

BRIGHTWATER SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

HEALTH SCIENCE 20 – HEALTH CARE PHILOSOPHIES AND ETHICS

Pilot: Brightwater facilitator Elizabeth Bekolay and Rick Bowes Aden Bowman, Fall 2016.

Inquiry Questions: ‘What is the role of Nature in regards to overall health and wellness? What role does Nature have in helping us balance the Wellness Wheel?’

HS 20 – HC1 Analyze how Western, Indigenous, Traditional, Complementary and Alternative approaches to health care can contribute to a holistic (e.g. mental, emotional, physical, spiritual) perspective of health.

HS20-NU2 Analyze dietary choices based on personal and cultural beliefs and scientific understanding of nutrition.

Activities: Sitting on the prairie, hiking through the trees, harvesting rose hips for tea (teaching how to harvest ethically and with gratitude), building a fire, making tea, drinking tea, book sharing.

Rationale: Most holistic forms of health care include the concept of ‘right relationship’. Right relationship means a balanced and healthy relationship based on love and respect. This concept is the common thread between Indigenous ways of healing, Reiki, Qi Gong, Herbal Medicine and most other ‘alternative’ health care. These techniques have grown from a close relationship with nature. Whether the practice focuses on herbs, energy, or ceremony, most are time tested and have grown from cultures and individuals with a very close connection to the natural world. Humans being part of nature are included in this and the idea of ‘right relationship’ is significant in all our human relationships as well.

The goal of this Brightwater experience is to have the students assess for themselves the role that nature and right relationship have in their lives. We explore the physiological benefits of human contact with trees, herbs, soil and the ground. We experience brain chemistry benefits of mindful movement through nature. We explore a human dynamic in a smaller circle where everyone is treated as equal and with great respect. Finally, we question the loss of these connections in our day to day lives and how experiences like this could benefit our lives.

Activities:

Sitting on the prairie in a Circle: This is how we begin most groups at Brightwater. In this session, we define why sitting on the Earth is so beneficial. We help the students to pay attention, mindfully ‘checking in’ within themselves, to see what is happening. Many Eastern Health practices, such as yoga, qi gong, reiki, and acupuncture understand that the human energetic system is a microcosm of the Earth’s electromagnetic system. These healing modalities are based on a healthy flow of energy throughout a person’s body. There is much research that supports these practices and helps us to understand the energy that is being emitted by the Earth and all living things. This energy is healthy, it is suggested to aid as an anti-inflammatory that can lessen

the effect of arthritis. Many people practice ‘grounding’ or ‘Earthing’, which is the conscious act of connecting with the ground for this purpose.

Earthing: Health Implications of Reconnecting the Human Body to the Earth's Surface Electrons

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3265077/>

The effects of grounding (earthing) on inflammation, the immune response, wound healing, and prevention and treatment of chronic inflammatory and autoimmune diseases

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4378297/>

Hiking through the trees: What does it mean to have ‘right relationship’ with an ecosystem? We explore the animal trails in the forest. Sit in the grandmother tree. The students hear a story about Richard St. Barbe Baker, known globally as “The Man of the Trees”

We study the soil. Everyone holds the darker forest soil in their hands. We learn about bacteria, how much bacteria is actually harmful. We also learn that there are species of bacteria in the soil that help our brains release serotonin when in contact with our skin.

Harvesting rose hips for tea: (teaching how to harvest ethically and with gratitude) making tea, drinking tea: The plants that grow in nature in a balanced way with each other contain trace minerals and nutrients that many of our foods are lacking. Most ‘alternative’ medicine methodologies consider food as medicine. Nutrition and digestion are of utmost importance for health and longevity. Living in ‘right relationship’ means to have a connection to your food and medicine. We make an offering and gather rose hips for tea. Rose hips are highly medicinal and full of nutrients, such as calcium, selenium, iron, magnesium, niacin, phosphorus, potassium, protein, riboflavin, sodium, zinc, and vitamins A, C, and E. *The Boreal Herbal: Wild Food and Medicine Plants of the North,*

Building a fire: Fire is an important element that gives us comfort and warmth. The students help to build an outdoor fire to sit around as we prepared the tea and discuss a variety of readings and reflections of their Brightwater experience related to their health and wellness inquiry.

Book (Knowledge) Sharing: Horizontal knowledge sharing helps to create relationship and trust in community. Right relationships and trust are also important for health and efficient mental function for learning. The students had a chance to look through plant identification and herbal medicine books to find a plant that they were interested in. While drinking tea and watching the fire we listened to each person who chooses a plant, share what they have read.

Medicinal Plant Game: This is a matching game. Half the students have an ailment and the other have plants that are known to heal or improve the condition or illness. Some of the plants in this game are known as ‘common weeds,’ like dandelion and chickweed. These examples bring up the lesson on plants as helpers that go where they are needed, rather than pests that exist to annoy.

Assessment: The students evaluate themselves using a rubric the class created based on health indicators before and after the experience.