

POSTER: Strengths in our differences: how “sense of connectedness and relationship with environment” and the Mi’kmaq First Nation worldview help point the way to new possibilities for health promotion for all Canadians

Cape Breton Regional Health Research Symposium
“Human Health and the Environment”
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AUTHORS

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- **Albert Marshall**, Elder, Eskasoni Mi’kmaq First Nation, and Unama’ki Institute of Natural Resources

ABSTRACT: This poster explores perspectives on the environment that focus on our human senses of connectedness and relationship. From this basis, it then asks if the understandings revealed might point towards innovative possibilities for health promotion that seek to foster greater personal (individual) responsibility as per the “healthy living pillar” for primary health care in Canada (see http://www.phcssp.ca/html_files/four_pillars.html for *National Primary Health Care Awareness Strategy, a joint project with representation from territorial, provincial, and federal health departments across Canada* whose public awareness campaign ran in 2005-2006). Two examples of perspectives on the environment are featured, drawn from different cultures or worldviews. The examples are “how we see the year” (i.e. our calendars) and “how we see a particular species of plant” (i.e. our names for them). The examples show how a world view or consciousness conditioned by the combination of “Mi’kmaq language and Indigenous Science” fosters an “eco-reflexive and participatory” sense of connectedness with one’s environment characterized by relationships and responsibility, whereas a worldview or consciousness conditioned by the combination of “English language and Western Science” fosters a “cognocentric and detached” sense of disconnectedness from one’s environment. The comparative, big picture ideas featured in the poster emerge from an Aboriginal community-based, participatory action research project funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health (2003-2006). The project, entitled “Integrative Health and Healing: co-learning our way to expanding wholeness through restoration of relationships with the land”, involved Cape Breton University’s Integrative Science research team and Elders from Cape Breton’s Mi’kmaq communities. Over the course of this project, “Two-Eyed Seeing” replaced “co-learning” as the preferred guiding principle for collaborative work involving university and Aboriginal community. The innovation that this poster points towards, re health promotion, is an example of the power and potential of Two-Eyed Seeing.

Strengths in our differences

breakdown of poster to show seven parts enlarged in pages that follow

1

This poster features two comparative big picture perspectives on the environment based on simplified Aboriginal and Western worldviews. It asks the question: "Could an eco-reflective and participatory sense of connectedness with the environment, as seen in the Mi'kmaq language and Indigenous Science, point to new possibilities for health promotion for all Canadians?"

TWO-EYED SEEING

Two-Eyed Seeing is learning to see from one eye with the strength of Aboriginal knowledge, and from the other eye with the strength of Western knowledge, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. Thus, Two-Eyed Seeing intentionally and respectfully brings together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to work together. Two-Eyed Seeing is our preferred Guiding Principle for collaborative work involving the university and Mi'kmaq (Aboriginal) communities because it allows us to see **strengths in our differences**.

Comparative Big Picture Perspectives on the Environment



the strengths of Aboriginal knowledge

the strengths of Western knowledge

ABORIGINAL WORLDVIEW

Mi'kmaq language and Indigenous Science
Eco-reflective and participatory
Sense of connectedness with one's environment

WESTERN WORLDVIEW

English language and Western Science
Cogno-centric and detached
Sense of disconnectedness from one's environment

3

Two-Eyed Seeing was brought forward by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation during an Aboriginal community-participatory action research project "Integrative Health and Healing: Learning our way to expanding wholeness through restoration of relationships with the land". This research project was based in Cape Breton and involved participants from the five Mi'kmaq communities on Cape Breton Island and researchers from several universities in Eastern Canada, as well as Mi'kmaq undergraduate science students, health professionals and environmental professionals. The project was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health (2003-2006).



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Seeing relationships: plant names and my environment



6

The relational Mi'kmaq phrase *Nemitu kis sismoqnietes* (I see this could give me sugar disease) describes health information in terms of the relationship between self and food (in environment). This participatory and reflective understanding makes one's role and responsibility in health care and enact.

The Western Science understanding focuses on blood sugar, which must be determined by an instrument. Furthermore, the technical term "Glycemic Index" lacks meaning for most people; thus, the responsibility they have with respect to food choices and their health is not immediately apparent.

5

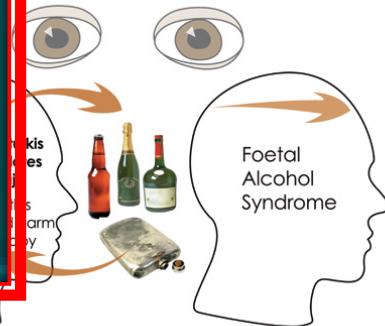
Seeing relationships: time of year and my environment



the Mi'kmaq name of a particular moon in

The detached Western calendar labels the time of year using month names and numbers that can be used anywhere in the world. This involves no participation in or observation of the environment.

Seeing relationships to promote healthy lifestyles: my health, and my environment



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Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

The relational Mi'kmaq phrase *labju nemitu kis oplalates mijuajji* (I see this could seriously harm my baby) demonstrates an understanding of health information based on personal action, relationships and responsibilities.

The Western Science understanding labels a condition but not the human or environmental relationships that contribute to health problems. The explanation is more abstract, static, and much less participatory.

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Comparative Big Picture Perspectives on the Environment

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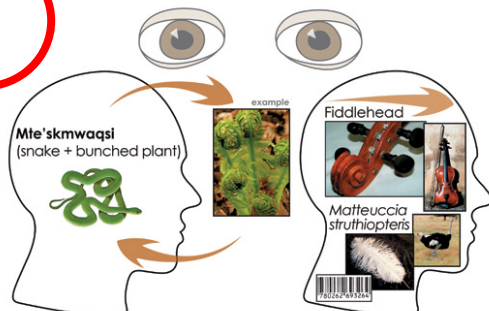
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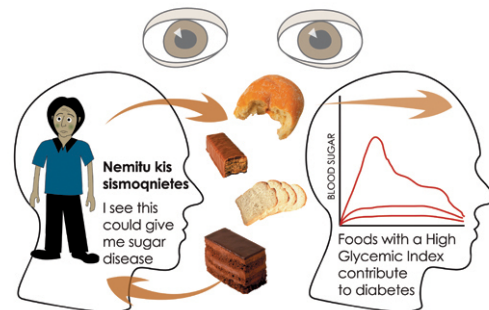
Seeing relationships: plant names and my environment



The eco-reflective Mi'kmaq plant name describes the fern in terms of the relationship between it and another living being present in the same local environment, a snake.

The cogno-centric Western plant names describe the fern in terms of symbolic objects, organisms, and even numbers that might reflect the patterns of the plants but that are not related to the local environment. The barcode exemplifies extreme detachment from environment.

Seeing relationships to promote healthy lifestyles: my thoughts, my health, and my environment



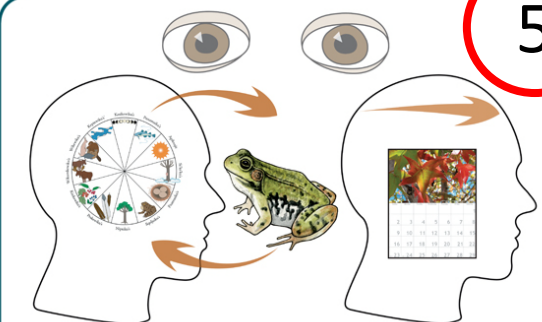
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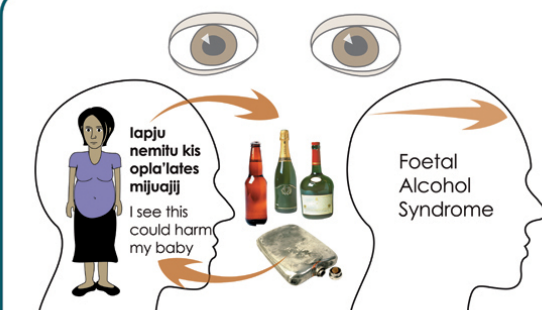
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The participatory Mi'kmaq calendar describes the time of year in terms of natural patterns that are observed in a particular place within a particular moon in one's local environment.

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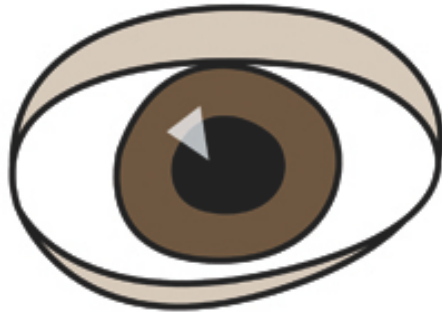
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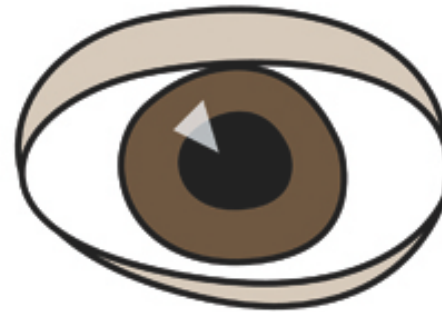
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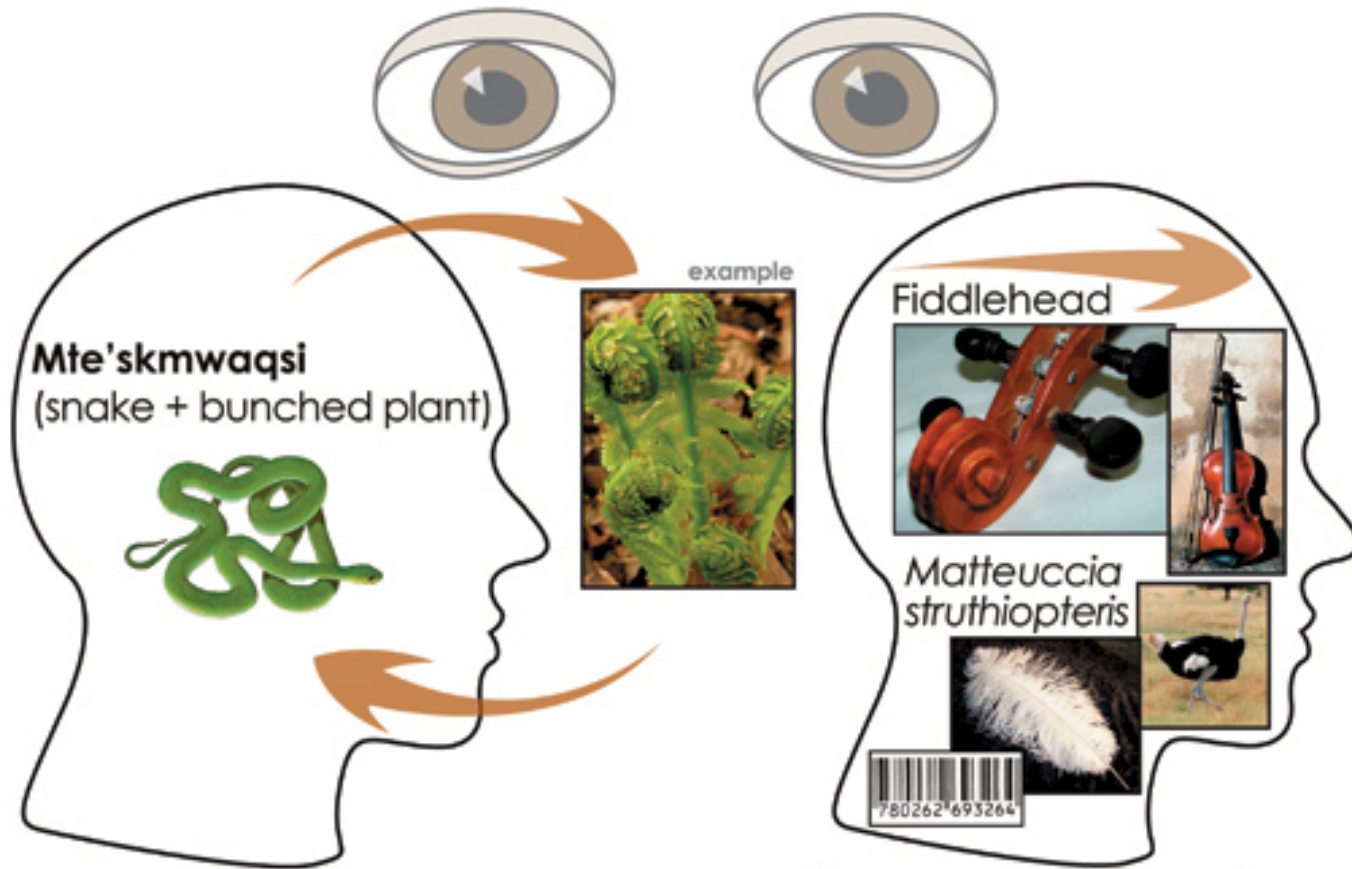
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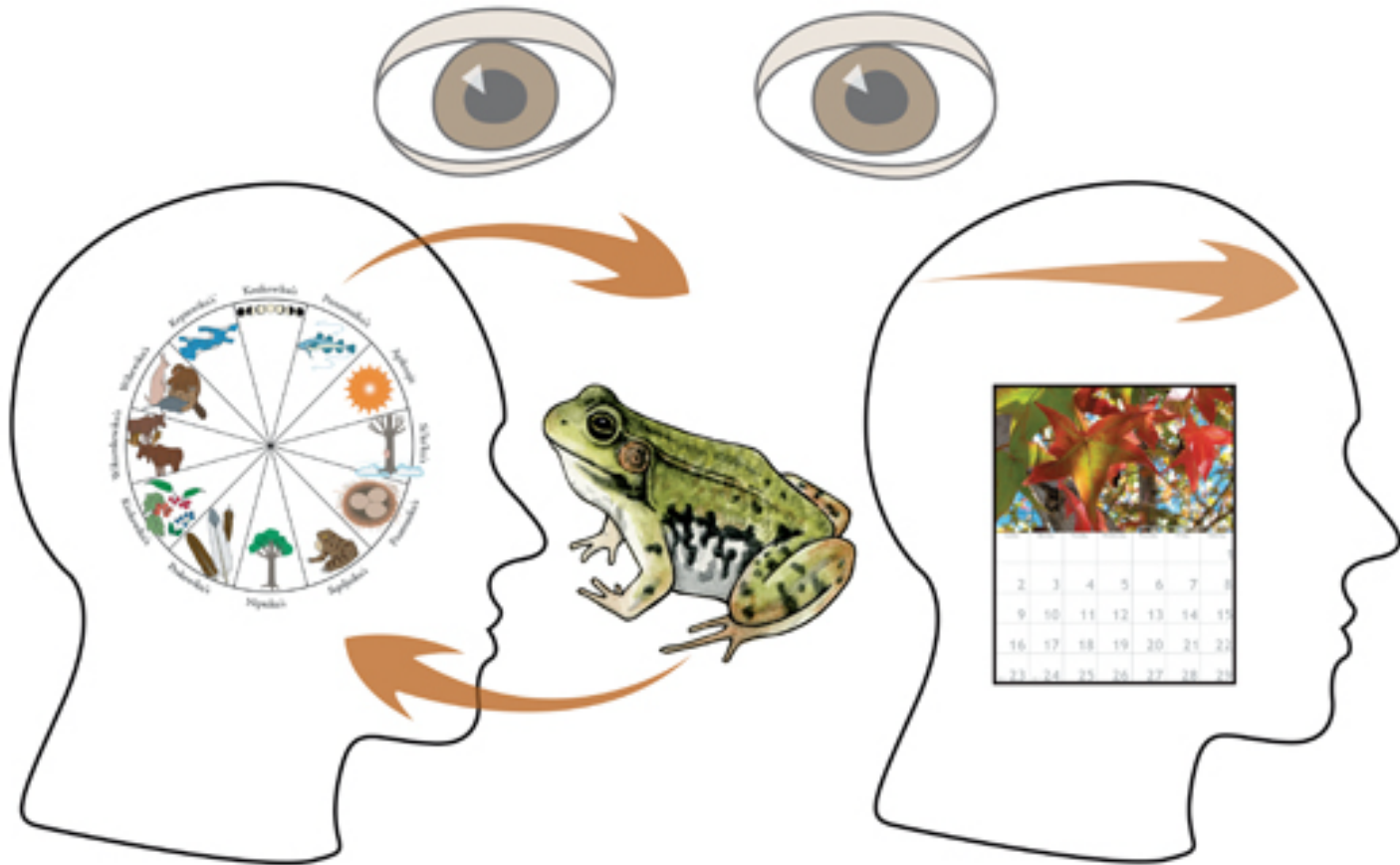
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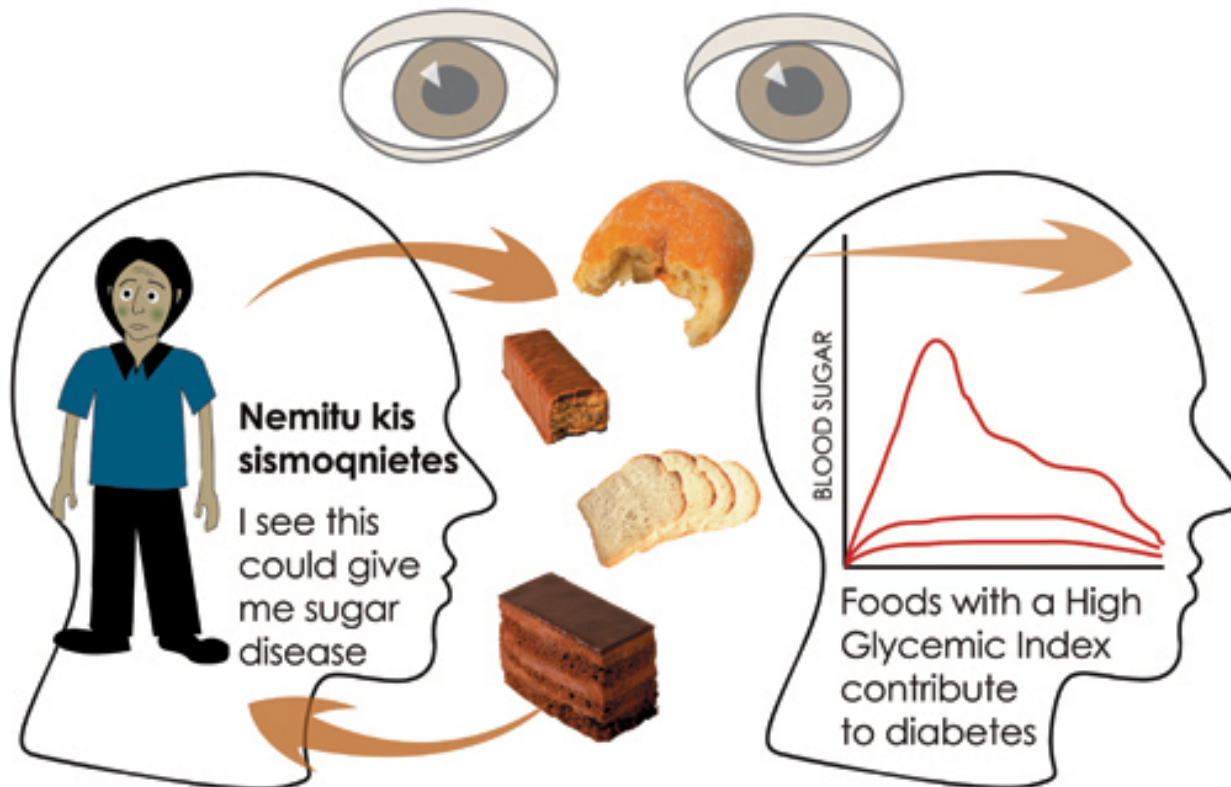
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du Canada



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada
Canada

**CIHR-IAPH research award to
CRC Cheryl Bartlett for project entitled**

*“Integrative Health and Healing:
co-learning our way
to expanding wholeness
through restoration
of relationships with the land”*

**Institute of Aboriginal
Peoples’ Health (IAPH)**



CIHR IRSC

Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

CAPE BRETON
UNIVERSITY

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is gratefully acknowledged.**