



# **WEAVING OUR COLLECTIVE WISDOM TOWARDS STRONG R2N GENDER JUSTICE**

*A Peer Learning Journey for Women and Gender Diverse People*

***Toolkit***



## Why a Peer Learning Journey for Rural, Remote, and Northern Women and Gender Diverse People?

For some time, The Canadian Women's Foundation has undertaken to strengthen the capacity of gender justice organizations in rural, remote, and northern (R2N) communities. In recent years, The Canadian Women's Foundation has been preparing the terrain for deeper and more integrated collaborative leadership and systems advocacy work in the R2N communities in Canada.

Based on The Canadian Women's Foundation's work developing relationships, capacity-building, and better understanding the needs of the R2N communities work in the women's and gender justice sector – one particular need surfaced.

**Intersectional feminist peer mentorship to support women and gender-diverse people making change in their rural, remote, and northern communities.**

The intention of this intersectional feminist peer mentorship program is to strengthen the leadership of women and gender diverse people in the women's and gender justice sector in R2N communities to mobilize for systems advocacy. The intersectional feminist peer mentorship program is about leveraging the capacity-building work in the past year to create the conditions for sustainable systems change.

## How we got from an intersectional feminist mentorship program to a peer learning journey?

In the Spring of 2022, conversation cafés were held with people from rural, remote, and northern (R2N) gender justice spaces, asking what was needed to develop a meaningful R2N intersectional mentorship program - what structure, what focus, what needs. Graphic recordings were done of these cafés, from which the images in this toolkit are taken. When collating and analyzing the emerging themes, it became clear that the original concept of developing a mentorship program that centred a mentee/mentor relationship was not what was needed. Rather the people who participated in the conversation cafés were seeking ways to be in community, to learn together, and to share their knowledge. Given the emerging themes as well as an emergent strategy approach/design approach (Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, by Adrienne Maree Brown), a decision was made to develop and test out a pilot using a peer learning journey approach.

**The pilot “Weaving Our Collective Wisdom Towards Strong R2N Gender Justice: A Peer Learning Journey for Women and Gender Diverse People” was undertaken in early Fall 2022. This Toolkit offers pragmatic ‘How Tos’ to guide future endeavors at providing impactful R2N gender justice peer learning spaces.**

**The Peer Learning Journey Pilot was developed and facilitated by:**

- Louise Pitre (*she/elle*) Principal of Louise Pitre Coaching & Consulting Inc. (LPCC)
- Giizhik (Cedar) Crystal Fach (*they/them*), Founder, Diversity Ed
- Dr. AnnaLise Trudell, PhD (*she/her*), associate from Louise Pitre Coaching and Consulting Inc.



## WHAT'S IN THIS TOOLKIT:

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  - Lesson Plan
  - Feedback Survey
- **Session 2 - Gender Diversity**
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## Why did people feel this space was needed?

"To have a sense that somebody believed I had value."

"Listening, regrouping, trying again."

"I want a feeling of being part of a movement."

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

### Accessibility and understanding barriers to engaging

Making it as easy as possible for people to be involved, and to meet their needs. The barriers faced by Indigenous women, gender nonbinary and 2 Spirit people get in the way of being able to commit time and energy to mentorship and training. **These include:** transportation, access to technology, money, child care, lack of organizational resources.

### Nuancing the language of leader and mentorship

Oftentimes, many of these individuals do not see themselves as 'leaders' in the traditional formal sense. For this reason, the language was shifted and approach was shifted away from mentorship which implies a power imbalance, to one of a peer learning journey where equal sharing and collective wisdom were centered.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

### **Rurality and rural perspective**

Centering and acknowledging that this has implications for how participants need to work in their communities. This can mean that it is at times difficult to participate in feminist movement building or activism within rural spaces. It also means there is an increased sense of chaos: R2N individuals and organizations are all too often in survival mode, and attendance is not a reflection of seeing value in the program.

### **Meaningful trans inclusion**

Being very intentional about inclusion and cultivating support from within the trans community to develop content especially for session two, to help facilitate and hold space, to ensure language is welcoming. This need was identified in the cafés and led to the focus of session two.

### **Who facilitates is important**

Ensuring there is lived experience of rurality, of gender justice leadership, of gender diversity (trans/nonbinary).



## THE CONTAINER

How we design the space where we can have authentic and messy conversations, feel our big emotions, ask big questions, and sit with our grief, discomfort and joy is critical to hosting a Peer Learning Journey. This is what we call The Container.

**Think of an image of a bowl.**

How we show up as facilitators to hold what is emerging in The Container is also critical to hosting a Peer Learning Journey. Who we are – our strengths, vulnerabilities, passions, triggers, experiences, knowledge – helps to shape the container and hold what is happening in the group.

To prepare for a Peer Learning Journey, it is essential that the facilitators be intentional about the environment they are creating and for what purpose. It is also essential that the facilitators throughout the process engage in reflective practice, continuously engaged in their own inner work, and being willing to pivot as needed.

**Here are some elements you can bring into creating a container for your peer learning journeys.**

### ■ FROM SAFE SPACES TO BRAVE SPACES

We want brave spaces to be the goal, we cannot ensure safe spaces. “What happens when safety is not enough? What happens when safety leads to complacency? And what happens when one person’s safety infringes upon another person’s safety? We don’t want safety to turn into an excuse to stay stuck. We encourage people “to speak with intention and listen with attention. (The Art of Holding Space: a practice of love, liberation, and leadership; Heather Plett)

It’s normal for people to show up with big emotions. What do we do with those? “If we focus only on safety, we might be tempted to avoid tough conversations or shut them down because they make people feel uncomfortable. If we do that, we don’t move forward into meaningful change. We stay stuck in the place where we started.” To have tough conversations and grapple with the tension in the Gender Justice sector, there is a need to move from safe spaces to brave spaces.

## THE CONTAINER

### ■ LEAN IN BUT DON'T TEAR

Think about a traffic light.



If you are in the **red zone**, it likely means that something said has triggered you. You might be angry, disconnected, defensive or you might even be debating with your screen. When you are in the red zone, you stop listening, you get ready to fight, or you check out or maybe it's also too much for you. We don't want you in the red zone. We want you to stretch but we don't want you to tear.

**Green** means that you are chill, there's nothing new here for you, everything about this conversation is old hat. If that is the case, we encourage you to take the opportunity to reflect more deeply on your own behaviours.

You have guessed it. We want you in the **yellow zone**. If you experience discomfort, stay with the discomfort. Notice where it lives in your body, the sensations you have. Notice your self-talk. But stay with the discomfort. When we meet one of our learning edges, this can feel uncomfortable.

### ■ A SLOW AND SURE OPENING MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

We always start with a fulsome check-in, one that allows sharing and connection, reflection on the previous session and weaving the learnings of the group.

### ■ MODELING VULNERABILITY AND 'CALLING IN'

How the facilitators showed up was key. Not shying away from 'the muck' or the tension, entering with humility and as co-learners, holding space for the messiness of unpacking, being willing and ready to call in when people say something that is exclusionary (for example, 'we women').

### ■ THE SELF AS THE CONTAINER

The facilitators created a container by using the self: their unique professional expertise, who they are in the world, their lived experience. They showed up as their full selves and modelled vulnerability and 'messing up' from the get go.



## THE CONTAINER

### ■ WEAVING KNOWLEDGE

During our conversation cafes, people spoke to us about mentorship as being about exchanging information, being supported by like-minded leaders who had experiences that you may not have had, or connecting with others who understood what it was like to not be an urban community.

When we think about mentorship from a Western world view, we often conjure an image of two people, one with more experience than another or more knowledge than the other. We often think about giving and receiving knowledge in one direction. This program is based on a different kind of mentorship model, one where you can collectively weave the wisdom of everyone in the group into a human tapestry of bone-deep knowing, rooted in your collective experiences as women and gender diverse leaders, in rural, remote, and northern communities.

In this weaving, we prioritized the weaving of Indigenous knowledge in particular, ensuring one of our facilitators brought that perspective and invited peers to share.

### What the participants had to say about the importance of The Container



*"It is affirming to be in a space of learning and growing together as feminist/social justice changemakers. I value all of the energy and vulnerability people put into this group. Showing up as themselves and being candid about the challenges we each are facing. Sharing knowledge in a caring way and sharing laughter and joy. I have such gratitude to be in this space."* - **Participant's feedback**



*"The things that helped make it successful were: understanding that gender diversity is important in feminist space and working through the real bumps that come up with grace and care as best as we all could, creating true space for peer sharing and learning, vulnerability of the facilitators, allowing for people to participate as they can and understanding that challenges do not mean someone does not want to be part of group. Continuing to incorporate evaluation and feedback into the sessions so that future groups would be able to share their needs and what works for them. I would love to continue it!!!!"* - **Participant's feedback**



*"The openness for dialogue. The call-ins taught me so much! I like that there was enough time to dive into things and the agendas permitted for more fulsome conversations."* - **Participant's feedback**

## THE INVITATION

A warm invitation that tells the recipient they are welcome and they belong here in this group is also a critical element to structuring an effective Peer Learning Journey. Providing all the details about what people can expect along the way is also important. In essence, the role of facilitator is to host and to do so with impeccable hospitality so that each guest/participant is cared for.

The following email was sent out via R2N gender justice email networks. Individuals who were interested were asked to complete a Google Registration Form. They were then contacted via email to confirm their desire to attend, and to complete a pre-survey that helped inform Session Two.

### Invitation Email Template

New Message

To Participants

Subject Invitation

**What is it?**  
A different kind of mentorship group, one where you can collectively weave the wisdom of everyone in the group into a human tapestry of bone-deep knowing, rooted in your collective experiences as women and gender diverse leaders, in rural, remote, and northern communities.

It is for people who are ready to go on a journey, strengthen their connections, their knowledge; to connect to what movement building is and can be for you. It is about stepping beyond the struggles of, for example, finding food money for a client you are supporting that day. It is about taking the time to reflect. What movement do we want to be part of? This is not a webinar. This is a 4-session learning journey on these dates.

Honoraria: \$500  
Cap 12 people (*We will prioritize BIPOC, people who work in very small orgs, 2SLGBTQIA, and representation across the north*)

**This is for you if you are**

- A leader in the gender justice sector. Not focused on formal leadership roles.
- Live in rural, remote, or a northern community in Canada
- Part of the non-profit sector
- Identify as a woman or a gender diverse person (for example nonbinary, trans and gender-nonconforming individuals)

**The structure**  
Retreat – 1st session – Date – 4hrs – Leadership and Power (Zoom)  
2nd session – Date- 2hrs – Gender Diversity (Zoom)  
3rd session – Date- 2hrs – Systems Change (Zoom)  
4th session – Date- 2hrs – Collective Care – moving beyond resilience (Zoom)  
Possibility of a closing session, if desired by participants – Date- 2hrs

Send

## THE INVITATION

We sent out a **registration form via a survey**, to not only get information regarding peer's names and contact information, but also what they needed to be fully present, whether they wanted to bring any specific leadership in facilitating a given session, and their demographics. We had decided that given limited space and honoraria funding, we would prioritize the inclusion of peers who were from R2N as well as from marginalized communities (e.g. Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA).



### Registration Form Template

- a) Your Name, Pronoun and Gender Identity
- b) Your Email, your phone number
- c) Where are you located
- d) Please indicate if you are from a R2N community (yes or no)
- e) What type of work you do and what position you hold in the gender justice space
- f) Please let us know of any identities you hold that are important sources of experience and knowledge you would be bringing to these conversations. For example, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, person living with a disability etc
- g) What brings you to this learning journey?
- h) What do you hope to gain from a mentorship group? What do you hope to share?
- i) What do you need to be fully present?
- j) Please let us know of any accessibility needs you may have, so we can support your full involvement in these sessions. These could include: ASL, note taking, help in navigating internet connection, phone in option, etc.
- k) The session topics are as follows. Are there any of these that you would feel comfortable bringing specific knowledge and offering moments in the sessions of taking leadership to facilitate?
  - i) Leadership & power (your own unique power print, how to use it, how that connects to your impact);
  - ii) Gender diversity in R2N communities (how can people be out, how are they safe, the tension within the VAW/women's only spaces)
  - iii) Systems change in R2N gender justice spaces (collaboration looks different, different types of pushback, who has successfully made change by finding allies)
  - iv) Collective care (what does it mean to go beyond survival and thrive, how can we support one another)

## THE INVITATION

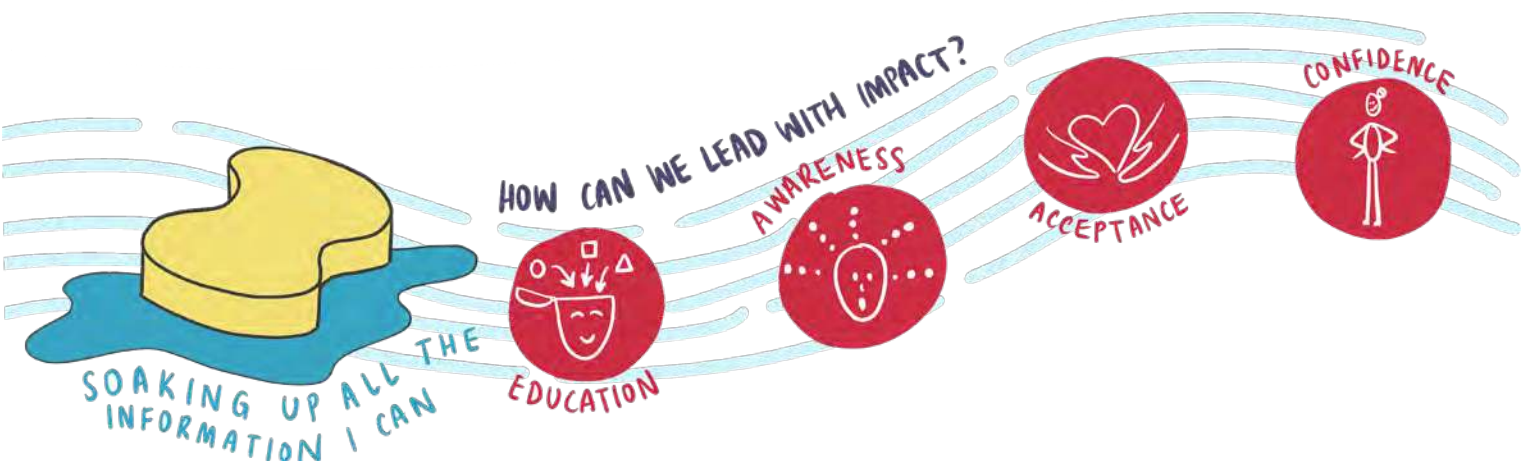
We also sent out a **pre-survey for session two**, in order to have a better sense of what knowledge base people brought around gender and sexual minorities as well as working with individuals from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Finally the survey was also used to identify themes around what tensions peers were experiencing. We knew that we wanted to focus on the tension in the sector between centering women (for example, in 'violence against women') or centering gender (for example, gender-based violence), and the implications of this tension on the 2SLGBTQIA community. This pre-survey allowed us to know how peers understood tensions within this space, and what they were living in their local communities.



### Pre-Survey For Session Two

**We want to know a bit more about how to structure our conversations during Session 2. Please answer the following:**

1. How would you rate your knowledge of gender and sexual minorities? (1- very little, 2- introductory, 3- quite a bit, 4- extensive, 5- expert)
2. What experience level do you have working with people who are part of the 2SLGBTQIA community? (1- none, 2- little/rarely, 3- some, 4- quite a bit/often, 5- regularly/extensively)
3. What tensions are you experiencing in your community or your sector related to 2SLGBTQIA inclusion and service provisioning?



## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION EMAIL

### Invitation Email Template Pt. I

New Message

To Participants

Subject Welcome and Introduction Email

Welcome! We are so excited to be on this journey with you. Together, we are carving a path where there is no path. We are pulling on other paths we have followed, bringing our collective knowledge and experiences to co-create a space for connection, sharing, learning, and movement-building towards strong rural, remote, and northern gender justice. The purpose of this email is to provide you with a high-level view of the peer learning journey and to help you prepare for Session 1: Leadership and Power.

**Your Facilitators:**  
The Peer Learning Journey will be co-facilitated by Louise Pitre and Crystal Fach. Each brings their unique knowledge, experiences, and identities to this work. Together they will weave Western and Indigenous knowledge.

*Brief Bio of Each.*

**Peer Facilitators:**

We received an overwhelming response to our request for peer facilitators who wanted to contribute to the sessions. We were not able to invite each of you to play a specific role, however, given how we have set up the sessions, you can bring your knowledge and share it during our discussions. There will be ample opportunity for you to share your wisdom.

**Our Space:**

Given this is a pilot and we are experimenting, it is possible this journey will get messy, in a good way. Even though we have developed a structure for each session with content and lots of opportunity for connection and reflection, we are making the path as we go. What you can count on is how we will hold the space.

Send

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION EMAIL

### Invitation Email Template Pt. II

New Message — ✕

To Participants

Subject Welcome and Introduction Email

The facilitation team has committed to creating a space that is:

**Welcoming:** You are welcomed to show up as you are and contribute in the ways that are meaningful to you. You need to turn off your video, then turn it off. You must step out, then step out. You arrive late, no problem, we welcome you into the space. You need to rant, rant.



**Brave:** You can show up brave, whatever that means to you. Together we will create a brave space where we hold hard conversations and tend to the tensions that live in our collective work. We know this can be scary and in this moment of heightened polarization, grappling with what is hard is necessary. Building relationships across differences is a must.

**Compassionate:** We are inviting you to show up with compassion for yourself and each peer member. We too will hold the space with deep compassion for you and ourselves. We invite you to lean into the discomfort but don't tear. We know there will be survivors in the room. We trust you know how to take care of yourself and know what you need.

**Curious:** We are experimenting and the best way to learn when we are experimenting is to stay curious. We invite you to be curious about your reactions, judgements, where there is resonance. We invite you to also pay attention to the emotions surfacing, to notice what is happening in your body. Coming into this space with curiosity will deepen your learning and point you to the edges you may need to cross.

**Incomplete:** Given the journey we are going on, there will be many opportunities for reflection. Don't expect closure at the end of this peer learning journey. Expect that you will have more questions than answers, that your curiosity will be peaked.

Send

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## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION EMAIL

### Invitation Email Template Pt. III

New Message

To Participants

Subject Welcome and Introduction Email

**Structure:**

For each session, there will be some pre-work that includes reflection questions and some recommended readings. The pre-work is intended to give you a moment of pause and get you grounded in the work we will be doing. We encourage you to dive into the pre-work for each session. We will start each session with an opening circle with the intent of hearing each voice and listening deeply to our stories. We will then offer some knowledge, whether it comes from Western sources or an Indigenous teaching. There will then be an opportunity for reflection and integration of the knowledge shared. During each session you will have an opportunity to connect in small groups and deepen your relationships. Throughout the sessions we will be weaving our collective wisdom.

**Evaluation:**

After each session you will be provided with a link to a very short survey. Given this is a pilot, your feedback is of utmost importance to help us improve on the next version and report back to the funder.

**Session Dates/Times and Zoom Link:**

The sessions will be conducted online using zoom. We will send you a meeting invite for each session with a zoom link. You will be able to also call in if you prefer.

**Shared Folder:**

Finally, we have created a shared Google folder which you can access here. If you have any trouble accessing this folder please contact...

**How to contact us:**

We know this is a lot of information. Don't hesitate to reach out to anyone on our team. *Facilitator contact info.* With deep gratitude for your trust and being willing to carve the path as we go. It's going to be invigorating!

Send

# SESSION #1

## LEADERSHIP AND POWER



*"I appreciated the warmth and vulnerability that was brought into the space. It felt like there was room for us to grow from where we are right now."* - **Participant's feedback**



## Session 1 Email to Participants Pt. I

New Message — ✕ ×

To Participants

Subject Session 1: Leadership and Power

Hello dear participants,

We are looking forward to seeing you on ... for our introductory session and a focus on Leadership and Power.

The purpose of this email is two-fold:

- to provide you with your pre-work,
- to have you complete a very short survey to help us prepare for our 2nd session on Gender Diversity.

For the SURVEY, please click on this *link* which will take you to survey monkey. There are 3 questions for you to respond to. We need you to respond to this survey by x! All documents, materials, readings, handouts, for the pre-work are attached to this email and are also available in the following Google Drive: *[link]*

If you have any questions do not hesitate to reach out.



**YOUR PRE-WORK FOR SESSION 1: You will likely need about 30 to 60 minutes depending on whether you read the recommended readings.**

**Our Opening Circle**

Send an image that represents the work you do in your community, its essence, and why it matters to you. We will need the image by X! Come prepared to be part of an opening circle where you will share a story about the work you do in your community and what it means to you. We also ask you, if you identify as a white settler to also come prepared to acknowledge the traditional territory you are on.

We will also have a smudge to open our circle. If smudging is part of your practice, feel free to bring your own sage, smudge bowl as well as a tobacco tie.

Send

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## Session 1 Email to Participants Pt. II

New Message — ✕ ×

To Participants

Subject Session 1: Leadership and Power

**Seeing Our Individual and Collective Power**

During this 1st session we will be introducing you to Julie Diamond's Power Intelligence framework. It is a Western way to look at leadership power in teams, organizations, communities, and across sectors. As you review this information, feel free to bring in your culture and your way of being in the world. Our intention here is to have a framework where we can see our individual and collective power. It is a starting point. How you see your power, your relationship to power will be informed by your lived experiences and your culture. This will be the weaving we do in this 1st session.



**To prepare for this activity, we invite you to do the following pre-work:**

- Read Handout #1 and do the exercises.

**Some recommended reading:**

- Barriers to Women's Leadership, The Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network
- "Power is hard to get" by Julie Diamond
- "Feminist Systems Change" by Tatiana Fraser and Rachel Sinha

Send

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## Session 1 Lesson Plan

### Leadership and Power

#### OUR INTENTION

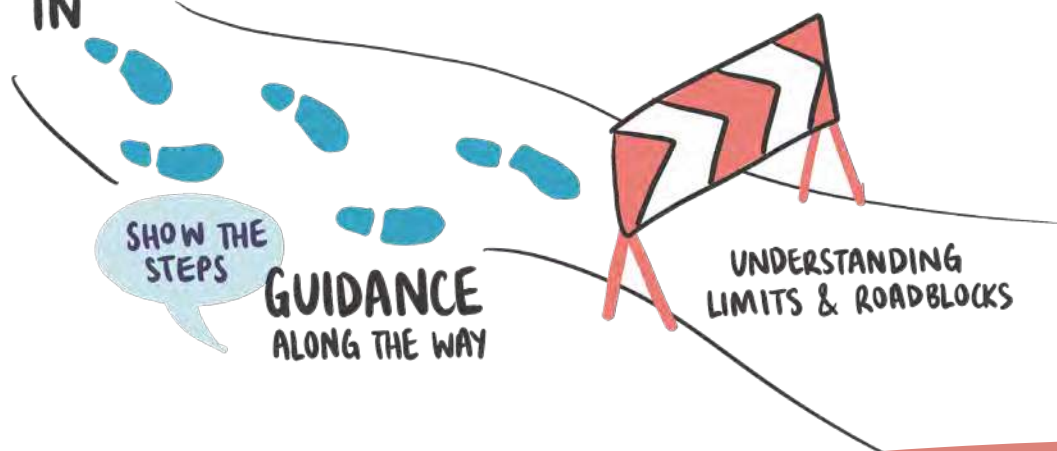
The intention of this 1st session is to get to know each other, build a foundation of trust and reciprocity by weaving together our stories. This 1st session will explore leadership and power. Together, we will unpack “leadership”, what it means to lead in the gender justice sector at this time, firmly rooted in the strengths and complexities of rural, remote, and northern communities. We will explore “power”, with the intent of understanding our relationship to power, being able to see our power, and transform the individual and collective power we hold to create systems change.

15 MINUTES



#### Welcome, Meaningful Land Acknowledgment & Introductions

- ✓ Welcome the participants.
- ✓ Start with a land acknowledgement.
- ✓ Provide an overview of today's session including the flow.
- ✓ Facilitators share how they have come to this work.



# Session 1 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Power*

**1 HOUR**



## ***Opening Circle***

- ✓ Facilitator starts with a smudge (see Appendices for more information on smudging).
- ✓ People can grab their own smudge bowl and hold tobacco and speak to their intentions.
- ✓ One of the facilitators will start the circle and demonstrate what we are looking for.
- ✓ Start by sharing your name, pronouns, the role you have, and the land you are coming from; tell us about the image you brought, how it represents the work you do in your community, why your work matters ....
- ✓ Thank people for sharing their stories. Take a moment to breathe and sense into the emotional field.

**15 MINUTES**



## ***Designing Our Container***

- ✓ Reiterate our intentions for this space.
- ✓ Ask them what else they need and what they will be accountable for:
  - What atmosphere do you want to create? How will you know you have that?
  - What will help you thrive? How will you know you have that?
  - When things get tough, how do you want to be together? How will you know you have that?
- ✓ Remind people that this is a collectively held space.

*There are individuals in this space that are non-binary and use the pronouns they/them. It is possible that some of us will at times mis-gender people. If this happens, apologize and move on. If you don't notice that you have done this, one of us will step in as an ally, call you in, invite you to apologize, and then continue to engage. For those of you who are non-binary, if you want this situation to be managed differently you can advise us of this.*

# Session 1 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Power*

45 MINUTES



## ***Knowledge Sharing / Wisdom Weaving***

### **Teaching about Bundles** (20 minutes)

Below we share teachings on personal bundles provided by facilitator Giizhik (Cedar) Crystal Fach. It is also suggested that you ask an elder or a person who carries a community bundle to come bring that teaching to the session.

A personal bundle is a collection of sacred items that help us make our way through life with peacefulness, balance, health, and wellness. A bundle does not have to be kept in a physical bag. The “bundle” is the items themselves. Bundles are sacred and each item within them carries significant meaning. Often, bundle items are given as gifts, and may have been gifted by a parent, grandparent, teacher, or an elder to help you along your path.

Each item in this bundle is a gift and carries a special story. Teachings say everything in your bundle should have a story or memory that goes along with it. Anything you hold dear to you or has value—even family members—can be a part of your bundle, making everyone’s bundle unique and personal to them.

Teachings also say that physical items in a bundle can give thanks for different actions and feelings. Love and forgiveness are things you cannot see, so having a bundle lets you see them in physical form. Just like we are unable to see the **Seven Grandfather Teachings**, they are always with us. I hold in my bundle cedar as that is my name and a healing medicine that I use in every part of my life; as my gifts are that of healing. I also carry a pipe which was gifted to me by a two spirit elder; I know that part of my role in the community is to pray for my people; I do this by smoking tobacco and asking creator to heal our communities. I also hold seven grandfathers (rocks) which were gifted to me from various members of my community during my path of discovery on who I am and my role. Lastly I always carry tobacco, sage and sweetgrass and those are the medicines that keep me whole and connected to creator. **Are there other Indigenous people on the call who can speak to their bundle?**

### **Small group discussion** (20 minutes, breakout rooms)

We all have medicine. We all have gifts we carry. We all have people we can reach out to. We are now going to send you into small groups and have a discussion about your bundle and/or the wisdom you bring to your leadership. How have you come to receive these gifts?

## Session 1 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Power*

**30 MINUTES**



### ***Break and Personal Reflection*** (Off Camera)

- ☑ Take your journal and pen or coloured markers, whatever it is you have brought with you into this space and reflect on the following questions using the stories you have just heard as inspiration and knowledge:
  - What medicine/gifts is/are in your bundle?
  - How is it connected to your ancestors? To your lineage?
  - What is its potency?
  - How does your bundle of medicine support you in your role of leadership and systems advocacy?
  
- ☑ Remind people that this is a collectively held space.

# Session 1 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Power*

**1 HOUR**



## ***Mapping our individual and collective power for systems advocacy and movement-building***

- ✓ Facilitator introduces the Power Intelligence Framework; the concept of rank and power sources.

### **Group experience and instructions (15 minutes):**

- Check to see that everyone has done the exercise.
- Go through the individual reflection and provide examples from own life.
- Give them 5 minutes to think on their own.
- Invite them to use the ANNOTATE function on Zoom and map out their power print.

### **Debrief:**

- Ask people to notice the constellation.
- Let's look at the hearts. The hearts represent the power sources you are most comfortable with. What are you noticing? Let's hear from a few people. Why did you place your heart here? And what is that like to have your heart in this power source?
- Repeat for each question.

### **Reflection/application:**

- What was this activity like?
- What are you learning about your relationship to power?
- What is your opportunity to further develop your leadership power?
- What collective power lives here and can be used to move towards strong R2N Gender Justice.

## Session 1 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Power*

**15 MINUTES**



### ***Closing Circle***

- ☒ What did you most appreciate about this session's content/discussion? *OR* What is one thing that will stick with you from this session?
- ☒ What would you change in terms of how the session was facilitated?
- ☒ Did you find the content/focus to be helpful? Yes or no and why.
- ☒ Go around and give everyone an opportunity for people to say how they are leaving.



### **Feedback Survey Session 1**

1. What did you most appreciate about this session's content/discussion? *OR* What is one thing that will stick with you from this session?
2. What would you change in terms of how the session was facilitated?
3. Did you find the content/focus to be helpful? Yes or no and why

The answers to each session's feedback survey were used to shift and adapt the following session(s) to better meet the needs of the group.





## SESSION #2 GENDER DIVERSITY

# MEANINGFUL TRANS INCLUSION



*"In other spaces we've talked around this conversation but never went right through it."* - **Participant's feedback**



*"The content was mindful, impactful and through the words of lived experience helped to recognize the challenges, gaps, and areas where discussion on women's spaces and identity and inclusiveness of trans and binary individuals."* - **Participant's feedback**

## Session 2 Email to Participants Pt. I

New Message — ✕ ×

To Participants

Subject Session 2: Gender Diversity

Our intention during this second session is to focus on gender diversity. We are at a critical moment in time in the gender justice sector. Many of us have grown up in the violence against women sector with a focus on women and girls. As our work evolves as well as our understanding of gender, we are at a critical moment in time to reflect on what is gender diversity and what does this mean for Gender Justice in the rural, remote, and northern communities. Questions we will explore include: how do we define gender? What is gender diversity? What are the tensions in our field? What narratives are dominant about gender diversity in our sector? Which narratives do we need to let go of, and which new stories do we need to create if we are to welcome gender diversity? How do we create workplaces and communities inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+?



**You will need about 60 minutes to do this pre-work.**

1. Please review the following handouts. You can find them here in the google drive *[link]*:

- Gender 101
- Pronouns
- Sexual Orientation Sheet
- Cheat sheet for policy change

In the sub-folder Additional Content/Reading, you will find more detailed and relevant reports on Gender Diversity.

Send

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## Session 2 Email to Participants Pt. II

New Message — ✕ ×

To Participants

Subject Session 2: Gender Diversity

2. Listen to this video:

While there are some who use the term Two-Spirit to refer broadly to all queer Indigenous people, the term is more commonly used for identities that originate in traditional understandings of gender and sexuality (rather than Western colonial binaries). Because these traditions and understandings are culturally and spiritually specific, it's important to recognize that Two-Spiritness is not an identity universal to all Indigenous communities or something that is a part of all Indigenous worldviews.

The video below features Passamaquoddy Two-Spirit artist and educator Geo Neptune and provides a brief overview of Two-Spirit identities: *What Does "Two-Spirit" Mean? | InQueery / them.* - YouTube



Video: *Smudge, Don't Judge (Trailer)* - YouTube

Full Video: *Smudge, Don't Judge: Assisting Two Spirit/Trans Survivors of Violence* - YouTube

3. Reflect on the following questions:

- How can I create safer spaces for gender diverse and transgender people to access the VAW or GBV sector?
- What resources are available to support 2SLGBTQAI+ people in my community? What other resources are available outside of my community?

Send

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## Session 2 Lesson Plan

### *Gender Diversity*

#### LEAD FACILITATOR

Someone with lived experience of being nonbinary or trans is ideal.

#### PEER FACILITATOR(S)

A participant self-selected in the registration survey to help facilitate an activity in this session

**10 MINUTES**



#### ***Welcome and Introductions***

- ☑ Land acknowledgement. Each week, something new is brought into the land acknowledgement.

**25 MINUTES**



#### ***Opening***

- ☑ Circle: *30 minutes*
  - How are you arriving today?
  - What questions have come up for you about our topic today?
- ☑ Use the Zoom White Board to collect information.

**15 MINUTES**



#### ***Review Survey Results***

- ☑ Help unpack what the results mean, how they are representative of the R2N gender justice sector, and how they demonstrate what lives in the room today.

## Session 2 Lesson Plan Gender Diversity

**15 MINUTES**



### ***Guest Speaker to Tell Story of Lived Experience***

- ☑ Bring in someone who has lived experience of being trans/nonbinary and has interacted with gender justice/violence service providers. Helping to ground why change is needed, building empathy for what is at stake if we do not do better.

**25 MINUTES**



### ***Small Group Discussion (Breakout Rooms)***

- ☑ Share a story about a time when you realized the importance of understanding gender diversity and being able to meet the needs of gender diverse people in your community. What did you learn? Any promising practices for R2N gender justice 2SLGBTQIA inclusion?
- ☑ Ask the participants to collect the learnings in a google jam board. (*Share jamboard link*)

**20 MINUTES**



### ***Close with Collective Poem Activity (Peer Facilitator)***

- ☑ This section was designed by one of the participants. It would be ideal if a participant felt they could bring forward some leadership to this part, in whatever way (art based, discussion based, information sharing) that makes sense to them and the group. ***On the next page is an example of a poem*** that was created, asking each participant to answer the question 'this is for'.



## Session 2 Lesson Plan Gender Diversity

### SAMPLE POEM

This is for those who've felt like the world is not made nor meant at times for them.

This is for all the people who are told that their appropriate responses are pathologies

This is for touching bravery

This is for everyone who knows who they are in their heart

This is for people who don't have time to wait for us to be comfortable.

This is for all the trans and non binary people who feel they are silenced or cannot live their truth; I share my voice with you

This is for the unborn child so they may not struggle, be accepted for who they are; so they may know they belong

This is for all the gender diverse peoples who are struggling to fit in. You are not alone. So be who are and always be you

This is for the activists and the allies.

We must be open.

We must do better.

We must change.

This is for all, the past is the past negative memories fade and you will survive and you will be okay.

This is for each and everyone of us we all have a role to play. Living, legacies building community creating identity and supporting this for each other and in one another

This is for the youth who don't feel seen

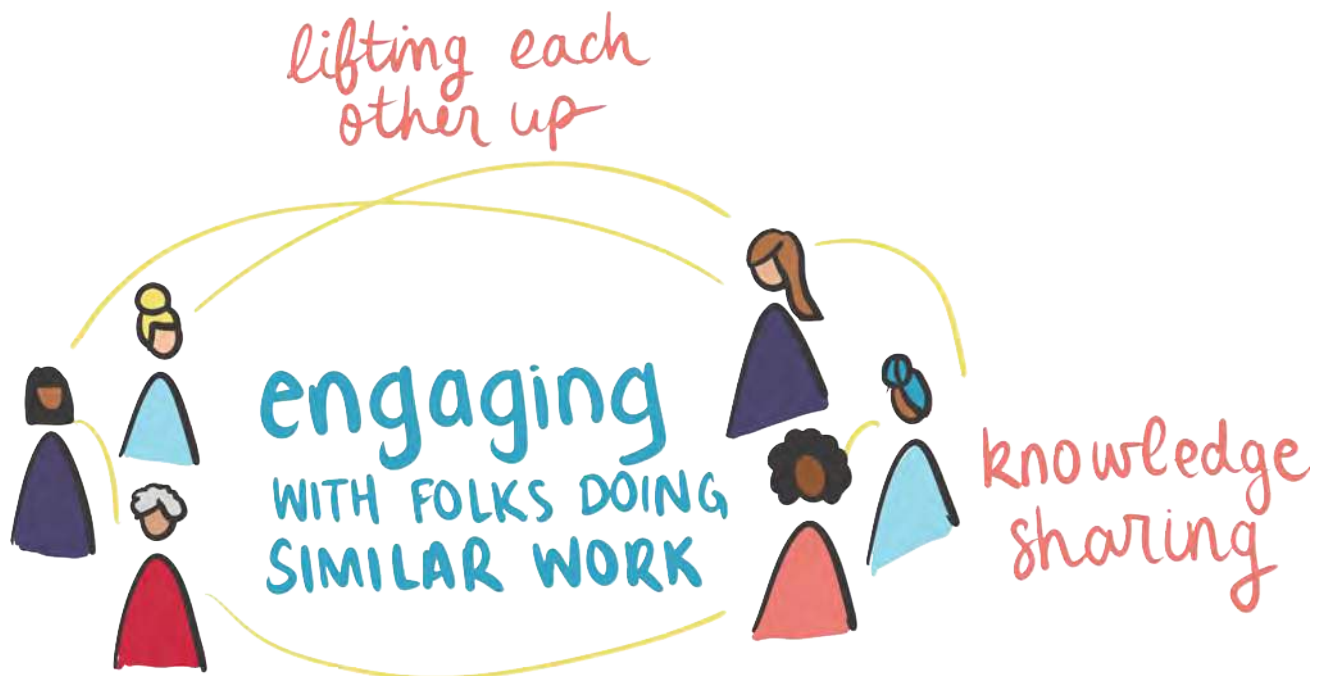
This is for women and gender-diversed people who defend my country and are placed under extra risk. This is for Ukrainian children and youth who arriving in new countries see diversity and listen to their own identity and question it. And this is for people here who would like to care for children and are afraid to be confronted by the perception of their communities.

## Session 2 Lesson Plan Gender Diversity



### Feedback Survey Session 2

1. What did you most appreciate about this session's content/discussion? OR What is one thing that will stick with you from this session?
2. What would you change in terms of how the session was facilitated?
3. Did you find the content/focus to be helpful? Yes or no and why



# SESSION #3

## LEADERSHIP AND SYSTEMS CHANGE



*"I think its really exciting to hear what systems change pieces people are navigating. Often the work feels isolating, I appreciate how much these sessions break down the isolation. It is going to be hard not to have this group continue together in some iteration. The space has been healing and transformative."*

**- Participant's feedback**



## Session 3 Email to Participants

New Message — ✕ ×

To Participants

Subject Session 3: Leadership and Systems Change

On X date we will have our third session focused on systems change. We will introduce different systems change models and use them to explore how to create the change we are seeking in our communities. We will look at a case study from one of our peers about systems change. We will bring forward our power print from Session 1 to identify how we can collectively influence and create the impact we seek.

To prepare for this 3rd session we invite you to:



- Listen to the Two Loops Model of Systems Change by Margaret Wheatley and Deb Frieze. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcyHKKc2LVg>)
- Read *“Relational Systems Thinking: That’s How Change is Going to Come, from our Earth Mother”*, by Melanie Goodchild, Turtle Island Institute and Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience
  - What resonates in this article?
  - How can relational systems thinking inform moving toward strong R2N Gender Justice?
- Identify a system change that needs to happen in your community. Begin to think about:
  - What needs to die? Who is hospicing what needs to die?
  - Where is the energy in the system? Where are the pioneers?
  - Where can you start?

If you have time:

- Check out the panarchy loop in the google drive.
- Check out the following websites:
  - Presencing Institute
  - Wolf Willow Institute of Systems Learning
  - Turtle Island Institute
  - The Systems Sanctuary

If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to reach out.

Send

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## Session 3 Lesson Plan

### *Leadership and Systems Change*

Our focus in this third session is on systems change. We will introduce different systems change models and use them to explore how to create the change we are seeking in our communities. We will also examine how cross-sectoral collaboration can be a vehicle for system change. We will bring forward our power print from Session 1 to identify how we can collectively influence and create the impact we seek.

**Lead Facilitator:** X

**Peer Facilitator:** X

**10 MINUTES**



#### ***Welcome and Opening, Meaningful Land Acknowledgement***

- ✓ Land acknowledgement. Each week, something new is brought into the land acknowledgement. This could be a new piece of writing or poetry, a short educational youtube video, new information to share. This helps keep the land acknowledgment from becoming stagnant and pro forma.

**30 MINUTES**



#### ***Check-In Circle***

- ✓ Name that the check-in will take some time. We are continuing with this approach because it is helping to build vulnerability and connections.
- ✓ How are you arriving today since our last session?
  - What is brewing for you?
  - Weave together people's responses into themes.

**30 MINUTES**



#### ***Case Study: Peer Facilitator***

- ✓ One peer facilitator offered to present her case using one of the systems change models and takes questions

## Session 3 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Systems Change*

**30 MINUTES**



### ***Small Group Discussions*** (Break Out Rooms)

- ✓ Use the Two Loops Model (see Pre-Work above for link to this) to think about the systems change you are creating or want to create:
  - What is the systems change you are attempting to create?
  - What is your role in the system, as a leader, as an organization?
  - What stage are you at?
- ✓ Share a jamboard link and ask that someone from each group take notes.

**15 MINUTES**



### ***Large Group Discussion***

- ✓ What are you learning about systems change?
- ✓ Where are the sticks in the system?

**5 MINUTES**



### ***Closing***

- ✓ Invite them to do a gesture with their bodies as their closing.

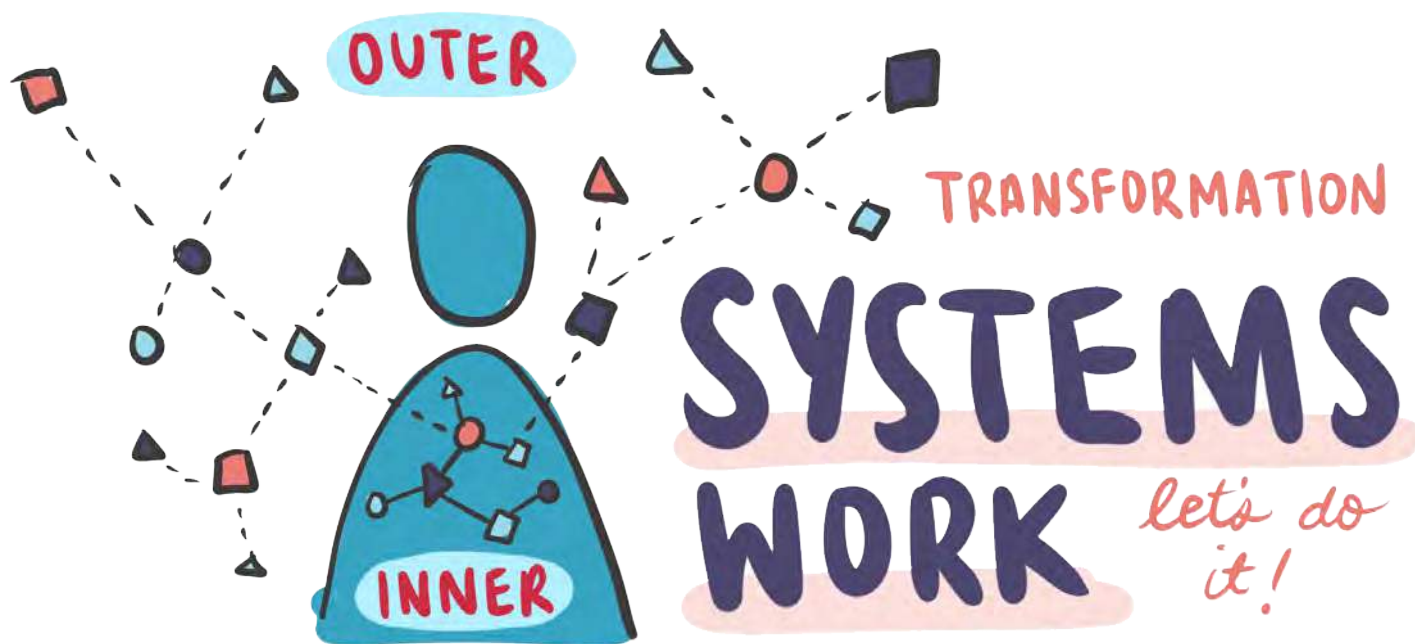


## Session 3 Lesson Plan *Leadership and Systems Change*



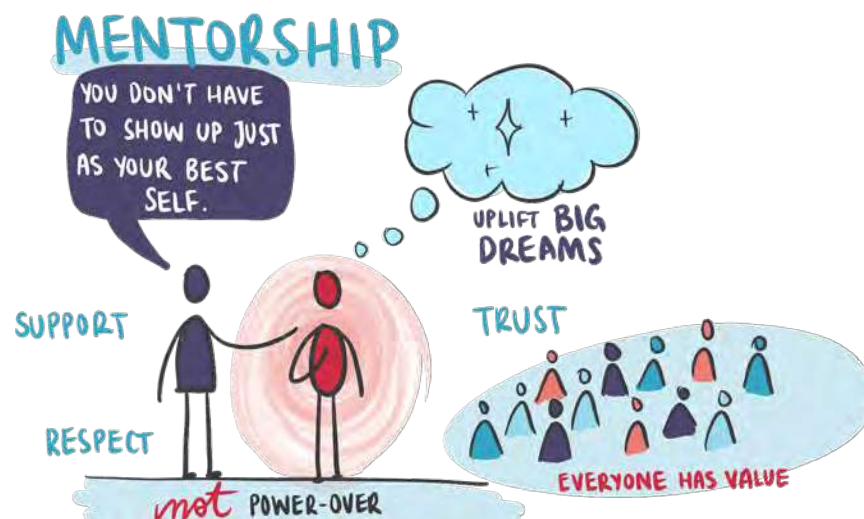
### Feedback Survey Session 3

1. What did you most appreciate about this session's content/discussion? *OR* What is one thing that will stick with you from this session?
2. What would you change in terms of how the session was facilitated?
3. Did you find the content/focus to be helpful? Yes or no and why



# SESSION #4

## COLLECTIVE CARE



*"It was important to focus on collective care because too often, burnout and vicarious trauma that are such a part of the gender justice sector are individualized under the response of self-care. People are told to meditate, to take a day off, to even have me time with a bath. Collective care reframes this response as needing to be collective."*

**- Participant's feedback**

*"This session was not only a discussion of collective care but also (for me) collective care in action. Space to share how we are entering the conversation today, space to share wisdom and reflection, space to share challenges and hurts and space to share joyfulness. The one thing that sticks with me is the trust and relationships that we have been creating through this group which has been powerful and deeper than I thought would be able to happen online. I value this group and care for the members."*

**- Participant's feedback**

## Session 4 Email to Participants

New Message — ✱ ×

To Participants

Subject Session 4: Collective Care

Good morning,



Here are some readings for our Collective Care session:

- *Collective Care and Activism*  
*Resisting the commoditization of self-care & building our capacity for collective care*
- <https://irresistible.org/> - this is a really good podcast on healing justice
- [www.sacredearth.solar/healingjustice](http://www.sacredearth.solar/healingjustice) - Melina Laboucan-Massimo, co-foundere of Indigenous Climate Action and Founder of Sacred Earth Solar

**Questions for reflection:**

- What does collective care mean to you?
- When have you experienced collective care? What was that like?
- What is the collective care/healing justice that needs to happen in the Gender Justice sector?

Send

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## Session 4 Lesson Plan

### Collective Care

One of the participants offered to lead the facilitation of this session, pulling on their lived experience of being a newcomer and truly living the need and benefits of collective care.

**10 MINUTES**

#### ***Welcome and Opening, Land Acknowledgement***

- ✓ Land acknowledgement. Each week, something new is brought into the land acknowledgement.

**30 MINUTES**

#### ***Check-In Circle***

- ✓ How are you arriving today since our last session?
- ✓ What is brewing for you?

**35 MINUTES**

#### ***What is Collective Care***

- ✓ Self-care vs. collective care. Collective care as nurturing: “We are not the survival of the fittest, we are the survival of the nurtured.” (Louis Cozolino). Why do we need to be cared while working in non-profit, systems changing organizations? Indigenous notion of Collective Motherhood, rather than individual motherhood.



## Session 4 Lesson Plan Collective Care

20 MINUTES

### *Small Group Discussions (Break Out Rooms)*

- ✓ What rituals or practices of “motherhood” are/were restorative, healing for you?
- ✓ Which of those practices can we apply in our work with others?

15 MINUTES

### *R2N Gender Justice Collective Recipe for Wellbeing Activity*

- ✓ Ask participants to reflect for a few minutes and think of a word for wellbeing they would like to strive for. Then ask them to use a metaphoric verb from cooking/baking to action that word. In other words, take an ingredient (empathy, joy, restoration, equity, etc.) and add an action (boil, strain, layer, combine, etc.) to create a poem and call to action. Ask participants to give you their statement, which you will then combine into a group recipe for wellbeing. ***Below is an example of Recipe created by the participants.***

10 MINUTES

### *Closing*

Recipe for wellbeing DEVELOPED BY: RURAL, REMOTE AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES GENDER JUSTICE COLLECTIVE	
Ingredients	Directions
EMPATHY	1) STOMP ON PATRIARCHY FOR 15 MINS. PICK UP PIECES AND
JOY	THROW INTO A HOT OPEN FIRE. LISTEN TO FLAMES CRACKLE.
RADICAL ACCOUNTABILITY	2) LAYER SUPPORT AND STIR IN COMMUNITY CARE.
RESTORATION	3) FOLD IN JOY FOR 10 MINS. LET RISE FOR 1 HR.
EQUITY	IN WARM AND WELCOMING SPACE. FOLD IN MORE JOY.
WHITE SUPREMACY LENS	4) ADD A FEW DROPS OF HUMILITY.
	5) STIR EMPATHY INTO RADICAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO CHOP OUT THE WHITE SUPREMACY LENS. COMBINE EQUITY AND JOY FOR RESTORATION.
	6) KEEP POT OPEN TO WATCH AMAZING PROCESSES HAPPENING, THANKS TO COMMON EFFORTS.
	7) FLAVOUR WITH SINCERITY.
	8) SERVE WITH A SIDE OF HUMOUR AND SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY. BON APPETIT!



## Session 4 Lesson Plan *Collective Care*



### Feedback Survey Session 4

1. What did you most appreciate about this session's content/discussion? OR What is one thing that will stick with you from this session?
2. What would you change in terms of how the session was facilitated?
3. Did you find the content/focus to be helpful? Yes or no and why
4. Did the Weaving our Collective Wisdom Program meet your expectations? (Yes or no, tell us why)
5. Would you recommend that this program be offered again? (no, yes, maybe)
6. In terms of the overall design and approach, would you change something about the program?
7. If you had to tell someone of the impact this peer learning journey had on you, what would you tell them?
8. What were the conditions that made this successful? What would need you need to do this again, continue it?

### WHAT TO DO WHEN IT'S OVER

When the sessions are over, it is important to be reflective and use multiple data points to think about the impact of the peer mentorship space. Not only is this essential for improving your praxis as a facilitator, but it is also a key part of making meaning about the impact and success of the space you just held. Look to the evaluation data and ask what resonated, what should be changed next time?

You can host a debrief with peers or with the facilitators, and ask:

- What did you learn about yourself, about your edges?
- What did you do well?
- What would you do differently?



# APPENDICES

## SESSION #1

- ✓ Smudging
- ✓ Handout Final PowerPrint Exercise
- ✓ Feminist Systems Change

## SESSION #2

- ✓ Gender 101
- ✓ Sexual Orientation
- ✓ Pronouns
- ✓ Needed Org Policy Changes

## SESSION #3

- ✓ 577 Original Article “Relational Systems Thinking”




## SMUDGING

Smudging involves the burning of one or more plants known as “medicines” that are gathered from the earth. The four medicines typically used in First Nations’ ceremonies are tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass, although the most common medicines used in a smudge are sweetgrass, sage and cedar. Each of these medicines is considered sacred.

Smudging has been passed down from generation to generation. While the exact form of the tradition varies from culture to culture and, there are many variations on exactly how a smudge is done. In some traditions, all people who wish to do so participate in the smudge in a circle. In other practices, one person, an elder or teacher, leads in the smudge with prayers for all and only they will smudge; others participate vicariously. In either case, the usual pattern is to “gather” the smoke of the medicine over oneself in various ways: the area around us; our heads to clear the mind; our eyes to see truth and the good in others; our ears so that we will be able to hear and discern; our mouths so that we will speak well and truthfully; above, before, behind and below so that when we walk into this life we are immersed in prayer for the guidance of our Creator.

Smudging allows people to stop, slow down, become mindful and centred. This allows people to remember, connect and be grounded in the event, task or purpose at hand. Smudging also allows people to let go of something negative. Letting go of things that inhibit a person from being balanced and focused comes from the feeling of being calm and safe while smudging. The forms of smudging will vary from nation to nation but are considered by all to be a way of expressing and experiencing the cleansing of oneself. Smudging, for many, is part of “the way things are done” and is part of living a good life.


The following are some of my thoughts about what the purpose of the smudge is:

- We smudge to clear the air around us.
  - We smudge to clean our minds so that we will have good thoughts of others.
  - We smudge our eyes so that we will only see the good in others.
  - We smudge our ears so that we will only listen to positive things about others.
  - We smudge our mouths so that we will only speak well of others.
  - We smudge our whole being so we will portray only the good part of our self through our actions.
- 



## SMUDGING

Some First Nations people believe that the smoke, in itself, serves as actual prayer or, serves to provide real cleansing and purification. The smudge here symbolically signifies the means by which cleansing and purification take place – the work of the Creator. Smudging is always voluntary. People should never be forced or pressured to smudge. It is completely acceptable for a person to indicate that they do not want to smudge and that person may choose to stay in the room and refrain or leave the room during a smudge. Respect for all is the guiding principle in any authentic Indigenous tradition.



# WEAVING OUR COLLECTIVE WISDOM TOWARDS STRONG R2N GENDER JUSTICE

*A Peer Learning Journey for Women and Gender Diverse People*

*"At the heart of effective leadership is the conscious and effective use of power. At the heart of a transformed system is doing and distributing power differently." (Louise Pitre)*

## SESSION #1: LEADERSHIP AND POWER KNOW YOUR POWER PREWORK

Chances are that the conversations you have about power, if you have them, are about the power that another organization has, or another leader, or another sector. Chances are you don't have conversations about how power shows up in your own organization and your own leadership. To create a strong Gender Justice sector, to transform the systems that create gender-based violence, we need to understand our relationship to power and be able to see the power we do have and use it consciously. To truly transform systems, we need to redistribute power. The first step to systems change is to see our own power.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Read the Types of Rank and Sources of Power. If you want more detailed information, you can read the paper by Julie Diamond entitled *"Why Power is Hard To Get"*.
- Jot down any questions or thoughts that surface for you.
- Map out your Power Print. If it feels like too much, just read the questions and notice what surfaces for you: emotions, questions, images, sensations in your body, etc.

## TYPES OF RANK AND POWER AN OVERVIEW

### SOCIAL POWER

#### **SOCIAL RANK (GLOBAL)**

- **Social Status:** Power exists within a global fabric. Society bestows advantage by virtue of social identity—attributes like race, gender, class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, physical and mental ability, and gender and sexual orientation. Social status plays a major role in the opportunities and outcomes we have in life: education, income, employment, health, and life expectancy.

#### **STRUCTURAL RANK (GLOBAL)**

##### **POSITIONAL POWER, EXPERT POWER, ACCESS**

- **Position:** Positional power is the formal role we occupy in a group or organization such as a workplace, volunteer association, club, place of worship, or political group.
- **Informal or Contextual:** Informal group ranking system based on things like popularity, seniority, alliances, or expertise and skill. Our ranking comes from our ability to successfully align with the norms and values of the group.

### HISTORICAL POWER

#### **PSYCHOLOGICAL RANK**

- Refers to the sense of rank we internalized in childhood. We grow up in a context of power—in a family, school, neighborhood, community, and society.

### PERSONAL POWER

#### **PSYCHOLOGICAL RANK**

- Can be described colloquially as what we use to “get by” in life. It includes our ability to make and keep friends, negotiate conflict, promote our interests to our advantage, cope with challenge, learn from difficulties, bounce back from setbacks.

#### **SPIRITUAL RANK**

- Connection to larger purpose, vision, transcendent experience, knowledge of self and other, closeness to death, life, altered states.

**SOURCE:** Julie Diamond, “Power, A User’s Guide”, <http://juliediamond.net>, <https://diamondleadership.com>

## INSTRUCTIONS AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

**Using your workplace and your roles in the Gender Justice sector you play as context, DEFINE YOUR POWER PRINT:**

- Review the power sources below. Write down examples for each of the power sources that resonate for you.
- Consider the following questions:
  - Which power source are you most comfortable using? What is it about this power source that makes you comfortable? Put a heart on the power wheel that represents the power source you are most comfortable with.
  - Which power source are you the least comfortable with, the one you avoid at all costs? What is it about this power source that makes you uncomfortable? Put an X on the power source that you are least comfortable with.
  - Which power source is the least developed in you? What is it about this power source that makes it the least developed in you? Put a circle on the power source that is the least developed.
  - Which power source do you have but you forget you have it? What is it about this power source that makes you forget you have it? Put a checkmark on the power source that you forget you have.

**Given your unique power print, reflect on:**

- What are your most robust powers and where do they come from?
- What are some areas where you feel less powerful, or less resourced? What knocks you off balance?
- How can you use the power you have to create more Gender Justice?

## POWER SOURCES

*Based on and adapted from Power Intelligence Framework®, created by Julie Diamond. [www.diamondleadership.com](http://www.diamondleadership.com) and Power: A User's Guide)*

### SOCIAL POWER

Social Status. Power exists within a global fabric. Society bestows advantage by virtue of social identity—attributes like race, gender, class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, physical and mental ability, and gender and sexual orientation. Social status plays a major role in the opportunities and outcomes we have in life: education, income, employment, health, and life expectancy.

### POSITIONAL POWER

The formal role we occupy in a group or organization such as a workplace, volunteer association, club, place of worship, or political group. It is a form of social power derived from a position we hold.

### EXPERT POWER

A form of social power derived from education and experience, skills, and talent.

### ACCESS AND RESOURCES

A form of social power; it's about how easy it is for you to access resources; could include seniority, alliances, popularity.

### PHYSICAL POWER

A form of social power based on your physical abilities.

### HISTORIC POWER

The sense of rank you grew up with; social, familial, cultural.

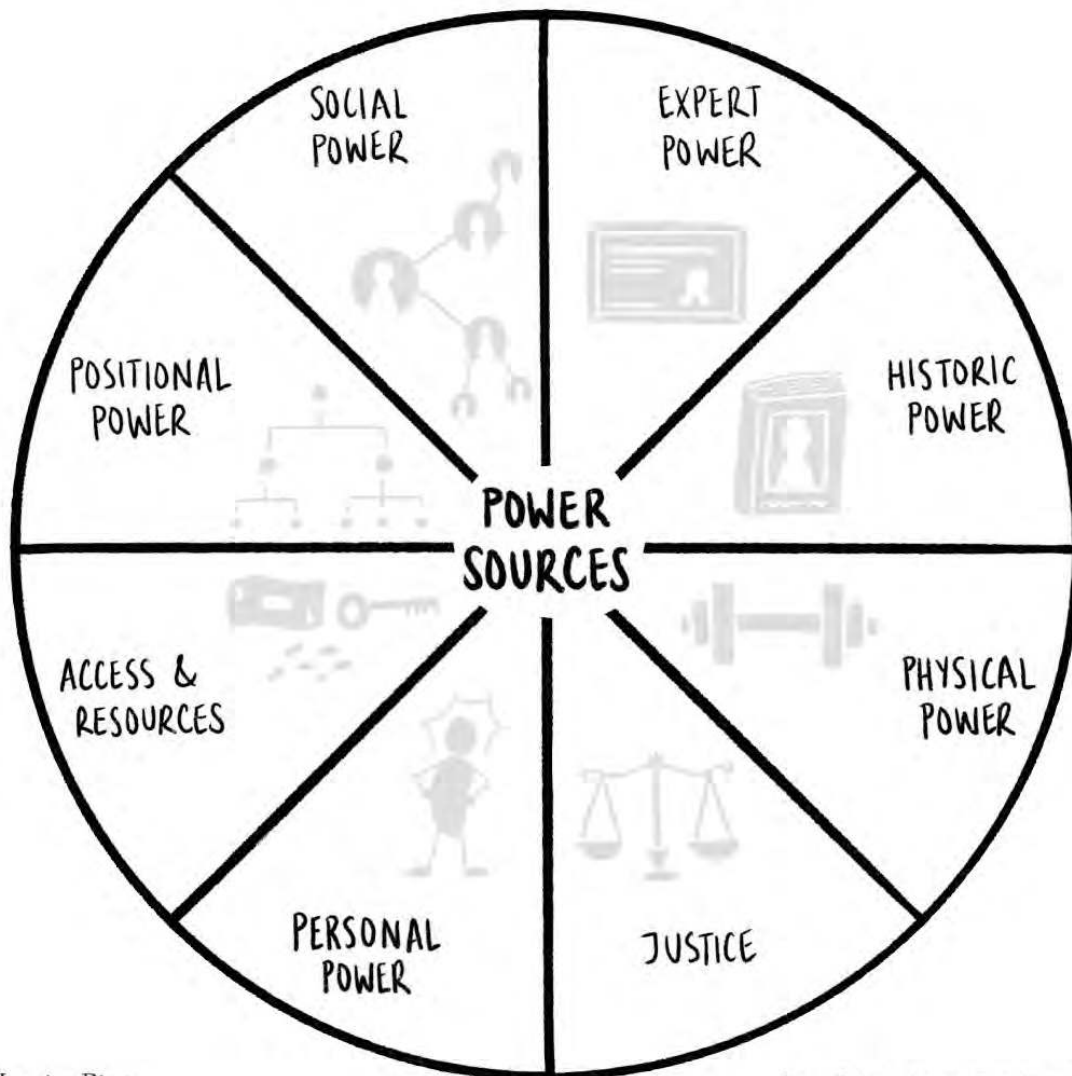
### PERSONAL POWER

Your personality, this is innate and developed; any life experience; emotional intelligence, skills, abilities.

### JUSTICE

A sense that justice is on your side.







# Feminist Systems Change

by Tatiana Fraser Rachel Sinha (2021)

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# 1

## Alignment

### Why Gender and Systems Change?



In my twenties and during a difficult time in my life, I discovered feminism. You could say it kind of saved my life. So many things I had internalized about myself and so many of the experiences that I struggled with, that family and friends struggled with - finally made sense. What was personal now had a social, systemic and political frame. I discovered that I had agency for change. I wasn't messed up. The world was.

I began the journey of taking all that I had learned, to share this with other young women. I questioned, why wasn't critical thinking, empowerment, socio-political framing of our experience part of the normal education systems? I wanted to create a space and opportunity for young women to collectively reframe their experience too and do something with this new understanding of the world. The organization I co-founded in 1995, Girls Action Foundation, was born as a grassroots project supporting girls and young women's empowerment, leadership and social justice.

It was here that I cut my teeth on feminist activism. We were informed by Paulo Friere, *the Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*. Anti-racism was feminist and intersectionality informed our world view. As third and fourth waves, the feminist movement was entrenched in identity politics, sorting out how to make sense of gender and multiple points of intersection including sexual identity, class, race, ability. In our work, we always knew that you couldn't slice gender in a binary

“

way. We constantly asked ourselves in our work, ‘how can we transcend identity politics, how could we create a space to practice how to work and learn across difference?’

As we grew Girls Action Foundation, we were informed by complexity theory - this was my way into systems change. At the time, Brenda Zimmermann and Frances Westley were injecting complexity into the Canadian social change landscape through an innovative masters program at McGill University. I ate it up. This thinking validated my desire to do things differently. It offered a new ground from where to stand that redefined power from static to fluid, it introduced emergence as a strategy and it held the messiness of contradiction and paradox. It informed how we organized, how we incorporated learning into our work and how we approached change.

At the time, I knew we were working systemically but we lacked the tools and frames to articulate this. When I left Girls Action, I was preoccupied with systems change. I went on a journey with other senior leaders in Canada to explore the emerging systems change field of practice. We were seeking the edges and once again, were interested in how we might do things differently. We recognized the limits we were coming up against - including Increased polarization and perpetuating climate crisis and inequities.

As I built my understanding of new systems frameworks, I re-affirmed that feminist practice aligned here. Feminism works to shift harmful dominant systems rooted in hierarchy and dominance. Systems change works at the structural, systemic and cultural level for change. Feminism is systemic; it is inherently anchored in a desire for systems change.



I saw how systems change practice could add to the feminist tool box, like it did for Girls Action, and vice versa. It could help us find new pathways for change. I also saw that there were resources being pumped into new systems change collaboratives, meanwhile, there was a huge lack of funding for grassroots women's movement work.

It also became clear to me that the systems change field lacked a power analysis. It was not fluent in social justice terms or an intersectional feminist lens. It was born and bred in the privilege of Western white academia, and it was male dominated. With a focus on relationships (importantly and usefully), it missed important questions like *'who is centered, valued and resourced here, and how is hidden and visible power playing out?'*

Many of the systems change experiments I observed, were being designed and orchestrated from and by funders. This was problematic because how could we truly hope to shift systems if we were starting from the center of that dominant system, or beginning within the paradigm of a flawed charity model? Feminist practice could strengthen systems change practice by bringing a power and justice lens.

The pandemic, along with racial reckoning have caused the tectonic plates to shift from under the feet of the systems change field over the last year. For many in the field, they are now more 'woke', but there are many who still struggle to genuinely work across difference and how to align justice in the systems change field. We are on a journey of alignments.

”

– Tatiana Fraser, The Systems Sanctuary





# We Are on a Journey of Alignments

There are many ways into systems change, many lineages and many practices. For example, we see that Indigenous knowledge systems originated this world view long before Western science found it. Many social change practices have embraced systemic approaches and ways of being far before systems change named this as the brand new solution to complex problems.

At the same time, systems change offers new tools and new thinking to support these efforts.

In a Western context, patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism are the meta systems that cut across all the systems we are working in. A gender and intersectional lens is a way to understand how inequity is a through line in any system. It helps to see and make sense of the interconnections and dynamics that are at work in unhealthy systems.

Furthermore, many systemic issues are gendered and these issues, like gender based violence, the feminization of poverty, are far too often minimized, erased and overlooked. We know women are often on the front lines of harmful systems and therefore, these women have solutions and visions for change.

Feminist practice strengthens systems change and vice versa.

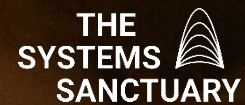
FEMINIST PRACTICE	SYSTEMS CHANGE
Feminism brings the power analysis that is missing from systems change.	System thinking brings love by valuing relationships and the wondrous interconnectivity of our world of humans and non-humans.
Feminism politicizes the gendered and discriminatory nature of care.	Systems change invites us into caring and healing the self as a way to heal systems.
Feminism is at the cutting edge of binary breaking.	Systems change invites us to hold paradoxes.
Feminism sees intersectionality and recognizes that our multiple identities mean we experience systems differently.	A Systems lens invites the complexity and nuance in locating ourselves, and to the ways in which we are interconnected.
Feminists are closely connected to solutions but lack \$\$.	The systems change field increasingly have resources to support systemic solutions.



# 2

## Case Studies

### Our Work



We have brought a feminist lens into all of our work at The Systems Sanctuary; our platform formed four years ago to coach, train and support systems leaders internationally.

Through the Sanctuary, Rachel and I work to bridge the fields of feminist and systems practice on many fronts from supporting women identified systems leaders to supporting projects to build ecosystems and drive systems change addressing issues from climate, care, to gender based violence and human trafficking.

Specifically we launched The Systems Sisterhood as the Sanctuary began, as a peer mentoring group for women and gender diverse people leading systems change who were going through a life transition; from having babies, to ageing in the field of social innovation, to starting big new roles or stepping away from them.

We transcribed all our calls and tracked the challenges they faced, surfacing patterns and themes across our many cohorts, across years.

## The Systems Sisterhood

A space for peer learning and inquiry into women's and gender diverse leadership.

Some of our questions:

- How are we located in the systems change work we do?
- How is my work connected to the broader system?
- What privileges and challenges give us motivation, power for this work?
- How does motherhood and care connect to systems change?
- How might we heal and strengthen our embodied and intuitive ways of knowing?
- How might we intend a culture that values deep relationality and is power aware?
- How are we interconnected in this work?
- What are the systems challenges and opportunities, the patterns and themes across issues?
- What can we learn from life transitions, how can this inform my systems work?
- How do I become more embodied?
- Where are we on the ecocycle? Personally, collectively?
- How is healing self connected to healing the system?



We have used this model of peer learning as the backbone of our work ever since, working with different groups from women leading on issues of climate and nature to those supporting survivors of gender based violence and human trafficking.

Through our work, we have emerged with a different quality of conversation. We are able to talk openly about everything from imposter syndrome, to internalized sexism and racism, to what it means to disrupt outdated cultures and systems as a woman.

We have witnessed the power of bringing women and gender diverse folks of different generations together. Allowing younger systems leaders to hear from those who have been through the life transitions they are grappling with. Seeing the career twists and turns that are possible. Hearing the ‘long view’ about how systems have shifted in a lifetime. It has been a deep joy to listen to the stories of these women over time.

In hosting conversations at this level of vulnerability we have moved from competition to camaraderie. Women truly caring about and supporting other women in the field, by lending their own experience and lessons learned to help others through a familiar transition.

We have seen the culture that emerges when we are able to have a conversation at this level of authenticity. It’s one that so many of the systems we are trying to shift would benefit from and it’s inspiring to imagine our many harmful systems thriving with this culture.

## The Kitchen Cabinet

In collaboration with MakeWay, we are supporting women identified system leaders in the climate and nature space. Here we are uncovering how internalized patriarchy, colonization and white supremacy block our power and actions and how cultures of care can heal systems and inspire new pathways. Through collective sense making, systems mapping and peer learning, we are creating opportunities for systems change at personal, organizational and landscape levels. This is an ecosystem building initiative that will scale through new cohorts, funder collaboration and new funds to support front line change efforts.

## The Gender Based Violence Learning Lab

An ecosystem initiative, in collaboration with Be the Peace Institute, that convenes a cohort of change agents across multiple systems in Nova Scotia. Here we are training system leadership and facilitating collective sensemaking to inform new collaborative actions. Our action planning includes decolonizing and shifting the funding system, challenging professionalization of the GBV field and diving into racism and how this marginalizes communities and work in the field. Most importantly we are building deep relationships across the ecosystem and a space to unpack the burn out and undervalue that is pervasive.

# Challenges in Systems Change

Working in this way has given us a poignant insight into the challenges facing those who are trying to cultivate systemic change in different contexts.

What has become obvious is the many ways that women, whether they are leading systems change or on the front lines of social justice movements are burnt out, lack funding, and their perspectives, voices and visions are often overlooked or undervalued. **They often feel isolated and alone in these experiences; the intersection of racism and colonization exacerbate these challenges for BIPOC and gender diverse women.**

In our own experience as women systems leaders, we know many women in systems change are privileged to have access to levers and power to help move systemic approaches as well as to shift outdated mindsets. There is a need to unpack and challenge white dominance and norms in the systems change field and the role that women play here. At the same time, we see gendered and racialized barriers in systems change efforts. Cultures that perpetuate old power; competitive innovation environments dressed up as collaboration that value silver bullets, and slick solutions over the deep work required to do systems change. Initiatives that prop up the technocratic over the creative, and that value linear outcomes over emergence.

We see how senior male dominated leadership in the systems we seek to shift as well as in our own social change organisations and sectors, means that decision making power and control over how resources flow in ways that often don't support the ideas of women leaders. The trend in the systems change field for men to mansplain the importance of the feminine, makes it even more frustrating, when there is limited understanding of the language we speak or the ways in which we are working.

We believe that through supporting women identified leaders, recognizing and validating their experiences and supporting the emergence of collective and interconnected action, we can shift sexist and racist cultures and heal systems. We shift power when we 'scale deep' by valuing the deep work that happens in the root systems; personal transformation, movement and community building.

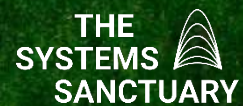
Using an intersectional lens and linking the personal, to the political, through to the systemic, we create the space to locate ourselves in our work, to include our role as mothers, daughters, caregivers and leaders and to pay attention to the social and political power dynamics at the same time. We hold the tension between the value of deep relationship building with the broader systemic analysis.





# 3

## How do we do feminist systems change practice?



Leading from the heart and being vulnerable is hard in a world that values highly polished and professional presence. But we know silver bullets don't work and technical, individual entrepreneurial and policy solutions are not enough on their own.

Our methodology laid out below, highlights the ways in which we apply feminist systems change in practice:

### Start with Lived Experience and Shift the Power

We center the conversation on lived experience first, theory second.

Feminist practice gives us a way to weave in power and intersectional analysis throughout in an authentic and real way. It offers us a guide to de-centre the dominant frameworks, expertise and narratives as a starting point and to re-centre and listen deeply to the experience of people.

Whether it's allocating resources, finding the leaders in a system or convening an ecosystem, our work begins with: *whose perspective is centred and whose is resourced?* These first steps are an important moment to ensure that the experiences and voices of the community, first voice, those living the harm of a system - will be leading the way. It also begins with a clear intention to shift resources and power from dominant systems to multiple and decentralized community leadership.

In our work with The Systems Sanctuary, we also focus on the messy, imperfect, everyday realities of the people leading systemic change. By doing this collectively, in small groups of up to 12 people, we are able to turn what feels like deeply personal challenges or failure, into a shared understanding that we are not alone in our experiences and that these are connected to systemic and deeply rooted cultural norms.

## Bring In Systems Frames

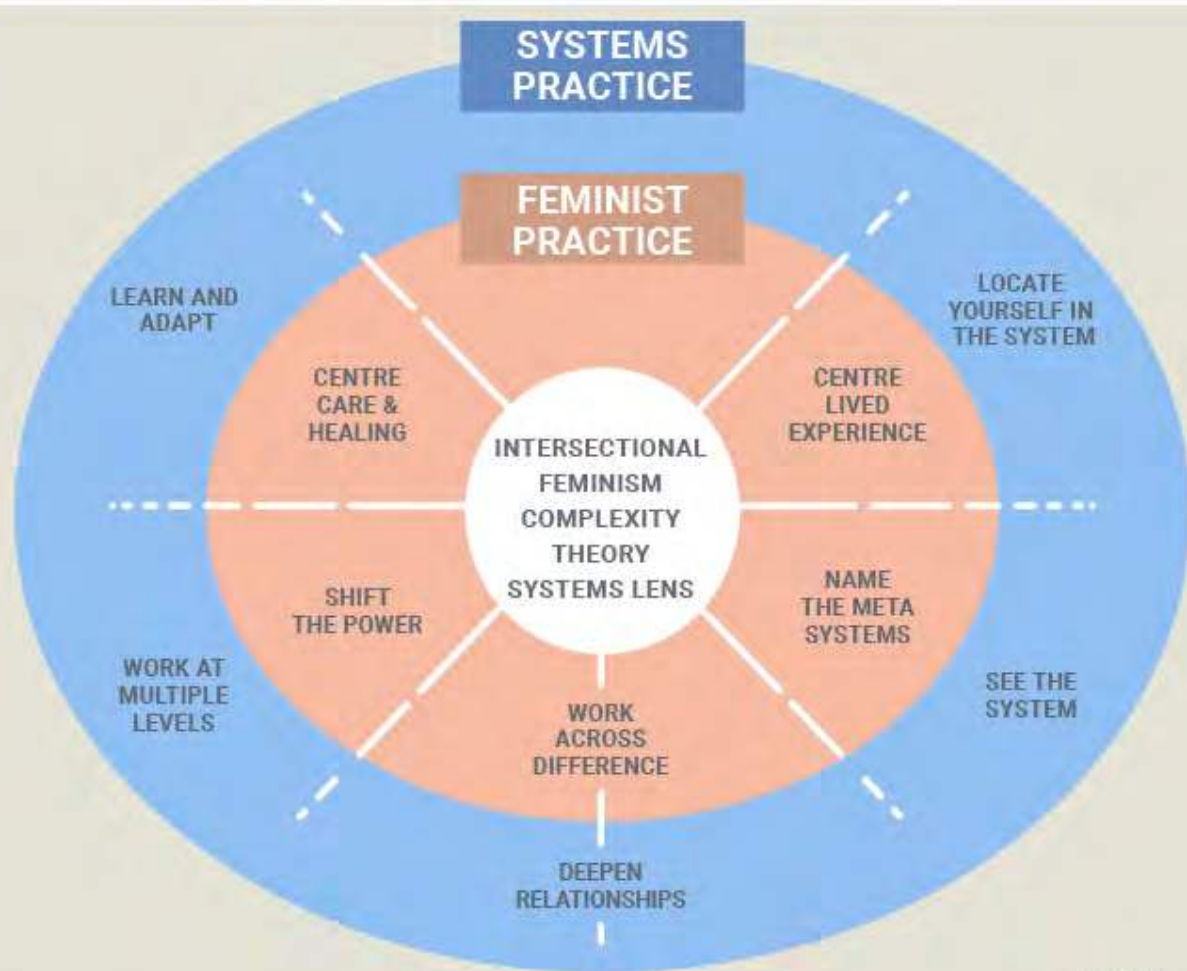
From here we bring in systems frameworks to reframe the challenges we see and develop strategies for change based on this new understanding and knowledge. We build community and connect ecosystems that are wiser in their collective actions.

Systems practice helps us to sense-make and move to action and strategy that could create the conditions to shift the system.

These strategies emerge through learning and from participants who are motivated and in the position to act on them.

Our methodology merges together feminist practice with systems change. We believe it is the combination of both together that helps to create interventions that are built on understanding, trust and deepened relationships across difference.

# Feminist Systems Change Framework



**THE FEMINIST SYSTEMS CHANGE FRAMEWORK**  
*Fraser and Sinha (2021)*

**THE  
SYSTEMS  
SANCTUARY**

# Integrated feminist systems change in practice?

What does this all look like in practice when merged seamlessly together?

We support systems practitioners leading an initiative or cohort of leaders working collectively across an ecosystem. Specifically, we convene women identified and gender diverse folks leading systemic change in a particular sector over a minimum 7 month period. This is our integrated practice.

## Name the Metasystems: Use an Intersectional Lens

- Intersectionality<sup>1</sup> means that we recognize how meta systemic issues like colonization, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism cut across all the systems that change work that we do. With this lens we acknowledge how these play on a personal and systemic level.
- Naming the metasystems means that we regardless of the system we are working in - i.e. health care, finance etc., we name the through line of these metasystems and hold this lens to bring equity and justice into each stage of the work.

## Centre Lived Experience: Invite the Full Human

- Set out to create a culture that is flexible, invites the full human, and doesn't take itself too seriously.
- Invite everything that's going on in the background of our lives, as genuine context for the conversation.
- Ask everyone to state their needs and we acknowledge that we can never achieve a safe space, but a 'safer' one where we can be challenged, learn, deepen and grow.
- Honour that not everyone is an extrovert and loves public speaking. We create the conditions for one to one conversations, individual reflection, small group work and in creating small, trusted circles where people can be vulnerable.

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*1. Learn more about intersectionality here: Time Magazine. What's Intersectionality? Let These Scholars Explain the Theory and Its History. Arica L. Coleman. 2019*



## Centre Care and Healing:

- We work to connect to our bodies through embodiment, meditation, and other modalities.
- By creating connection and sharing our challenges, we break isolation and silos, reframe issues that illuminate pathways for transformation
- We recognize that people are on their own healing journeys; and by connecting the personal to the systemic, we invite deep dives and reflection into new spaces, shadows and contradictions.

## Shift the Power: Weave Power Analysis Across Everything

- We integrate a power analysis in everything we do
- We locate our position and our own role in the systems we are trying to change
- We seek to understand more about our own power, challenges and privilege.
- We commit to finding out more about where that has come from in our lives.
- We seek to strategically redefine power and to shift power from dominant centres to the edges where the vision and innovation are alive

## Deepen Relationships + Work Across Difference

- We create cohorts that engage different places in the system and that offer a multiplicity of perspectives, experiences and cultures across race, lived experience, sexual identity and age.
- Set firm conditions around showing up fully human, including an in-depth dive into equity and our identity, power and privileges in the circle.
- Centering conversations on the challenges that leaders are facing at work, allowing a lot of room to weave in the personal challenges that intersect and exacerbate these issues.
- We listen and speak at depth and notice/weave interconnections
- We show up as authentic as feels ok and possible on the day

## See the System: Facilitate Collective Seeing and Sensemaking

- We host conversations about what participants are noticing in the system, how they practice care for themselves, what ideas are growing, stagnating or need to be let go of in their field



- We transcribe everything so we have a record of what is said verbatim. We re-read, highlight, cluster and track emerging themes from the conversations.
- We bring in systems frames as a way to see the systems that surround our experience and to strategize about how we might cultivate the conditions to create change
- We also map different roles participants are playing in the ecosystem they exist in- what is missing and what could be focused on.

## Work at Multiple Levels: Move to Strategy

- We plot challenges at different levels in the system and opportunities in the system that could be actioned on.
- Our frameworks offer powerful ways to move to action and see new pathways that might not have been obvious before.
- Systems practice helps us to turn this experience into a strategy that could create the conditions to shift the system.

## Learn and Adapt: Working with Emergence

- We adapt as we go, shifting as needed to meet the needs of who shows up, rather than what we planned to do when we began
- We emerge collective intelligence, sharing it back and building on it as the program progresses
- These strategies emerge from women who are motivated and in the position to act on them.

Importantly, we shift the system by demonstrating a culture that honours our full, messy experience at home and at work as part of the change work we are trying to do. And we take time to build out a collective strategy for systems change over a significant period of time.

When an ecosystem does emerge from this process, with new innovation groups, or potential collaborations, we have built the foundation of new professional relationships that run deeper and are more authentic on which it has a chance to flourish.



# Feminist Systems Change in Action

This space has been an important touchstone for everyone involved, especially during COVID. Participants tell us how the process has impacted them personally and professionally. It has supported leaders to have the courage to leave toxic work spaces, or to stand up to bully colleagues so their ideas get some light. It has validated experiences that felt like personal failure and reframed them in a way that creates movement for change, its allowed for critical reflection on how white supremacy culture has operated and stifled cultures and made people sick, it has deepened understanding for the human challenges when we are working across difference and it has sparked new projects and collaborations that would not have happened otherwise.

It's building an interconnected web of fierce and powerful women leaders who are connecting an ecosystem to act on the climate emergency and other social and environmental issues.

At the heart of this work is a belief that silver bullets and technocratic solutions that dominate the halls of power - aren't working, that there are many brilliant efforts alive in communities that are overlooked and under-resourced and that care and healing can transform systems when they are centred.

This has been a space where we can name the shit that doesn't get talked about and that gets invisibilized, internalized and treated as an individual problem. We make the connections and start to see how these patterns are connected to the systems we are working to shift. These interconnectivities are like a healing salve that strengthens a collective vision for change.

We create this culture by aligning a feminist lens with systems practices. We balance critical and power analysis, with the relational; we prioritize the human experience and then theory second, we value emergence over linear strategy and outcomes and we try not to take ourselves too seriously.



# How feminist practice strengthens systems change practice.

Integrating feminist practice into systems change strengthens our capacity on many levels.

Feminist practice: intersectional feminist lens	Systems capacities: working with complexity	How feminist practice strengthens systems change
Center lived experience: challenge notions of expertise	Locate yourself	Shifts power from expert to lived experience; from centers to the margins, from fragment to whole human.
Name the metasystems; patriarchy, white su- premacy, colonization	See the systems - collective sense making	Brings a power analysis to systems analysis that sees the systems level through line of justice and equity
Create conditions to work across difference	Build relational depth	Builds capacity to name power and access in the relational and in the room
Shift power and resources - into the hands of the people on the front line of the problem	Create a strategy for systems change - at multiple levels	Values the important work of scaling deep, working at the root systems to inform multi level strategies for change.
Centre care and healing	Learn as you go - emergence, reflection and action	Informs and shifts the focus from technical/policy focus to centering the full human with dignity and liberation.



# 4

# Our Next Steps: Systems Change @ Intersections



## An inquiry

We've been immersed in the stories internationally for four years, and we have worked with incredible women who are leading deep systemic change. We know it's time for some of these conversations to be amplified loud and proud. They are inspiring and validating, frustrating and clarifying and we know that they leave women and gender diverse folks feeling like they are part of something much bigger than themselves.

Moving forward, we want to pay attention to the energy and potential of interconnections of issues. To help see from new perspectives and think about where this might guide us.

Through this work, we hope to expand and amplify this conversation and provoke a movement that supports women-identified systems leaders to lead as themselves in all their complexity, in a culture we know the world needs more of.

## Fieldbuilding

We are committed to connecting and supporting the field of feminist systems change practice and we do this by bridging the fields of systems change and gender equity.

Specifically we:

- Support women system leaders to create and lead change
- Support feminist systems change projects, to become thriving ecosystems for positive change
- Set up structures to support front-line change leaders

We believe in working at the many intersections of gender and systems change to catalyze new visions for transformational ways forward into the future.

To join us, get in touch!

## Acknowledgments

We are so grateful to everyone who has contributed to this work and learning. Thank you to our many partners, collaborators, participants and to those who thoughtfully provided feedback and suggestions as we developed this publication.

# Learn more about The Systems Sanctuary

We are a support system for leaders trying to shift unhealthy systems.

We work with leaders who already have a Network, Cohort, Team or Ecosystem and are trying to create the conditions for it to have a deeper systemic impact.

If you find yourself saying ‘we need to change the system’ but are overwhelmed with what to do next, we can support you to help you think strategically about ‘how to’.

We ‘coach, don’t play’. We have your back as the leader of your initiative and support you to do your work with more clarity, confidence and less stress.

We help you work strategically through the unique challenges that face systems leaders; from managing stakeholder relationships, to how to communicate your work and we can help you build learning into your work.

We work individually and with cohorts across an ecosystem.

Specifically we offer coaching, strategy support, and we host regular peer-mentoring courses. We also train leaders internationally on systems change practice.

Working with us feels connected, compassionate and strategic. We embed a power and justice analysis in all the work we do and we listen, champion and care deeply about the people we work with.

With ties to the UK, US and Canada, we work internationally.

[www.systemsanctuary.com](http://www.systemsanctuary.com)



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# GENDER 101

presented by DiversityEd, with  
definitions sourced from PFLAG



**gender:** a set of socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate.

**pronouns:** the words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/them, he/him, and she/her. Some people use neopronouns, like xe/xem.

**transgender:** a term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Also used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression, like transsexual, genderqueer, gender diverse, and androgynous. Often shortened to trans.

**cisgender:** a term used to refer to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Often shortened to cis.

**gender identity:** a person's sense of self in relation to gender. Gender identity does not always correlate to biological sex.

**gender expression:** how a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, and mannerisms. May or may not reflect their gender identity.

**gender spectrum:** the concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum.

**gender binary:** the disproven concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other.

**nonbinary:** refers to people who do not subscribe to the gender binary. They might exist between or beyond the man-woman binary.

**gender-fluid:** describes a person who does not consistently adhere to one fixed gender and who may move among genders.

**intersex:** current term used to refer to people who are biologically between the medically expected definitions of male and female.

**androgynous:** having physical elements of both femininity and masculinity, whether expressed through sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.



**Transgender** is a term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Also used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression, like transsexual, genderqueer, gender diverse, and androgynous. Often shortened to trans.

## transitioning

used to refer to the process, including social, legal, and/or medical one goes through to affirm one's gender identity.

**The validity of an individual's gender identity does not depend on any social, legal, and or medical transition.**

**gender-affirming surgery:** surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to match their innate gender identity more closely. Also referred to as gender confirmation surgery.

**binding:** process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts, often by using a binder. One must bind safely, with appropriate materials and reasonable amounts of time to avoid discomfort or negative health impacts.

**Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):** treatment which allows trans and gender-expansive people to medically transition to feel more at home in their bodies, like testosterone and estrogen.



**Hormone blockers (puberty blockers):** medical treatment which allows young trans and gender-expansive people to prevent the potentially negative outcomes of going through a puberty that does not match their gender identity.

**gender dysphoria:** the distress caused when a person's assigned sex at birth and assumed gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

**gender euphoria:** a euphoric feeling often experienced when one's gender is recognized and respected by others, when one's body aligns with one's gender, or when one expressed themselves in accordance with their gender.

## things to avoid

**dead-naming:** occurs when an individual refers to the name that a transgender individual used at a different time in their life.

**misgender:** to refer to someone using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect their gender.





# PRONOUNS

MY PRONOUNS ARE

## WHAT ARE PRONOUNS?

The words used to refer to a person other than their name. We use pronouns all the time.

**"She is going to the store."**

**"His coat is on the couch."**

**"I am going with them."**



she/her/hers  
they/them/theirs  
he/him/his

some people use they/them pronouns!

**"They are going out today."**

**"That ring is theirs."**

## MULTIPLE PRONOUNS

Some people use multiple sets of pronouns, like she/they. Use both sets of pronouns when referring to them.

**"I like their outfit. She looks nice today."**

THEY  
THEM



## NEOPRONOUNS

Neopronouns are a new (neo) category of pronouns that are used in place of he, she, or they. Some examples are xe/xem/xyr and ze/hir/hirs.

**"ze laughed when I told hir a joke."**

**ASK PEOPLE WHAT PRONOUNS THEY USE! AND REMEMBER, PRONOUNS ARE NOT PREFERRED, BUT ESSENTIAL.**



**DIVERSITYED**  
SAFER SPACES CANADA



# SEXUAL ORIENTATION 101



## what is sexual orientation?

innate emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. sexual orientation is part of the human condition. typically, attraction helps determine orientation.



\*people do not need to have sexual/romantic experience in order to know who they are attracted to.

PRIDE IS  
EVERYDAY

2SLGBTQIA+

the "+" represents the countless other ways that people in the community identity. Each identity is valid and should be respected.

## coming out

coming out is the process of self-identifying and self-acceptance that entails the sharing of their identity with others. There are many different degrees of being out, and coming out is a lifelong process.



**Two-Spirit** is a term used within some Indigenous communities, encompassing cultural, spiritual, sexual and gender identity. The term reflects complex Indigenous understandings of gender roles, spirituality, and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

**Gay:** A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Used broadly in the community, and for men who are attracted to men.

**Bisexual:** A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity.

**Transgender:** A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Being trans does not imply a specific sexual orientation, it is a gender identity.

**Queer:** reclaimed by some members of the community, queer is a term used to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream.

**Questioning:** A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Intersex:** Intersex is the current term used to refer to people who are biologically between the medically expected definitions of male and female. It is not a sexual orientation.

**Asexual:** asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum.

## Policy and Procedures

Organizations need to create the foundation for inclusion within governing and operational policies and procedures. Do not shy away from specifically including language of homophobia, transphobia, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within organizational documents.

## Transitioning to Inclusive Policies

In many cases, policies do not need to be completely reconstructed. Adding key language in existing policies may be sufficient to creating change. Organizations may already state in their policy that they comply with the provincial or federal human rights code, however it has greater impact to specifically include the protected grounds listed in these codes. We strongly encourage adding terms such as “sex,” “gender identity,” “gender expression,” “family status,” “marital status,” and “sexual orientation” in policy and procedures.

Examples of 2SLGBTQAI+ Inclusive Policies	
Current Policy	Revised Policy
Discrimination and harassment are not tolerated in our organization. <b>OR</b> Discrimination according to the Ontario Human Rights Code is prohibited in our organization	As per described in the Ontario Human Rights Code, discrimination and harassment on the grounds of, but not limited to, citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour ancestry, disability, age, creed, <b>sex</b> , pregnancy, <b>gender identity</b> , <b>gender expression</b> , <b>family status</b> , <b>marital status</b> , <b>sexual orientation</b> , receipt of public assistance, record of offence is not tolerated in our organization.
All sensitive information of a client or colleague must be confidential and not shared without permission.	All sensitive information of a client or colleague must be kept confidential and not shared without explicit permission, including <b>someone’s gender identity</b> , <b>gender expression</b> , <b>sexual orientation</b> , <b>family status</b> , and all other protected grounds as per the Ontario Human Rights Code.
Procedures to deal with instances of discrimination on protected grounds as per the Ontario Human Rights Code will include:	Procedures to deal with instances of racism, sexism, ableism, <b>homophobia</b> , <b>transphobia</b> , or other forms of discrimination on the protected grounds as per the Ontario Human Rights Code.
This organization is dedicated to maintaining the confidentiality of our clients.	This organization is dedicated to maintain the confidentiality of our clients, staff, and other members. This includes not discussing or revealing another’s sexual orientation, <b>gender identity</b> or <b>family makeup</b> without the explicit consent of the individual.

## Policy and Procedures

### Immediate Change Opportunities

Changes in official policies may be a lengthy process. In the meantime, there are some tips to explore on how to create change either as the opportunity presents or with a quicker turnaround. Consider some agency wide staff memos could look like:

- It is understood that all policies and procedures addressing discrimination and/or harassment include, but are not limited to homophobia and transphobia
- It is understood that all entries referring to a person as either “he” or “he/she” shall be referred to in the gender-neutral pronoun “they”
- All confidential statements and policies include respecting our client, colleagues, or customer’s gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family status, and all other protected grounds as per the Ontario Human Rights Code

### Policy Review Checklist

Here are some policies to consider tweaking or including to provide a more inclusive service:

- ☐ Are there policies and procedures to deal with discrimination and harassment that specifically mention 2SLGBTQAI+ topics such as occurrences of homophobia & transphobia?
- ☐ Is there a policy to remove service barriers for various social groups, which specifically includes 2SLGBTQAI+ communities?
- ☐ Is there a policy to support a colleague or client who is transitioning either in the workplace or during service?
- ☐ Is there an equity or diversity statement/policy to govern workplace culture to be inclusive of various groups including 2SLGBTQAI+ communities?
- ☐ Does the confidentiality policy specifically include respecting people’s family structure, gender identities, and sexual orientations?
- ☐ Are programs promoted through an equity lens which showcases 2SLGBTQAI+ families and children are welcome?

### Best Practices

Policies should explicitly reflect homophobia and transphobia as intolerable behaviours in a workplace and promote a safe and inclusive environment for 2SLGBTQAI+ individuals and families. All staff should be made aware of these policies and should understand that adherence to such policies is a condition of employment.

- Resource: Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code ([www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-16/royal-assent](http://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-16/royal-assent))

Peer-Reviewed Article

# Relational Systems Thinking:

## That's How Change Is Going to Come, from Our Earth Mother

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### Abstract

We explore the notion of the need to decolonize systems thinking and awareness. Taking a specifically Indigenous approach to both knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, we look at awareness-based systems change via a Haudenosaunee (Mohawk) two-row visual code. The authors explore the sacred space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of thinking and knowing, to identify pathways for peaceful co-existence of epistemologies. Based on conversations with Haudenosaunee elders and Western systems thinkers, along with data from a DoTS webinar, we identify cross-cultural dialogues as a doorway to healing, to transformation and to spiritual understanding. A reconnection with Mother Earth and with each other is fundamental to disrupting global patterns of trauma and mass corrosion of the spirit.

### Keywords

## Indigenous Knowledges, decolonizing, mother earth, healing

**Kevin Deer:** I was at a conference in Montreal because it was dealing with soils, which is an extension of Mother Earth. I talked to them about my experiences of fasts and vision quests, and about the personal healing that I had to do. Before that, I believed that babies cry, weaklings cry, but real, as a real man, I don't cry. Anyway, through the *Midewiwin* Lodge teachings when they put you out, it's usually before the sun sets. So, in that lodge, I'm asking myself, if this lodge represents my life, so I have to go back to my earliest recollection, where there was pain and hurt. If there's hurt and pain then I have to go back and give this pain back to my first mother, which is Mother Earth. In the construction of my lodge, there is one sapling in the ribs of my lodge that represents my life's journey. I ask in Onkwehonneha "Mother how can you heal me?" Because my biological mother is still alive, and she can hug and console me but how do I strengthen my mind about these teachings because I was doubting it. So, I put my tobacco down and waited for some kind of answer or sign that would strengthen my mind that this is a powerful healing ceremony. Eventually, a strong woman's voice spoke in my mind and said, "You see this soil, it's an extension of my body, so lay down and cover yourself with it." I laid down on my back almost naked and covered my body with handfuls of this rich black soil. As I covered my body with this soil, in my mindset it was like these hands and arms came out from earth and began to hug me, from my first mother.

**Peter Senge:** We once had a meeting in South Central Colorado, 200 miles north of Taos, New Mexico. There's beautiful land there, used for thousands of years for spiritual retreat, anyhow we had a small group there. And there was one woman from China, 35 years old or so, a skillful facilitator, I've worked with her in China, but she grew up as a modern young Chinese person, which means she had like zero contact with the natural world. So, there was the opportunity for people to sleep on the land, they didn't have to, but there was that opportunity. We had organized it so they could get sleeping bags and tents. It was a pretty chilly time of year, early October, so it was cold enough that it was a little daunting. And this young Chinese woman had never slept outside in her life. But two people who had spent a lot time camping outside said they we're going to put their tents on both sides of her and she could sleep in the middle and said they would be right there if she needed anything. I can recount a few times where people were so disconnected from nature that they were literally terrified of being alone on the land. So anyhow I'll make a long story short, it was quite an adventure. They made sure she had a really warm sleeping bag. I saw her about three days later, and she had spent three nights with the two guys close by, sleeping on the land. I've known her for about 10 years and when I saw her at the end of this time, I'll never forget her comment, she said 'It was the first time in my life I've been happy, really happy.' She

‘Wow!!! Imagine that my mom is hugging me, healing me, and helping me to love and forgive all who have hurt me and for me to come to terms with all who I have hurt and all of that.’ I was feeling such elation that I said to myself, if I could choose the moment of my death, I would want it to happen right now at this particular time. This was a pretty profound experience. I imagined that if I had not done this ceremony, I would have died one day and lowered back into the womb of my mother the earth, dead, but here I am going into her womb alive, experiencing it and being able to talk about it. But then all of a sudden self-doubt enters my mind, and asks “did I just make it up?” I was immediately feeling disappointed and let down. So, I put my tobacco out again, I said ‘*Ista* [my mother] you gotta give me something more stronger than this [laughter], that is going to clarify and strengthen my mind without a doubt.’ I put tobacco down and within a short period of time she spoke again now saying in my mind, “Ok get up walk around this circle and count your footsteps.” I get up, brush off myself, try to think what could that mean. I begin to walk heel to toe and count my footsteps as I follow the cedar circle ring that encompasses my lodge. Where I get to the spot from where I started out from there is a number. The cedar circle, from the teachings I know represents everything in my life past, present and future [inside the cedar circle]. The magical number is 36. When I verbalize it as I’m counting, I immediately got down on all fours and I kissed my mom, because from that moment onward I said to myself, “I

said, ‘I’ve been happy when I did good on a test and I’ve got all these things I want in my life, but I realized that that happiness isn’t real happiness.’ And as we continued our meeting, she kept going back to sleep on the land each night. So, the rest of us were sleeping inside meanwhile, she slept on the land every night for seven nights. And I will never forget the other thing she said, ‘I’ve never felt held by the earth, I lay there in my bag at night and I know the earth was holding me.’ It was just such a beautiful reminder of how many people, really more than ever before, are growing up with this complete separation. So, Mother Earth, if you don’t know your mother, you are kind of lost. So, it’s not a small thing.

don't care what other people may conclude about this personal intimate experience that just happened when I tell this story, because they can't experience it, they're only hearing a story. But we established this connection, Mother Earth and one of her beloved sons of the Earth Mother. So why was that number so significant? 36 footprints and I was 36 years old. I was also opened up and began to finally allow myself to cry and feel the feeling that I had suppressed for so many years. I forgave myself, I forgave others, and let all the baggage and negativity in my life go. I was renewed from head to toe [transformed]. I tell this story now, at this conference on soils, after I did the opening. This was my experience... Change is going to happen from people going inward within themselves and along with going back to having communion with their first mother, Mother Earth. That's how change is going to come, from our Earth Mother. Because if this could happen to me it's going to happen en masse ... and many people who are spiritually grounded are going to know what's happening, but the ones who never connected to the earth will not know what's going on.

## Introduction

*Boozhoo nindinawemaaganidok* (greetings my relatives). *Anishinaabekwe indaaw* (I am an Anishinaabe woman). She/Her. *Mooz indoodem* (I am moose clan). *Biigtigong Nishnaabeg izhinikaade ishkoniigan wenjiiyaan* (is the name of the First Nation that I come from). *Waabishki Ogichidaakwenz-anang* and *Waaba-anang Ikwe Anishinaabemong idash* (is what I am known by the spirits in Ojibwe). Melanie Goodchild *indizhinikaaz zhaaganaashiiong* (what I am called in English). The seven of us, Melanie (Anishinaabe), Peter (American), Otto (German-American), Dan (Haudenosaunee), Diane (Haudenosaunee), Rick (Tuscarora), and Kevin (Haudenosaunee) have recently joined together in what



might loosely be called a Circle of Presence (Scharmer, 2009, 2016, p. 374) around the notion of the need to *decolonize* (Smith, 1999) systems thinking and systems awareness theory and practice. For stylistic purposes, I (Melanie) will serve as the narrator.

Recently, I had the honour of being in conversation with the Haudenosaunee Elders and Knowledge Keepers and also with Peter and Otto to talk about ‘awareness-based systems change.’ I spent time with Peter and Otto at the Executive Champions Workshop (ECW) in Stowe, Vermont in 2019, in addition to which we collaborated on a Dialogues on Transforming Society and Self (DoTS) webinar (episode 6)<sup>1</sup> and the Global Activation of Intention and Action<sup>2</sup> (GAIA) series of webinars by the Presencing Institute. I am also a Faculty member with Peter at the Academy for Systems Change<sup>3</sup>. In writing this article together we are attempting to reflect, and perhaps model, a more relational disposition to collaborative knowledge creation and sharing. It is ultimately a quest, an ongoing journey as Aikenhead & Michell (2011) describe, a quest for us to become wiser. Conventional systems-based approaches to tackling wicked problems have epistemological foundations in the Western scientific method that pursues ‘knowledge’ in an analytical way, whereas Indigenous ways of coming to know, as practiced by Elders, is the pursuit of ‘wisdom-in-action’ (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011, p. 69). ‘Fragmentation and isolation’ is a belief that understanding lies in studying isolated things and this mindset still dominates everyday affairs (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004, pp. 190-191).

Peter told me during one of our conversations in Cambridge, “I came to MIT originally as a graduate student studying something called system dynamics here at MIT.” He explained: “There are lots of different western-based types of tools for how to do systems thinking. System dynamics is especially good at helping yourself and others think more deeply about ‘underlying system structures.’ It’s really this *epistemology*, this way of making sense of the world that underlies a systems perspective in my mind.” Peter suggested: “You don’t even have to use the word ‘system’ ... so people don’t get hung up on what do you mean by ‘system’. There are a lot of different tools that you might say are diagnostic for moving from what’s on the surface, what’s visible, to what’s not visible, to the deeper sources of the forces that shape social realities.” Perhaps, too, the word ‘system’ in English conveys it as a noun, whereas in *Anishinaabemowin* (Ojibwe) a system would be a verb, dynamic and imbued with spirit. And that spirit is in relationship with other spirits.

This article is a process of co-inquiry in a *sacred space* between Indigenous (the Elders and I) and non-Indigenous (Peter and Otto) systems thinkers. We

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.presencing.org/news/news/detail/b2c6a7b3-4d97-4534-83f3-4914818c84d5>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpucs12iAZw>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.academyforchange.org>

consider cultural and spiritual perspectives about the role of consciousness in awareness-based systems change. Our intended audience includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and practitioners who seek a mature, balanced, and peaceful co-existence of distinct knowledge systems in their own scholarship and practice. Europeans and Native peoples historically held different worldviews and we found it difficult to relate to each other in understanding and compassionate ways. It is a schism that still exists in understanding between Indigenous peoples and Western society, says Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2007). The primary goal of this paper is to attend to a deeper level of consciousness that exists in a particular teaching place, a place *between epistemologies*. This space in-between has been referred to as the *ethical space* (Ermine, 2007). It is a place that affirms human diversity, where we “detach from the cages of our mental worlds and we assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur” (p. 202). It is a space/place that is respectful and generous of spirit, so that we can begin to release “that kind of energy” as Peter once said (C. Otto Scharmer, 2009, 2016, p. 51). The idea of ethical space is a useful construct because it is “predicated upon the creation of new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples” (Kapyrka & Dockstator, 2012, p. 109). This sacred space enables a mindset of *connection* rather than *separation*, that allows us to access our deepest capacities for unconditional love (Scharmer, 2020).

In December of 2019, I had tea with *Rotinonshon:ni* (Haudenosaunee—People of the Longhouse) Elders and Knowledge Keepers at the Gathering Place by The Grand, at Six Nations Grand River Territory. The Six Nations consist of the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, and Tuscarora, unified under the Great Tree of Peace. I was there to be *in conversation* (see Kovach, 2010) with the Elders and knowledge keepers through *asemma* (tobacco), a tobacco tie offering (see Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Tobacco offerings to the Elders recognizes that their knowledge is often revealed to them from the *spirit world* (Johnston, McGregor, & Restoule, 2018). As an Anishinaabekwe (Ojibway woman) living and working in traditional Haudenosaunee Confederacy territory, it is important that I am guided by their philosophies as much as my own. I invite you to also hear the teachings of the Haudenosaunee ‘intelligentsia’ (so-called in laughter) that day. Each respected Knowledge Keeper, my Auntie *Kahontakwas* Diane Longboat, Turtle Clan of Six Nations; her brother, my Uncle *Roronhiakewen* (He Clears the Sky), Dr. Dan Longboat, Turtle Clan of Six Nations; *Ka’nahsohon* (A Feather Dipped in Paint) Kevin Deer, Faithkeeper at the Mohawk Trail Longhouse, from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory; and Rick Hill, Beaver Clan of the Tuscarora Nation of the Haudenosaunee at Grand River, accepted the invitation from me to gather and talk about awareness-based systems change. On that mild day in December, beside the Grand River, I respectfully asked Kevin Deer to help begin the discussions in a good way, with the Words That Come Before All Else, the *Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén* (the Thanksgiving Address). And then the magic happened, the Intelligentsia started sharing stories.

## Indigenous-Settler/Colonizer Relationships: Independent and Interdependent

How do you incorporate multiple ways of knowing, in a respectful way, into the practice of awareness-based systems change? This is not an easy task.

Indigenous scholars have explored the nexus of Indigenous place-based wisdom and Western science and have called for an approach that privileges and honours Indigenous intellectual traditions emanating from spiritual wisdom. They have described this in a variety of ways, as *braiding* (Kimmerer, 2013), as *bridging* (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011), as a *circle of relationship* (Cajete, 2000), as *encompassing holism* (Kovach, 2009), as *grounded normativity* (Coulthard, 2014), as *resurgence* (Asch, Borrows, and Tully, 2018), as *regeneration* (Simpson, 2011), as *insurgent* (Gaudry, 2011), as *regenerative* (Tuck & Yang, 2019), and ultimately as an exercise in *humility* (Wildcat, 2009). Indigenous scholars have critiqued research more broadly, cautioning us against embedding Euro-centric values, the objective-versus-subjective and nature-versus-human dichotomies of Western thought (Deloria Jr., & Wildcat, 2001, p. 15) into our research praxis (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Brown & Strega, 2005; McGregor, Restoule, & Johnston, 2018). Western scholarship for the most part, offers us preconceived theoretical perspectives representing “a Western understanding of how the world works” (Browner, 2004, p. 9). A journey to the nexus of Indigenous wisdom and Western thought begins with an important realization, that both are *equal but differentiated*. In this article, we would like to explore a further conceptualization of the nexus, inspired by the spirit and teachings of the Haudenosaunee *two-row wampum belt*.

“*Kaswenta* is a word that applies to all wampum belts, not just the two-row,” says Rick Hill. Wampum belts are a part of the Mohawk culture as well as other Nations, including the Anishinaabeg. One of the most famous uses of Haudenosaunee two-column thinking is the Two-Row Wampum belt, properly called the *Tekani teyothata'tye kaswenta* (two-row wampum belt). Rick published, along with Daniel Coleman, the most complete oral history that exists today of the ancient treaty known as the Two-Row Wampum and also the *Tehontatententsoterotahkhwa* “the thing by which they link arms” Covenant Chain wampum belt (Hill & Coleman, 2019). The Covenant Chain embodies these wampum belts; it is the complex system of alliances between the Haudenosaunee and the Anglo-American colonies originating in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Following the chain metaphor, the more formal agreements required a change from an iron chain, which tended to rust, to a silver one. The silver chain will not rust, but it will tarnish, and we need to polish it from time to time<sup>4</sup>. “Repolishing is a process,” says my Uncle Dan Longboat, “it *brightens our minds* and it renews our mutual understanding of peace, friendship and respect.” This

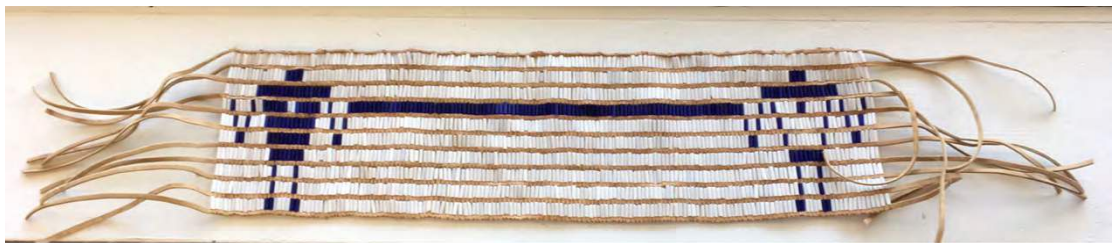
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<sup>4</sup> See <https://youtu.be/G7aZZrgRnQo>

article explicitly privileges Indigenous ways of knowing through telling stories in a two-row visual code. It is intended to brighten our minds.



*Figure 1. Two-Row Wampum Belt*



*Figure 2. Silver Chain Covenant Wampum Belt*

Source: <https://trentmagazine.ca/services-view/law-land-teyotsihstokwathe-dakota-brant-06-examines-canada-150-plus-video-walrus-talk/>

The 1613 Two-Row Wampum treaty was formed between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Dutch merchants arriving near Albany, NY. The Treaty belt is made of two rows of purple wampum beads, symbolizing the Mohawk canoe and the Dutch sailing ship, “and these two rows have the spirit of the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch” (Ransom, 1999, p. 27). The oral history of the Two-Row agreement was recited in public multiple times by Grand River Cayuga chief and Faithkeeper Jacob Thomas before his death in 1998. The two purple rows, which themselves are made of two columns of beads, signal internal pluralism even as they remain parallel and never intersect. “The three white rows, which are each three beads wide, symbolize the ne’skennen (peace), karihwí:iyo (good word or way), and ka’satsténshsera (unified, empowered minds) - Chief Thomas translated these as peace, respect and friendship—that will allow the two vessels to share the ever-flowing River of Life” (Coleman, 2019, p. 65). So, today, we are all traveling down the river of life together, but with each people in their own vessel with their own beliefs, languages, customs, and governments. “Native and non-Native peoples are to help each other from time to time, as people are meant to do, and their respective knowledge systems, or sciences, are tools to be used in this partnership” (Ransom & Ettenger, 2001, p. 222). We are to take care of this river as all of our survival depends on a healthy river (Ransom, 1999, p. 28).

The two-row wampum treaty explicitly outlined a *dialogical* Indigenous-European framework for how healthy relationships between peoples from different ‘laws and beliefs’ can be established. Dialogue, says Otto, is not about two parties talking to each other. Dialogue literally means ‘meaning flowing through.’ Hill and Coleman (2019) argue that the treaty conveyed the concept of reciprocity between autonomous powers and serves as a guide for cross-cultural, cross-epistemological research (p. 340). “The purpose of the Treaty is to recognize that each People is to travel down this river, together, side-by-side, but each in their own vessel. Neither is to try to steer the other’s vessel” (Ransom, 1999, p. 27). Conscious of these differences in their ways of knowing and living, “the two parties could better understand how to share the river of life in equality and friendship” (Coleman, 2019, p. 65). The Dutch transcription of this Treaty was on parchment paper, while the Haudenosaunee leaders chose to record the Treaty with a Two-Row Wampum belt, made from small tubular shell beads woven into symbolic designs. The different recordings of the agreement demonstrate the ‘two paths’ of their different knowledge systems (Hill & Coleman, 2019, p. 347). The Mohawks and Dutch were “very aware of translating between cultural codes and knowledge systems, a process that requires both differentiation and equivalence” and that “healthy relationships recognize rather than suppress differences and that the impulse to overwhelm and absorb the other into a hierarchical relationship can chafe and destroy peaceful relations” (Coleman, 2019, p. 67). Rick told me that the safe space between the two peoples is created when both parties commit to truth and respect, which then grows into trust (personal communication, 2020).

## Dialogical Framework: Two-Row Methodology

Written texts add “additional complexity” in transmitting Indigenous ways of knowing, “given that most Indigenous cultures are oral” thus we submit to you, dear reader, that some of the teachings offered herein may lose “a level of meaning in the translation into written script” (Kovach in Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 27). Indeed, it is difficult to translate “spiritual languages, and the broad concepts they represent, from one language to another” (St. Pierre & Long Soldier, 1995) but the times we find ourselves in call for us to try. We are willing to attempt the “troublesome task of criss-crossing cultural epistemologies” that occurs when we share Indigenous knowledge and wisdom in a non-Indigenous language (Kovach in Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 27). The history of ‘epistemic violence’ and ‘epistemic ignorance’ (Kuokkanen, 2008) within the academic world has often meant that “Western knowledge and worldviews retain a highly disproportionate amount of influence such that any effort to put them into conversation with Indigenous knowledge must be acutely aware of this historical and ongoing imbalance” (Ahenakew, 2017, p. 86). There is also our reliance on our collective modern culture to ‘transmit’ understanding, says Peter, as opposed to, for example, contemplation and listening to nature. To guard against this

imbalance, we are anchoring our discussion firmly within the two-row teachings of the Haudenosaunee peoples, as Uncle Dan shared with me:

One of the things that's really central, I think, in engaging with different perspectives and different knowledge systems, in how they interact, is this idea of *sacred space*; it is really about ethical space. Within our context of it as Haudenosaunee, whenever individuals or two things come together to make an agreement, whenever they collaborate, whenever they do that it is two individuals coming together, then the space in between them is the sacred space; you can kind of think about it in terms of how they are respectful towards one another, how they are caring and compassionate towards each other, how they are empathetic with one another. Now looking at prophecy, we talk about this idea of the two-row wampum belt, the Europeans and Indigenous peoples, or now any people that come to North America, and our relationship together exists in the space in between. It is the sacred space, those principles of peace, friendship, and respect, that becomes the sacred way that we work towards one another, but the idea behind it is that we are both sailing down the river of life together. And our responsibility is to help one another but more specifically, the river of life is in danger right now and there will be no more river of life. So, it behooves us now to utilize our knowledge together to work to sustain, to perpetuate, to strengthen the river of life. Why? So that all life will continue. And at the end of the day any social innovation or systems stuff should be all about the continuation of life and however we understand it to be—not just human life but all of it, for this generation right to the end of time.



Figure 3. Photo of Roronhiakewen (He Clears the Sky) Dr. Dan Longboat

The concept and spirit of the two-row wampum has been suggested as a framework or model for simultaneous intellectual *co-existence* by Anishinaabe environmental scholar Deborah McGregor (see McGregor, 2011; McGregor, 2009; McGregor, 2008), as the fundamental form of *reconciliation* between Indigenous peoples and settler peoples, that recognizes independence and interdependence, in Indigenous-settler relationships (see Asch, Borrows, & Tully, 2018), and as a model or conceptual framework for *non-interference* in cross-cultural research by non-Native scholars (see Evering, 2016; Sweeny, 2014; Latulippe, 2015). In our presentation of these stories and teachings we take inspiration from Mohawk poet Peter Blue Cloud's two-column poems, and Daniel Coleman's (2019) analysis of his work.



Excerpt from Peter Blue Cloud's (1933-2011) poem *First Light* (cited in Coleman, 2019, p. 54):

First light, a dark outline	evening
Of a mountain peak and	too
Pines their morning scent	will
Carried on first breezes,	call,
stars naked brilliance	to
pulsing to coyote cries	sleep
And keening chorus,	again,
a cricket's tentative chirping,	the
long pauses,	mind
the fall of an oak leaf	is
a bird's sudden question,	dreaming,

Peter Blue Cloud's poetry is a collection of two-column poems. The left-hand column presents Creation as alive. By contrast the right-hand columns descend in one-word lines that trace, in very spare language, an essential thought or growing realization that runs like a thread beside the lush imagery of the left-hand column (p. 56). How are we supposed to read poems laid out like this? One column at a time? Should we read across from left column to right, asks Coleman. The point is that you cannot read Peter Blue Cloud's two-column poems without being confronted with your own habits of thought, your own assumptions about how to make meaning. These habits are "challenged and made conscious by your simultaneous encounter with more than one way of doing things" (p. 56). And that is our point of departure.

## Equal But Differentiated

Following the dialogical model laid out in the Two-Row Wampum-Covenant Chain agreement and taking inspiration from Blue Cloud's two-column poems, this article is written, with a presentation of two-column stories. Blue Cloud's poems "remind us that contemporary engagements with Two Row tradition operate, as did the original agreement, within a dialogic domain, not some realm of singular cultural purity" (p. 69). That said, argued Coleman, there is value in keeping one's inheritances distinct. We do not intend here to divide Western and Indigenous worldviews neatly between the two columns, even if we appear to do so. Instead, the two ways of seeing and sensing systems are presented in both the left and the right columns and in the space in between. While most of us trained in the Western traditions of the Academic world have been taught to rely on our "chronically overdeveloped reason" (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 373) we

instead invite you to sit in circle with us, to practice *generative listening* (see Scharmer, 2009, 2016, p. 12). Our intention is that you are no longer the same person you were before you heard these voices. The topic of discussion was simple yet profound: How do we sense and then shift systems? As you continue reading, here are some practice guidelines for reading two-column thinking. You may find yourself reading one column at a time, perhaps that is how we are conditioned to read it. Instead, you are invited to read the text initially in whatever is your most natural way, suggests Peter. Then, go back and read by going back and forth between the columns every few lines. Try to hear each person's voice as you do this; and then imagine they are talking with one another. See what emotions and feelings are stirred in you as you do this.

We began this article and now continue in the two-row visual code:

**Dan Longboat:** Systems change for me really is about opening those pieces up, those things are all there, and connecting to that knowledge because that's knowledge that has carried our ancestors. Again, the origin of that knowledge as we come to understand it is, unlike the West, none of the knowledge has come out of the minds of men or women. Particularly in the West, too, it's come out of the minds of men, what about women's minds? If that's how you want to live, okay, sure. But what about women's concepts within Western knowledge, it was totally ignored. So, because of that it's built on a form of paternalism, paternalistic ideas, and at the same time it's based on ideas of power and control. Things have now gotten out of control. We are now going to see fundamental change in the world and we're going to regress ourselves and to pull ourselves back in to restore that sacred feminine, predicated on kindness and compassion, caring, love, that's the real impetus of change. If systems theory and practice can conscience us to that way

**Peter Senge:** We're not going to change the world, I hate language like that, or teach people to be systems thinkers, but we might find some ways for people to rediscover their innate capacities and love; it's not an intellectual capacity only, it's deeply rooted in an emotional experience. Interconnectedness is a big clunky word, but we also call it beauty. In that moment when you experience something beautiful what happened to the 'you?' You are not even around anymore. Whatever you see is still there, but something happens to transcend that object or phenomenon and you, and beauty just exists. So that's the interconnectedness, that's when that sense of us as separate, our embodiment which is how we navigate the world, somehow is held in abeyance. And something else emerges. So that's not something that has to be taught, but there's a lot of shit that needs to be unlearned. And I do think, this is obviously where the cross-cultural dialogues are so important. Maybe some of the cultures that are around today are a little more wise on this, and maybe one of our

of understanding the world, then we'll see some really fundamental change but unless it does that, it will be same old same old. Because the authority for our knowledge as Indigenous peoples has come from a place of spirit not out of the minds of men and women. Because it has come out of a place of spirit it is perfect, perfect, and it served our ancestors well for thousands of generations. And it will continue to serve us and we have a choice of whether we want to recognize that, authenticate that, activate that and put that process back into place, to help us see the entire system and what's our place in that. It's all about peace, it's about love, it's about compassion, it's about all of those things that come out of the *Ga'nigoi:yah* (the Good Mind), that's what the Good Mind is. So, it's bringing back the Good Mind.

problems with the dominant Euro-centric Western culture, modern global culture, is we've lost a lot of this wisdom.

**Otto Scharmer:** How do we sense systems? With our senses. With all our senses. Sensing is a funny process. Most people think they know how to do it. But I claim they don't. People, particularly people who have gone through traditional Western training and education, tend to miss any real education of the senses: how to deeply listen, how to really pay attention, how to actually sense the *resonance* of a social field. The late cognitive scientist Francisco Varela once suggested that 'we need to become blackbelts of observation,' i.e., we need to upgrade our skills to sense and to see. That idea is so much needed today.

What happens when we sense a social system? We sense its interiority. That's what I call a *social field*. A social field is a social system seen not only from outside (3rd person view), but also from within (adding the 1st and 2nd person views to scientific activity).

Sensing a social field means to sense social resonance. Resonance is an interesting term. Resonance is neither entirely subjective, nor is it entirely objective. It lives in the space between. Like the sacred space that you, Melanie, talked about earlier, the sacred space between epistemologies. Moving into this deep sensing is very much an aesthetic phenomenon, as Peter suggested. The word aesthetic was coined in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany and comes from the Greek word 'aisthētikos', literally meaning the perception by the senses. Decolonizing

**Rick Hill:** Knowledge is innately tied to the land, it's right there, it's waiting for us to pay attention to it, to guide us, through dreams, through visions, through practice, and maybe that's our greatest strength, is getting people reconnected to the source of knowledge. Removing their blinders, unclouding their ears, giving themselves to it so there will no longer be an impediment to our viability as a Nation. What does it take to empower the next generation of thinkers? The last seven years we've been doing a recitation of the Great Law in all of our communities and we're getting better at that, but what we haven't done is a regular recitation of our Creation story. That is the roadmap to this interconnected web, this is the ultimate system that we exist by, and I think in the end if you compare Nishnaabek creation and Haudenosaunee creation in this region there is a commonality about why the world was created and why humans were created to inhabit the land. That's the knowledge we need to uncover. When you can re-visualize creation as a whole entity, a functioning entity beyond the sky world to below the turtle, when you revision it in three dimensions and Dolby stereo you will then innately understand your relationship and your place in that universe. And you won't need a textbook or somebody to explain to you what you need to be doing, you will embrace it. That's what I meant by having faith in the

systems thinking starts with decolonizing and rehabilitating our senses. Because there is a knowing in our senses that we need to uncover and cultivate.

**Peter Senge:** So, this kind of awareness, now illustrating in the social domain of interconnectedness and interdependence, is innate. This is who we are. I really believe that deeply, the problem is like anything, if it's not cultivated it will atrophy; particularly in contemporary cultures it's not being cultivated because, as we found ourselves moving from hunters and gatherers, our oldest organized forms, to agriculture or to urban life, basically we stepped further and further away from the natural world and in doing so we stepped further and further away from the natural teacher of an interconnected, dynamic, systems perspective.

unseen. It's worked for 10,000 years. It's begging us now to re-engage with it.

**Dan Longboat:** When we talk about systems, solving problems, the realization that many of the problems that we've heard about today and are examining, you know the larger context of modern society at large, that whole process around the West's disconnect from the environment, has resulted in so many of the problems that we see today, everything from extinctions, loss of biodiversity, global contaminants and toxins, etc., etc., all under the umbrella global climate change. So, the systems piece needs to engage with, and work towards, and recognize, and work to resolve or reconnect to the environment somehow. It is a reiteration of this need to reconnect with the environment. In terms of systems, instead of looking at one-off pieces, it's looking at the whole thing, looking at the whole system the way our ancestors did, the seen and the unseen, the past, present and future, the spirit, the earth and all of a sudden, that's a whole system, that's what we need to bring back.

**Diane Longboat:** We also had a message in our lodge about that, that by proxy, because these people [Westerners] were not created to be here. By proxy we are the ones with our fires, and they need to come to us

**Peter Senge:** What we tend to do in Western cultures is abstract. This cultural habit of abstracting as opposed to, if this was a word, "concreting," getting your feet on the ground, feeling it and smelling it. At Executive Champions Workshop the thing that most bemuses me about it after all these years, people ask me how it works, and I can honestly say I have no clue really. I just say, well we hang out in the field. And we let the field go to work on us. Because that's my experience. Of course there's teachings and that's good, and they need to be to the best of your ability harmonious, with a deeper process. And it is that deeper process that somehow goes to work on people. I've watched it so many times and it's like watching a beautiful flower unfold. People by the third day are just starting to relax and they are really noticing what it feels like. I've watched some people, a good friend who is a senior person with the Nature Conservancy, his whole life is about this. It's not like this was a new discovery to him, but by the end of the three days, he was in like a transcendent state, he was so clear, so quiet, so thoughtful. It was clear he was reconnecting with what he knew was his purpose in this lifetime and it was beautiful.

**Peter Senge:** One of the fundamental issues you will wrestle with, Melanie, are those paradigmatic distinctions between Native cultures and let's call it modern or Western cultures, is that you're understanding lives in stories,

with that honour and respect and humility, to be able to heal and to connect to their ancestors. And they always need to be told that you come from a place that is your homeland. To tell them consistently, the white people that come to our ceremonies, we are happy to share our sacred fire with you because at this fire is the essence of life, of who the Creator is. If you make your offerings, you make your prayers, have your fast, your vision quest, or whatever, we'll help you with that, but you've gotta do your work to find out who is the Creator and what does the Creator want you to do in your life, how do you activate that spiritual mandate that is in your life. We'll help you with it but in that journey of your healing, you need to go back to your homelands, walk in the places of your ancestors, and that will change you forever. Because that is where you belong and we are sharing this land with you, and we also have a duty to share with you how to respect and honour these homelands, and you need to live with those natural laws and those spiritual laws that govern Turtle Island [North America]. You come here and we're not interested in your passport, we're interested in if you will adhere to these natural laws and spiritual laws.

at least your expression of your understanding, lives in stories. These stories are of course archetypal, they are dynamic, there is always an unfolding going on, whereas Western culture which has largely displaced other cultures over the past several hundred years, particularly the last 75, privileges abstractions; succinct, clear, de-contextualized characterizations. "Tell me what you know; don't tell me a story." We go from lived experience, something you can touch and feel and tell stories about, to an abstracted description and we consider that a higher form of knowledge. We consider that more refined, which is kind of bizarre in a way. They both have a function, and my bet is if we really explored this abstracting phenomenon, we would find similar phenomena in the ways of understanding of Native peoples, but it would be different because it would be so grounded in the lived experience.

I think the danger of the Western approach is that all you get is abstraction, you end up with almost no lived experience. Somebody is considered an expert because they can talk a lot about something, or they've written books about it. In the social science or the domain of human living, the consequence of this disconnected abstracting is that we struggle and struggle, with how to 'implement' ideas, how to do it, because we start off thinking that's a lesser kind of knowledge. This creates a false dichotomy between knowledge of the head and knowledge of the hand. You didn't learn how to 'implement walking' when you were two years old. You learned to walk through an

ongoing process of doing and discovering.

This dichotomy between knowledge of the head and knowledge of the hand has deep cultural roots in the West. Michaelangelo could not have a meal with his patrons, because he worked with his hands. Because his knowledge was of his hands, it was a lesser sort of knowledge and that defined his class status. So, these are deep issues in Western culture.

**Otto Scharmer:** I like Peter's distinction between abstracting and concreting. The problem with traditional approaches to Western science is the misconception that only the former is considered scientific. But that is actually not true. The distinction also reminds me of the work of the British philosopher of science Henri Bortoft, who in his book the *Wholeness of Nature* differentiates between two types of wholeness: the *authentic whole* and the *counterfeit whole*. The counterfeit whole is based on abstraction and more traditional rationalistic approaches to science. The authentic whole is the living whole. To encounter the authentic whole, we need a new methodology that he traces back to the phenomenological work of the German poet Goethe. To apprehend the counterfeit whole, we need *to step back* and abstract from the individual parts. But to apprehend the authentic whole, we have to step in to sense the particulars, because the authentic whole is not separate from the parts, it is, as Bortoft puts it, *presencing itself through the parts*.

What results from this second methodology is a view in which



humans consciously participate in nature by presencing the authentic whole moment to moment. That might be an agenda for 21st century science: to decolonize the knowing of the senses, and to develop and cultivate a scientific methodology that allows us to sense and presence what Bortoft calls the living authentic whole. Such a method needed to blend systems thinking with systems sensing and advanced phenomenological practices that integrate 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person knowledge. Maybe our conversation here is part of such a path.

## Discussion: Bringing the Soul to Systems Work

A few years ago, Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2004) said the time for this type of cross-epistemic dialogue is now because “We may not have the luxury of waiting two or three centuries for a science of connectedness to create a wiser society” (p. 189) and, further, as complexity increases “the need for wisdom grows, even as that wisdom atrophies” (p. 209). Each of us has access to distinct *gakiikwe’inana* (‘teachings’ in Ojibway language) and in the Haudenosaunee two-row thinking we value these teachings as different yet equal. So how do we bring these teachings together in a good way? Mi’kmaq Elders, Albert and his late wife Murdena Marshall, offered us all a way to make sense of this cross-epistemic dialogue. *Etuaptmumk* is the Mi’kmaq word for *two-eyed seeing* (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012; Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2009; Sasakamoose, Bellegarde, Sutherland, Pete, & McKay-McNabb, 2017). The two-eyed seeing approach brings together Indigenous knowledge systems and mainstream knowledge systems “side-by-side” as in *Toqwa’tu’kl Kjiijitaqnn*, meaning “bringing our knowledges together” (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 333). Two-eyed seeing seeks to avoid knowledge domination and assimilation by recognizing the best from both worlds (Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2009). Two-eyed seeing allows one to make conscious decisions “to activate whichever lens is more appropriate to use or a harmonization of both” (Sasakamoose, Bellegarde, Sutherland, Pete, & McKay-McNabb, 2017, p. 9).

This journey into ethical space begins with us collectively recognizing that “spirit” actually exists (Stonechild, 2016, p. 51). Capra (2007, cited in Capra & Luisi, 2014) argued that modern scientific thought did not emerge with Galileo, but rather with Leonardo da Vinci a hundred years before Galileo, when he single-handedly developed a new empirical approach, by involving the systematic observation of nature, reasoning, and mathematics, the main characteristics of

the “scientific method” (p. 7). His approach to scientific knowledge, however, was visual, the approach of a painter. Capra argued, Leonardo “did not pursue science and engineering to dominate nature,” but rather he pursued it to try to “learn from her as much as possible” (p. 7). Centuries later humanity in the West is discovering once again how much she has to teach. “The separation of knowing and doing,” that Peter spoke of, and the separation of knowing and sensing that Otto spoke of, that is “so widely accepted today can be addressed if we recognize that knowledge resides in our living in this world, not in controlling it” (Wildcat, 2009, p. 16). Indigenous peoples worldwide have science—they have Native Science (see Cajete, 2000, pp. 273-276) which is a process of thinking and relating that refuses to “decontextualize” (p. 307). This approach to sensing and shifting systems can help “form the basis for evolving the kind of cosmological reorientation that is so desperately needed” (p. 303). A fundamental difference between Native and Western science, says Peter, is that Western science prides itself in the ‘scientist discovering’ how reality is working versus deeper listening. Yet the nature of scientific discovery, as opposed to theory testing, has always been something of a mystery in the philosophy of science. As Otto says, Goethe was one Westerner who developed a whole way of deep observations and unpacking how scientific discovery could unfold—which has been a strong influence on our current emphasis on deeper listening. So, what Rick says and what Otto says connect directly.

“Listening to you this morning, Melanie, I’ve been Sundancing for 20 years, and have been to many Anishinaabe ceremonies, warrior dances, and ancestor dances. What you represent here to me is the soul, bringing the soul to systems work,” said Auntie Diane. She continued, “What do the unborn generations need to be able to carry on? I think the first and foremost piece of systems thinking is how to create a collective mind again, to develop consciousness. That to me is the key piece.” She concluded, “You can build whatever you want to build, you can build a new economy, you can build a new education system, we all have that capacity, I’m not worried about that. I’m worried about the minds of people to be able to do that.” A holistic and ecological view of life has been called “the systems view of life” (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 70). What is significant in this definition is a recognition that the systems view of life is an ecological view “that is grounded, ultimately, in spiritual awareness” (p. 70). “That’s how change is going to come, from our Earth Mother,” said Kevin Deer in the opening story. And he said: “many people who are spiritually grounded are going to know what’s happening, but the ones who never connected to the earth will not know what’s going on.”

Awareness-based systems change is a process of co-inquiry into the deeper structures of the social systems in order to see, sense, presence, and shift them. Bringing back *Ga’nigoi:yah* (the Good Mind) is a core concept of that co-inquiry, the Elders told me. The Elders and Peter each spoke about our collective disconnection from Mother Earth and how we must reconnect to her to truly understand the ‘systemic nature’ (Capra & Luisi, 2014) of life on this planet. Kevin said: “...when people are here on Turtle Island, suffice it to say they must acknowledge the ancestors, you are on this land, understand that you are guests,

that we are the hosts, come from a place of humility and with the utmost respect.” He added: “from you acknowledging those ancestors and all of that spirit, to guide your thought processes, you try to come to understand everything is about healing.” “Spirit is the life force of this work,” explained Auntie Diane. She continued, “bringing back the Good Mind again. The Good Mind cannot be without the spirit being activated, that is the first piece of the healing that they [Westerners] are seeking, it’s activating spiritual remembrance in their bones and DNA.”

Melanie, Peter, and Otto first explored spiritual awareness and healing together in October of 2019 during the recording of the DoTS webinar, episode 6 (see Figure 4). The topic was *Indigenous Wisdom and the Civilizational Shift from Ego to Eco*. Kelvy Bird was scribing. The webinar began with an exchange of gifts. I offered Otto asemma (tobacco) and Otto gifted me with a precious amethyst. Peter joined halfway through for the discussion and reflections. It is significant to note that the live webinar sold out immediately at full capacity, with 500 people joining from 56 countries on seven continents. What was the appeal of this topic to a global audience? Perhaps it had something to do with what Peter shared when he walked into the meeting room at MIT, from which the webinar was being broadcast. During the webinar, I placed sacred items from a medicine *bundle* (see Bell, 2018, in McGregor, Restoule, & Johnston) on the table. Sacred bundles include items “that the spirits have given to a person to carry for the people” (Marsh et al., 2015, p. 7). These were spiritual helpers gifted to me to support my systems change work, a *mikinaak zhiishiigwan* (turtle rattle) and a *migizi miigwan* (eagle feather). These were placed on top of a *waabooyaan* (blanket) that featured the four sacred colors (Yellow, Red, Black, and White) of the four cardinal directions, East, South, West and North. When Peter entered the room, he experienced a visceral response to seeing the medicine bundle on the blanket, the hustle and bustle of MIT campus life faded away, and he said he felt like he “entered into a sacred lodge.”



Figure 4: Photo DoTS webinar, episode 6, with Otto, Melanie, Peter and Kelvy

The generative scribing by Kelvy was captured in real time on a whiteboard (see Figure 5). During the webinar, I told a story about how I came to understand the Anishinaabe concept of *resilience* during my doctoral studies in Social and Ecological Sustainability. I was writing my comprehensive exam paper and reading about the Western concept of ecological resilience first articulated by C.S. (Buzz) Holling (1973), who published a classic paper in the *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* on the relationship between resilience and stability. He said resilience is “a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” (p. 14). I reached out to two Anishinaabe language speakers and knowledge keepers and asked them, how would we define resilience in our worldview? My cousin Rene Meshake said: “It is *sibiksaagad*, sibi (river), biskaa (flexible), gad (it is). You might say that resilience is described as a river flowing flexibly through the land. *Anishinaabemowin* [our original language] is embedded in the land” (personal communication, 2018). My sister Eleanor Skead said: “*Mamasinijige* is the act of twists and turns and moves. *Mamasinijiwan* is the water flow, in twisting and turning. There always has to be context with Ojibwe words, “You need to introduce how the word is being used” (personal communication, 2018). Then Eleanor asked me if I was near a river. I was in fact writing my paper while staying outside of Waterloo, along the shores of the Nith River. Eleanor said, “she [the river] is teaching you.” So, I made offerings to her, the Nith River, for teaching me about resilience. Kelvy captured this story in the DoTS scribing.

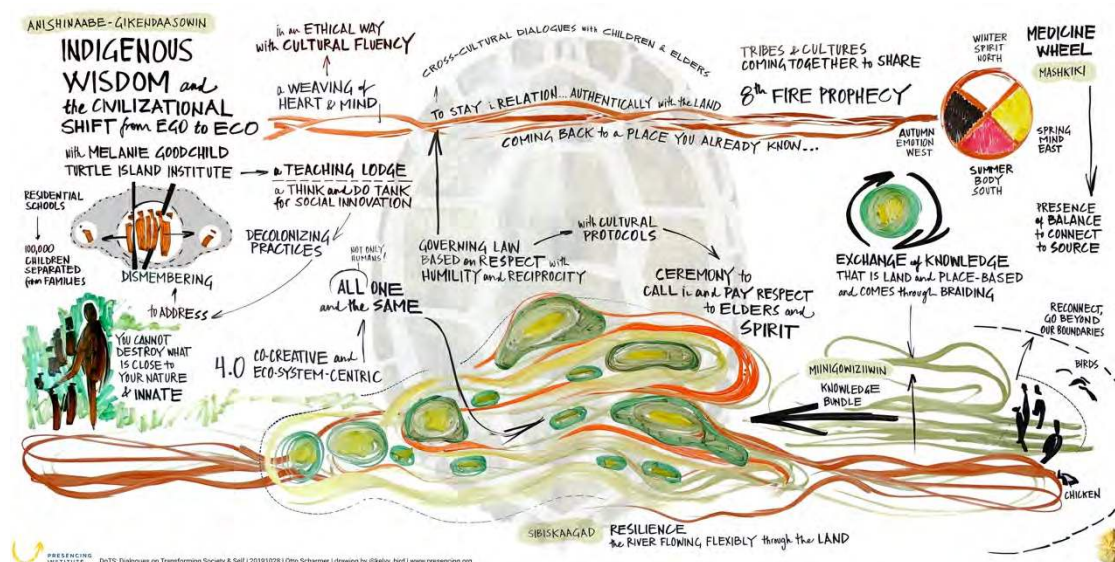


Figure 5. Generative Scribing by Kelvy Bird, of DoTS webinar, episode 6

Participants watching the live broadcast felt something similar to Peter, a presencing to the universe, across their computer screens. This was just before the global COVID-19 pandemic introduced us all to the regular use of webinars

as convening. The session evoked a lively chat in the Chat Box, that included some of the following shares:

- Being taught by a river, moves me to tears.
- How important is it for westerners to acknowledge the genocide to be able to bridge or unify these consciousnesses? It seems that we are asking the very people who we killed to save us from ourselves.
- This is such an important dialogue and is itself enacting the vital and necessary healing and transformations. Melanie and Otto, I am grateful for this enactment and creation.
- Is there a danger of coopting these concepts without full context?
- One of the important things I learned this year (actually from an indigenous elder in Nova Scotia) is that in the West we had a rich indigenous land-based tradition and we faced the first round of genocide coming from the church—this is what the witch burnings were—it was erasing our land-based intuitive, matriarchal culture and systems of power.
- It is a privilege having an opportunity to see the world from a perspective inaccessible to me so far.
- My principle for this is ‘change moves at the speed of relationship’. In my Ontario community, I have been part of an indigenous allies working group process that spent several years building relationships and then invited elders to give community talks. In the first talk, the elder Doug Williams [from Curve Lake First Nation], offered a beautiful and simple way to start. ‘We need to begin by listening to each other’s stories’.
- The chat is as rich as the discussion, love this sharing.
- I am so grateful to be part of this discussion today.
- Wonderful to talk about ‘healing’ in a grounded, and practical way.

During the DoTS resonance exercise, where the participants were invited to allow themselves to truly *see* Kelvy’s drawing, viewers shared *feelings* such as “I feel connected to the land,” “I feel warm in my heart,” “I feel a great need to change how I live,” and “I feel the entanglement.” They shared *sensing* such as “I sense it is about deep remembering,” “I sense familiarity/resonance,” “I sense a possibility that was always there, that we are finally ready to access,” and “I sense braiding of cultures, traditions, wisdom and story.” And they shared *seeing* such as “I see hope for our future,” “I see the river,” “I see confluence,” and “I see how much I still have to learn.” One viewer shared: “The most important

takeaway for me is the knowledge and the insight to change priorities in terms of which laws should govern our lives. I personally resonated strongly with the concept of prioritizing nature's laws on top of human laws. Maybe to find some humbleness here too." Peter shared something during the DoTS webinar that resonated with many viewers—that no matter how far we have been carried away from our connection to Mother Earth, something that is so innate, so true to our nature, cannot fully be destroyed. So, it is 'instinctual' to human beings—connecting to the land. "It's coming back to a place you know." Viewers also shared profound emotions such as "I feel the vastness of what needs to change," "I feel stressed by looking at the way we treat our planet earth and the path we still have to go to reach the wisdom of Melanie," "I feel the longing for connection," and "I sense grief and shame." Awareness-based systems change evokes feelings and emotions and it is to that topic we now turn—healing.

## Conclusion: Coming to Know

Late Anishinaabe author Richard Wagamese said that if we leave our strong or painful feelings unattended, then "...those feelings can corrode your spirit" (2011, p. 186). Recall what Kevin shared, "Change is going to happen from people going inward within themselves and along with going back to having communion with their first mother, Mother Earth." Uncle Dan told me, "So what we've been talking about today in its essence is the *revitalization of human spiritual integrity*. This revitalization is really about rebuilding human beings from the inside out." He continued, "It's connecting that human being to themselves, to each other, to a sense of place, to a physical and spiritual world, and there's a system that is involved, a process, to be able to build that." Earlier, he also said that we must "restore that sacred feminine, predicated on kindness and compassion, caring, love—that's the real impetus of change. If systems theory and practice can conscience us to that way of understanding the world, then we'll see some really fundamental change but unless it does that, it will be the same old, same old."

Deep healing, says Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2010) from the Santa Clara Pueblo, occurs when the self "mutualizes" with body, mind, and spirit (p. 1130). In healing, we attain deep understanding, enlightenment, and wisdom; a high level of spiritual understanding. This is what he calls the seventh life stage of Indigenous education. There is a knowing "Center" in all human beings that reflects the knowing Center of the Earth and other living things. And Elders have always known that "coming into contact with one's inner Center is not always a pleasant or easily attainable experience" (Cajete, p. 1130). This led Indigenous peoples to develop "a variety of ceremonies, rituals, songs, dances, works of art, stories and traditions to assist individual access and utilize the potential healing and whole-making power in each person" (p. 1130). A transformational element of *coming to know* is "learning through self-reflection and sharing of experience in community" (p. 1131). This allows us, concludes Cajete, to understand our learning in the context of the great whole. Cross-

culture dialogues help us to see that there are as many ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and understanding as there are members in a group. We come to understand that “we can learn from another’s perspective and experience,” and we also “become aware of our own and other’s bias and lack of understanding through the process of the group” (p. 1131). We become aware of our mental models, as Peter has described it, and of our blind spots, as Otto has described it.

In writing about prevailing mental models, Peter once said the more profound the change in strategy, the deeper must be the change in thinking (Senge and Sterman, 1992, p. 137). This article is an invitation to sit in circle with us, in the sacred space of non-interference *in between epistemologies*. It requires a change in thinking and knowing. That is what the two-row visual code invited us to do, and it is what the DoTS webinar invited Melanie, Otto, Peter, Kelvy, and the viewers to do. The space in between is a healing space and a space of peace, respect and friendship, inspired by the spirit of the two-row wampum belt. One of the DoTS viewers shared: “I feel at home here in this space. To meet other people who seek this beautiful space to find connection as individuals and community.”

Healing self and systems is ultimately at the heart of the work of Turtle Island Institute<sup>5</sup> (TII), the Presencing Institute, and this new journal. I founded TII and our new virtual teaching lodge called *Mikinaak Wigyaam* (Turtle Lodge) as a safe place for innovators and changemakers to sit with Elders and each other, to engage in deep inner work, in order to lead/support our outer work. As Auntie Diane said earlier, “You’ve gotta do your work.” Inside the teaching lodge everyone is a student, and everyone is a teacher. We practice *gichi gakinoo’imaatiwin*<sup>6</sup> (the act of great or deep teaching) (Eleanor Skead, personal communication, 2020). As Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) points out, for Indigenous peoples everything begins with *relationships*. And Indigenous *community* is based on relational thinking (Cajete, 2015). Inside the teaching lodge, we engage in a process I’ve termed *relational systems thinking* where awareness-based systems change centers *mutual benefit*, a foundational principle that Uncle Dan shared with me, between all the humans, the non-humans, the unborn generations and our Earth Mother. Kevin offered the following words at the conclusion of our tea together in Six Nations: “We ask all of the powers of the earth, the upper world, lower world, the ancestors, the Great Spirit, with all of their power, strength and wisdom to help us.” On behalf of all of us, I say *Miigwetch* (thank you in Ojibway) and *Nya:Weh* (thank you in Mohawk) for listening.

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.turtleislandinstitute.ca](http://www.turtleislandinstitute.ca)

<sup>6</sup> See video Gichi Gakinoo’imaatiwin <https://vimeo.com/427149336/27c6e0d67e>



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