibishkaan*. *Mino* means a good way or refers to something that is good, and *Dibishkaan* is a measure of one's life or a measure of time of where a person is at. This means that when we celebrate someone's birthday we are celebrating much more than the date when they were born, rather we celebrate their spirit coming to this world. At the same time we celebrate the family for welcoming this child and the family expresses gratitude for this spirit choosing to come to them. There is a sense of celebrating the accomplishments or rights of passage a child has undergone in this passing of time that started because the child was born. In celebrating this, the family also acknowledges its responsibility to teach this child and prepare them to live life in a good way. This is similar to other anniversaries that happen every year.

What we focus on more are the phases of life as represented by the medicine wheel. This helps us to understand where we are in our own personal journey and with family and community. We always start in the eastern doorway that represents the rising sun, the new day. That is how we understand our coming into this world as in the east, and that is how we always begin our understanding of life's journey, with the physical life here on this land. We then move through the wheel in the direction of the sun.

In the southern direction is where we begin to understand the world around us a little bit more. These are the middle years of childhood and a time of getting ready in so many ways. This is when you might go for your first hunt or somehow provide for your family. If for some reason you missed that time with your family and community, that's alright. You can still undertake that rite of passage because it is not date or age dependent. The journey is circular, and you will have your chance.

As we move into the western direction, this is typically when you grow into adulthood and have your own family, or focus on being a good auntie or uncle to the children in your family and community. Here again, if you are late to this stage in life, that's alright. Everyone is unique and comes to things in their own way and in their own time.

When you move into the northern direction, some would say this is the time of elderhood and you carry with you all the experiences and teachings from your life. Again, there is no set time for this to happen. There is no predetermined time laid down in a book somewhere. We each come to the teachings of the medicine wheel in our own time.

The aspect that is important here is that we do not proclaim ourselves to be at a certain time in life. This is especially the case when it comes to maturity and elderhood. It is the community that knows you and respects your experiences and respects your journey up to that point and they call upon you for different responsibilities. For some, in this northern doorway, this might be their busiest time in life as they are called on as an Elder. For others, they know they can relax and serve in their role as grandparents.

There is also the teaching of another doorway in the middle of that metaphoric circle, and in that is your spirit. Some would say that is the time when you leave this physical world. And then the circle continues; some would say you go back to the eastern doorway, but in a different form or with different means, and start that journey over again if that's what you're meant to do. We know that our physical life here is just one of our lives that we live, so when our physical body stops to work here in the physical world, we then have our spirit that will go on to something else.

**Darcey:** I am thinking how different these notions of time are from, for example, how we have decided that children start school at age 5 whether they are ready or not, and then they progress to the next grade, and the next grade, and the next grade. Then when you are done grade 12, you go on to post-secondary, then a career, and so on.

**Randy:** For us, the land teaches us when it is time to do things. Not us saying, well it is August 10<sup>th</sup> or September 4<sup>th</sup> and that's when we have to do a particular thing. For example, I am looking to make a birch bark canoe with my Uncle Billy, and when I last spoke with him he said, "The trees are not ready yet. For some reason things are a bit behind this year." This was a reminder to me that we can't force something when it's not ready. Sure, scientists might have found a way to speed the harvest or create more yield, but in our concept of time we listen to the land, and that's when we know it's time to do certain things. If for some reason we miss the opportunity this time, and we have to wait another whole cycle of the seasons, that's okay. It will happen when the time is right.

**Elder Blu:** What I want everyone to know is that these teachings are for all of us. These are the teachings of this land and are always passed on from generation to generation. They are not for us as individuals, and they are not just for Indigenous people—they are meant to be shared. And the unfortunate part is that colonization and Western ways of knowing are so dominant that this passing on of knowledge gets lost, drowned out, or comes to us later in our life's journey than it might have under different circumstances.

Colonization resulted in concepts being forced upon people who already had existing ways of being. We had our own communities that were thriving. We had large numbers of people living over a wide area who had many different viewpoints. Colonization brought a singular view, and we were forced to accept one way of doing things. This separated us from community. Rather than working together, we were isolated from one another. We were forced into a dominant way of being where there was no collaboration, but rather a dictatorship and the expectation to follow a single way of doing things. We can change this, though. The point is that the teachings of this land are still here for any one of us to take up in the time they are meant to enter your life.

In a colonial worldview, actions need to be undertaken in a certain progression, otherwise there are dire consequences. “We have to finish this project otherwise it will cost us millions of dollars.” Well, if the project had been planned taking into consideration the land itself and what it is ready for, this would have long-term benefits to all of Mother Earth. This is not to say that all people are like this. There are non-Indigenous people who really understand the importance of land and community, because they haven't been so distracted or removed from the original ways of their families in how to live in a good way.

I am reminded of the Cat Stevens song: He has a child and when they came to the world there were bills to pay, and the child learned to walk and do so many things while the dad was away, and in the end the son becomes just like the father. As an old man when he wanted to spend time with his son, his son said, “Not today dad, I've got things to do.” Losing our sense of what's really important can happen very easily when we live and are educated and trained within a system that teaches us to put personal priorities in front of the wellbeing of others.

It is so important that we stay in the circle of the medicine wheel and give each other space and opportunity to develop our gifts and responsibilities, all in their right time. The land tells us when things are ready. We might want fresh strawberries in March, but the land says no; the land is still resting. The land worked hard all spring, summer, and fall, now winter is its time to rest so it's not going to sprout those strawberries in the middle of March. It has to wait 'till June when the conditions are right, when that water has seeped back down into the soil, and when the ground becomes pliable and soft to work with, so that little sprout can come up through that soil when it's ready, not when we want it. We can want all we want, but the land really dictates to us what we need, how we need it, and when we need it.

**Darcey:** I am thinking here of two connections to post-secondary classrooms. One is that we are so individualistic. This is my timetable, my assignments, my graduation. The second thought is that this individualistic focus is undertaken on a rigid timeline. Now is the time for midterms whether you are ready or not.



**Elder Blu:** Yes, it is two different ways of being, and we only know what we've been exposed to so there's no acceptance, there's no compassion, there's no understanding, there's no humility, and there's no respect for anyone else, because you haven't been exposed to more than one way of being. That is why it's important that we come together to share information, and why a project like this—to have people think beyond that clock—is so important.

We need to reach out beyond ourselves and think about how we got to this place we are in right now. What is really important, and what gifts do you bring to yourself, your family, your community? Are you really sharing those abilities that you carry or are you holding everything for yourself? You might think you are an expert, but there are so many things that can impact the information you hold. It is not possible for one person to know everything, so when we come together with all our gained experiences, that's when we really see how rich in knowledge and understanding we are. No one is meant to be the sole keeper of information and resources. We are meant to live sharing with each other.

When it comes to time, it's about being present and embracing all knowledges. You have to be able to come up with concepts, understandings, mechanisms, and ways of communicating when things are constantly changing. For me it is not about the clock, but rather seeing all opportunities that are given within the many diversities that are out there. It is about trying different understandings and finding what works best for us.

Life and learning is not one-size-fits-all. It is about taking whatever time is needed to explore the old and the new. It is about taking the information at our fingertips, and the teachings that have been with us since time immemorial and fitting them together. And this takes time. We have to resist jumping on what is new and flashy, and instead bring those two worlds of the original instructions and new technologies together in a good way, and that cannot be rushed.

**Darcey:** To decolonize does not necessarily mean throwing everything out, but rather it is about living together in harmony and learning from one another. I am thinking here about the practice of Council Fire, and how this meant bringing people together to hear everyone's point of view because every Ancestor did not think the same way. Since time immemorial, there have been different viewpoints. We have always needed to communicate, and that takes time.

**Elder Blu:** Yes, there is no quick fix for anything and there are many ways of getting to a solution. If we are all given a voice to participate and find the best way, that is ideal. Of course, that process is going to differ depending on how many people are present. If there are only three people, then an agreement can be reached sooner. If there are 300 at the table, and we have to hear everybody's perspective, it's going to be a longer process. It doesn't mean people come to the same outcome as three people may have, but it's everybody's input that matters.

**Randy:** For me, one of the key connections between time and the academic setting is this idea of unlearning or relearning concepts, and that everyone is at a different point in their learning journey. It is important that faculty help students find where they fit in the learning community. The key concept here is community. Faculty are imperfect and don't have all the answers—we are all broken by colonialism. Fortunately, in an Anishinaabe worldview no one person is responsible for teaching all that we need to know. We are in this together; faculty, staff, administration, and students. We all work to help students create their own identity and understand where they are coming from. At the same time, students come into our lives and become our teachers. Perhaps before encountering us a student had not yet been given the time and opportunity to think about why they think what they do, and what has influenced their conception of learning. Students need time to think about time and what expectations have been laid on them about the speed with which they are supposed to learn new concepts.

I think it is ingrained in colonial culture, beginning in early childhood, that if you are not at a certain stage of development at a certain age, that raises red flags. Something is not right. If your child isn't doing this by such and such a time, that means they are actually behind and they are going to suffer consequences. I am thankful that both my son's great grandmother and grandmother made it clear to me that those developmental charts are only going to cause stress. As a parent, I need to come to understand my own child and they need to be allowed to grow into the ways they are intended to gift our communities. As faculty, that too is our job, to support students to come into their own way of being, and to honour the gifts of understanding that they bring.

Now bringing this into post-secondary settings, I understand there are course outlines, but outline is the key word. It is not called a mandatory course complete or fail checklist, but an outline of what the course will cover. I see it as a starting place from which to negotiate, especially with respect to assignments. Do all assignments have to be the same or can students have freedom to express themselves?

Coming back to our teaching of the medicine wheel: not everyone entering a course is at the same point. Some might be at the very basics of essay writing, while others might have already completed one program and have entered the course with strong writing skills. It doesn't mean you get to just do whatever you want, but it is about removing the stress and the anxiety of impending failure for students by reimagining the concept of the time it takes to learn something.

We have lost connection with the healthy rhythms of life. If we go back to our teachings, those messages about time come to us through the land, rather than the course outline telling us what to do and how to live, we could begin to reconceptualize post-secondary settings.

**Darcey:** Coming back to the *Braiding Sweetgrass* quote, the analogy of the river fits with the colonized culture in education as we have a vision of a straight line from entry to graduation and all we need to do is

stay in the boat and keep paddling. An Indigenous view instead suggests that we are in a vast water system that keeps going around according to the moon cycles. How do you see this relating to post-secondary settings?

**Randy:** For me it is about knowing that it's alright if we move through our understanding in our own time. We don't all have to get concepts at the same time. We can even move on and know that we can come back again. Just like the seasons return, learning opportunities also cycle through again. We have this teaching in the oral tradition that you need to be fully present and open to what you are meant to learn and then you will learn it. If you did not learn it this time, you will next time, if you are meant to.

**Darcey:** I've had many students email me well after the course and say, "Sorry I gave you such a hard time. I get it now."

**Elder Blu:** Yes, again coming back to the land as our teacher. The constellations appear every night so every night I get the chance to situate myself and pick up the journey.

**Randy:** It is also important to note that we can never rely accurately on the shifting of the seasons. We have a rough understanding of when they come and go, but we can't set an alarm clock that on such and such a day every year, this is when spring arrives. We will know it is here when it manifests itself. When the land is ready to transition, that's when it will happen.

When we have rigid expectations, we are really fighting against ourselves in that we need to just release that and say when it's time, that's when we'll switch over to the new season. We will transition to a new beginning, a fresh start of a new season, when the time is right, and that's when we'll do our original instructions for that time of year. This is how we need to see our own learning and that of our students. Learning cannot be forced; it has to be patiently anticipated, but never forced.

**Elder Blu:** The land brings to us multiple perspectives and all in its own time. All of creation has been given their original instructions. All parts of the world—the land, the waters, the trees, the birds, the plants—they all do what they are meant to do. They don't take their orders from anyone, and they don't change because someone tells them to. We value the many perspectives given to us and make room for many points of views. We do not rely solely on one perception to make everything run smoothly. We need to take the time to navigate different ways of getting to a point or achieving information, or being in relationship, or doing what's needed for ourselves and for others.

**Randy:** That's exactly our concept of time. That you're ready when you're ready, and it's not according to a chart or what science is telling us about when we should do something. When an opportunity is presented to you, that's when you are able to explore it.

**Darcey:** You have provided us with much food for thought on the idea of decolonizing time in post-secondary education. But I am sure there are many people reading this who are saying that this is all very interesting,

but not very practical. They might be asking what this really means for their classroom. How can time be decolonized in practical ways for the benefit of everyone's emotional health?

**Elder Blu:** Allowing people to be in the space that they're in and not discounting that they're not getting the concepts at that exact time when the professor or the lesson suggests should be happening. We need to allow people to have input and to be able to articulate if they don't understand something. It is also important for professors to use more than one model or framework to explain something. If things are presented in only one way, and that way does not make sense to a student, then they're going to become frustrated. We need to allow for choices to come into play rather than imposing restrictions and one right way because this one right way has far reaching negative consequences.

**Randy:** Just as you would not ask someone in a wheelchair to go up the stairs, you cannot expect everyone to learn in only one way. To do so tells people that if you can't conform to this way of learning then you're just not going to be able to cut it. You're just not going to be able to make it. There has been generations of individuals and communities that have gone through this Western system that have been told, if you can't learn this way then you just are not good enough for what is going to come and will not be able to function in society. This results in a separation from the good way teaching and having the blood memory of the past experiences of our Ancestors teaching us. When we are expected to conform to one colonial way of doing things, we become out of balance in the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel: physically, emotionally, spiritually, and cognitively.

**Elder Blu:** Not everyone learns the same way. We might see a certain progression of steps, but the learner might see things differently. We might think the only way is step one-two-three-four, but the learner might see a way for one-three-four-two to work. Or still another approach is, just because something doesn't make sense right now doesn't mean you shouldn't carry on trusting that in the right time, you will get all the concepts. Because when I've been allowed to keep going without being restricted or punished and am permitted to go forward, I have learned what I needed to learn.

**Darcey:** In your mind, how do these concepts such as choices, being ready in your own time, and multiple perspectives, fit with programs where there is a standard of practice that graduates need to demonstrate?

**Elder Blu:** Well, sometimes we're forced to be in those spaces when we're not ready. It actually starts before we're in that situation. We need to know ourselves and know if we are in the right place at the right time. Students have to feel free to step aside and shift to some other field if they find their gifts will be better used elsewhere.

**Randy:** I think along with this idea of learning in different ways comes the need for opportunities to complete assignments using different modalities. In addition, I think there needs to be opportunities for reflection on each piece of material. You might be really good at the facts, but what

do they mean in relation to your life? When recalling information, are you just going from memory, or are you actually going on the concept of reflecting back on what you're learning in order to then make sense of a live situation. I think there is room for the reflection of practice in every course. How do you understand this and how did you come to understanding it? Part of this reflection is understanding what responsibilities you are accepting when you take on new knowledge and skills.

**Elder Blu:** Another thing is that we may think we belong in one field, because there's something about it that's drawing us to it. We then take off in that direction without full knowledge of what we are getting in to. Then when we hit a barrier, we think we have to push through, when really that obstacle might be an opportunity to adjust ourselves and move in an area that aligns more with our gifts.

Sometimes we're not meant to be in spaces that we thought we should be in because it's not going to serve all of our people. We, therefore, need to have that open concept that we're not failing at something, rather it's just not in our journey. We need to see heading off in a different direction not as failure, but as strength to go in another direction and achieve something that's just as beautiful as that choice you had made in the earlier part of your journey.

**Darcey:** It seems from a colonial point of view that I have invested so much money and time in a particular program and I am going down this track until I finish, no matter what. As opposed to looking at your gifts and where you're meant to be.

**Elder Blu:** Yes, you might feel like you wasted money, you can't afford to start over, and you just need to get a job. Well, I can't be happy with my money if I don't like doing what I'm doing, or understand what I'm doing, or find purpose in it. If what I'm doing doesn't reflect who I am, then that money isn't going to make up for that. My happiness, my wellbeing, my understanding of my responsibilities in life are more valuable than that money that I think was wasted. You will only be happy when you find your passion in life.

**Randy:** What makes up who we are as Indigenous people is our lived experiences. Nothing we undertake is a waste of time; everything we try shapes us into who we are.

**Elder Blu:** When we see education as an investment undertaken for financial gain it limits someone's passion, because we're told that we must go to school, we must pick a profession and that's the whole point—pick a profession. For example, if someone wants to be an artist it's thought that's not a very sustainable way to make a living. But if that is that person's passion, the end result will be beautiful, because they're putting all their spirit, their mind, body, and their emotions into something that drives them, rather than participating in something that just leads them in a direction where there's no commitment or no desire.

**Randy:** Within the Western framework, money means more power, and more power means more assertion over other people and their

communities. Especially if you are a person of colour or Black or Indigenous. It really unbalances your thoughts of who you are and how important you are compared to others. I think this separates your spirit from your body. Similar to if a person is experiencing addiction, our belief is that the spirit leaves the body to avoid being harmed and is just waiting, ready to reconnect with your physical body when you start the healing journey towards sobriety. I think this can happen too when you are overly concerned with one aspect of life, like making a lot of money, that your spirit becomes disconnected from who you are. You also lose connection to family and community when you have a single focus of money. Your mental health is out of balance because everything else becomes secondary to making money.

I want to say that what we are trying to do here is to bring different ways of being together, the Western way and the Anishinaabe way. We are not seeking to abandon the Western viewpoint, but rather to join two different understandings and to make sense of them in the best way that we know how, in a way that complements each other, in a way that renews a relationship that goes back as far as the Treaty signings. If you were to take things back that far with the merging of two understandings, two nations coming together to bring the best of each nation, so that we can learn in the best way possible, that is ideal. But I think right now society falls towards the belief that the education that gets you the job that makes the most money, this is what is valued the highest. When in reality, the teachings that you might receive from an Elder might be of greater value than anything you will learn under the Western view of knowledge.

It seems that the commodification of education and learning that started with first contact and the view of colonizers that there was only one kind of knowledge of worth—and that was male knowledge—has set us on this path. The colonizers refused to talk to our women. They would not negotiate with them. This is not how things were for us pre-contact. Our nations were built around the sharing of ideas and the sharing of knowledge of all people. Women brought very important teachings and knowledge to the whole community. When colonizers devalued our women and chose only one gender to negotiate with, and in a sense buy their knowledge and their partnership through the Treaty process, this exchange became a commodity that had value only if undertaken in the Western way.

**Darcey:** It seems that at some point, education and learning stopped being a birthright given to you by your Elders and your community and instead became something that you had to purchase.

**Elder Blu:** I agree that this started with the influx of people coming to Turtle Island bringing their rules, their ways, and their laws. At one point, we were not even allowed to attend school because we weren't worthy. It was determined that we could not comprehend the ideas that were being delivered, and so it was outlawed for Indigenous children to go to school. Then when residential schools became a tool of assimilation, Indigenous children paid with their very lives when they entered this knowledge

system. There was no interest on the part of the colonizers to blend or infuse different knowledge systems together. There was only one form of worthwhile knowledge.

**Darcey:** When a hierarchy of knowledge exists and some knowledges, in this case Indigenous knowledges, are cut off and separated from learners, what does this do to one's mental health?

**Elder Blu:** When we are continually told and shown, through the lack of value placed on Elder knowledge for example, that our ideas are not as good as other ideas, this is discouraging and affects our well-being. When you are continually told you are not good enough, you withdraw and do not participate. Or when you are dismissed, you are made to feel lesser. This then leads to an imbalance in our wellness. Physically we manifest symptoms where we do not want to go to class. Intellectually we are not stimulated if we are sidelined. Then our spirit is harmed because we don't feel equal to other human beings.

Unless you have a Western education and letters behind your name you are not invited to the table, and so you are left with your ideas and your concepts isolated from spaces where you could be contributing. I think that really does play on people's minds, because they feel like "I'm not as good as others, I'm not valuable, no one wants to listen to me." I think this is especially difficult for our young people that come from northern remote reserves. It begins with high school where there are no high schools on many reserves, so our young people must leave their communities and separate from their family and community to go to a space where they feel they do not belong. This trajectory then continues into post-secondary settings. All this Western education is separating us from our Indigenous understandings. Really what is happening today is no different than residential schools where we were removed from our community and forced to learn in a foreign way.

**Randy:** I think there is goodness in both frameworks. We do not want to paint a totally negative picture of the Western way. What we need to do is find the balance between the two. We are beginning to do this by offering our Elders compensation for their teachings—not to the level that we need to, but this is shifting.

**Elder Blu:** People are beginning to see that there is something missing in Western pedagogy, and Indigenous pedagogy is filling that in. Within different bodies of knowledge, we see we need something more to help us deal with current conditions. Like with plant medicines and land stewardship. Indigenous voices and perspectives are needed and are being called upon. Bringing the lived experience of Indigenous people together with Western science can lead to a very healthy space where all information is valued, and all people are given the opportunity to embrace our diversities so that we can move forward in this strange world we live in today.

I want to come back to this idea that we need multiple ways of explaining things. If the professor has more than one understanding or explanation of a concept, then this helps learners to feel welcome enough to

express their own understanding. Teaching and learning should not be a dictatorship. We want professors to come from the point of, let me share with you what I know, let me share this information about some basic concepts and some foundational understanding so that we can build this beautiful course together and we can succeed in this beautiful course and we each go away with what we need when this is finished.

**Darcey:** I am thinking here again of Dodem and Council Fire and the teaching of the circle. There is no single leader or decision-maker; everyone comes together and shares.

**Randy:** Yes, in Council Fire, in the circle, everyone is listened to: the women, the children, the elders, the men. Everyone has an equal opportunity to have their input or have their questions raised during these negotiations or time of counsel.

**Elder Blu:** It's like that concept of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. Once everyone has heard something and agrees upon it, now we all think alike. That same concept applies to the classroom. When no one is left out in the learning process, then all people can agree upon something and come together with one mind to make a decision.

**Darcey:** How do we take the time to hear everyone when we have a large number of students, 50 minute blocks, and there are people knocking on the door to get in because it's their turn?

**Randy:** When you have a large class, small sharing circles can then feed their discussion into the larger community. If this means there are still too many people to share verbally with the whole class, then do it virtually. We seem to be heading more and more in the direction of using technology with students, so why not use it in a good way, a way that ensures everyone is heard? The discussion that your group had could be made into a blog post that everyone has access to. If we can't hear from everyone in person in the time given, we need to find another way.

**Elder Blu:** That is very much in keeping with our traditions. Historically we had large Councils that sat together, but then there were smaller Councils where the Women's Council brought together the issues of the women, the Men's Council brought together the issues of the men, and the Youth Council brought together the understandings of the youth. When we then all came together, everybody could learn about the different perspectives and think with one mind.

**Darcey:** Miigwech; thank you both very much. I am grateful for this opportunity to learn and reflect together on how post-secondary settings might become more kind and loving spaces if we rethink how we view time.

**Together as one:** We are thankful for this opportunity granted to us by *The Journal of Concurrent Disorders*. We are thankful to the editors and reviewers who enriched the article with their thoughtful feedback. We are thankful for those who take the time to read these words. We trust that in your involvement in post-secondary settings you are led more and more towards living life in a good way that honours seven generations back and seven generations forward.



To end we leave you with a portion of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address as provided in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Kimmerer, 2013).

*We are thankful to our Mother the Earth, for she gives us everything that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she still continues to care for us, just as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send thanksgiving, love, and respect. Now our minds are one.* (p. 108)

**Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

**Availability of data and materials**

N/A.

**Funding source**

N/A.

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