

Two-Eyed Seeing – Elder Albert Marshall’s guiding principle for inter-cultural collaboration

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Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall (who lives in the community of Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, in the Traditional Territory of Mi’kma’ki) coined the English phrase “Two-Eyed Seeing” many years ago for a guiding principle found in Mi’kmaq Knowledge as reflected in the language. Elder Albert is a fluent speaker of Mi’kmaq ... Two-Eyed Seeing in his language is known as *Etuaptmumk*.

Two-Eyed Seeing / *Etuaptmumk* encourages the realization that beneficial outcomes are much more likely in any given situation if we are willing to bring two or more perspectives into play. As such, it can be further understood as the gift of multiple perspective treasured by many Indigenous peoples. And our world today has many arenas where this realization, this gift, is exceedingly relevant including, especially, education, health, and environment. Elder Albert is passionate about bringing into these arenas the perspectives and knowledges of the Mi’kmaq people, of all Indigenous peoples, such that mutually beneficial, inter-cultural, collaborative relationships with mainstream society and the Western sciences can be nurtured and grown and new understandings put to work. Thus, he describes Two-Eyed Seeing as: *“learn to see from your one eye with the best or the strengths in the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learn to see from your other eye with the best or the strengths in the mainstream (Western or Eurocentric) knowledges and ways of knowing ... but most importantly, learn to see with both these eyes together, for the benefit of all”*. Albert acknowledges that such work is not easy and he emphasizes, therefore, that an on-going journey of co-learning is both required and essential in order to develop the profound collaborative understandings and capabilities that Two-Eyed Seeing encourages. Co-learning requires learning together, with and from each other, ongoing. Such is necessary to preclude an undemanding, facile approach in which Two-Eyed Seeing wrongly becomes mere jargon, trivialized, romanticized, co-opted, or used as a mechanism.

In addition to encouraging inter-cultural collaboration, Two-Eyed Seeing helps us to acknowledge the distinct and whole nature of Mi’kmaq knowledge and its ways of knowing, indeed of every Indigenous knowledge and its ways of knowing (i.e., they are represented as a whole eye) alongside the distinct nature of the Western knowledges and ways of knowing (i.e., they are also represented as a whole eye), while asking that these two eyes work together (as they do in binocular vision). Nevertheless, it may be that in a particular set of circumstances we will choose to call upon the strengths within Mi’kmaq knowledge or another Indigenous science, whereas in another set of circumstances we might choose to call upon those within the Western sciences. Thus, Two-Eyed Seeing can require a “weaving back and forth” between knowledges, and this will draw upon abilities to meaningfully and respectfully engage in an informed manner in collaborative settings. For such circumstances, Elder Albert recommends the approach be pictured in the following way: “Sometimes it’s like a heavy sledge that we are trying to move – this sledge represents our passions for ensuring the ecological integrity of *Mawisikamukawey* (the nurturing wholeness of the earth), the well-being of our communities, and the transmission of our Mi’kmaq culture (and/or other Indigenous cultures) and knowledge(s). We, the Elders, are dragging that sledge with all our might, and we need others to help us by pushing as hard as you can on the rear of the sledge. But, it is we, the Elders, who will determine where it goes. Other times that heavy sledge represents a passion we Elders hold that the Western sciences can help address. Then we, the Elders, will help you Western scientists with that sledge ... you drag, we push ... while we all also constantly exchange understandings about where it is going ... and learn to abide by *i’l’oqaptmu’k* meaning “to

revisit to renew, to maintain movement in the direction Spirit intended”. Indeed, Elder Albert says, the capacity to abide by *i’oqaptmu’k* is the essence of co-learning and essential to Two-Eyed Seeing. Other essentials are knowledge scrutinization or inquiry (to learn to be able to see in genuine and meaningful ways the best, the strengths, within our different knowledges); knowledge validation (by peers, to ensure authenticity, accuracy, and sacredness), and knowledge gardening (to learn to walk our talk, together, within grounded projects that have meaningful community relevance).

Two-Eyed Seeing adamantly, respectfully, and passionately asks that we bring together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, to use all our understandings so we can leave the world a better place and not compromise the opportunities for our youth (in the sense of Seven Generations) through our own inaction. Elder Albert indicates that “Two-Eyed Seeing is not easy to convey to academics as it does not fit into any particular subject area or discipline. Rather, it is about life: what you do, what kind of responsibilities you have, how you should live while on Earth ... i.e., a guiding principle that covers all aspects of our lives: social, economic, environmental, etc. The advantage of Two-Eyed Seeing is that you are always fine tuning your mind into different places at once, you are always looking for another perspective and better way of doing things.”

Elder Albert’s passionate concern for the well-being of the earth, for Indigenous peoples, for all peoples, can also be taken into account if/when a person might wish to ponder “how might academic or mainstream views be made more useable for Indigenous communities?” rather than seeking to follow a Two-Eyed Seeing approach of bringing into play the best of different knowledge systems (namely, Indigenous worldviews and paradigms alongside those of the mainstream). Albert’s words speak clearly as to why Two-Eyed Seeing offers a richer approach than would tweaking one view to accommodate bits and pieces of the other. He directs attention to the stress placed on an Indigenous person when educational (and other) systems deny traditional knowledge a place and a role in today’s times: “When you force people to abandon their ways of knowing, their ways of seeing the world, you literally destroy their spirit and once that spirit is destroyed it is very, very difficult to embrace anything – academically or through sports or through arts or through anything – because that person is never complete. But to create a complete picture of a person, their spirit, their physical being, their emotions and their intellectual being ... all have to be intact and work in a very harmonious way”. For Mi’kmaq people, Elder Albert says: “This is what we truly believe, this is what reinforces our Mi’kmaq spirituality: that no one being is greater than the next, that we are part and parcel of the whole ... we are equal ... and that each one of us has a responsibility to the balance of the system.” In a similar but opposite way to these understandings, and given that spirit is at the heart of Mi’kmaq knowledge and most if not all Indigenous knowledges, it would be highly inappropriate if not impossible to ask that the mainstream sciences and much of modern academia – which have diligently scrubbed spirit out of their overall ontology – somehow reverse their diligence. And thus, the profound challenge within Two-Eyed Seeing ... and the necessity of co-learning and the other key knowledge essentials mentioned above.

Elder Albert readily acknowledges that his Mi’kmaq understandings are but one view in a multitude of Indigenous views ... similarly that of the Western sciences ... and, moreover, that all of the world’s cultures (which include the Western sciences) have understandings to contribute in addressing the local to global challenges faced in efforts to promote healthy communities and ecosystems. Thus, one might wish to talk about Four-Eyed Seeing, or Ten-Eyed Seeing, or 3265-Eyed Seeing, etc. This extension also encompasses the understanding that all the world’s species, all our bio- and eco-kin, have contributions to make.

Further information on Two-Eyed Seeing:

1) www.integrativescience.ca

2) Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., Marshall, A., and Iwama, M. 2015. Integrative Science and Two-Eyed Seeing: Enriching the Discussion Framework for Healthy Communities. Chapter 10 (pp. 280-326) in "Ecosystems, Society and Health: Pathways through Diversity, Convergence and Integration". Edited by Lars K. Hallstrom, Nicholas Guehlstorf, and Margot Parkes, McGill-Queen's University Press.

3) Marshall, M., Marshall, A., and Bartlett, C. 2015. Two-Eyed Seeing in Medicine. Chapter 2 (pp 16-24) in "Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada; beyond the social", edited by Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, Nicole Marie Lindsay, and Charlotte Reading. Canadian Scholars Press, Toronto.

4) Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., and Marshall, A. 2012. Two-Eyed Seeing and other Lessons Learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences, 2(4): 331-340.