

Transdisciplinary Scan Summary

It would seem logical that decades of experience in Newfoundland and Labrador as a practitioner of community development and adult education would be the ideal preparation for entry into a program of Transdisciplinary Sustainability. (My arguments are supported by Transdisciplinary literature as quoted in this summary.”

One might say the main ingredients of transdisciplinary are working from a variety of disciplines (interdisciplinary and more) and university people working with people from outside the university as equals. Since 1989 I have worked on more than 100 communication projects in more than 60 rural NL communities.

I first recall meeting Calvin White (now a TRSU mentor/advisor) when he led the citizen’s advisory council while I was a regional planner with the provincial Rural Secretariat. His local knowledge, practical experience, and wisdom are impressive and I have interviewed him several times (for YouTube and Podcast). Calvin is a perfect match for TRSU because of his Transdisciplinary Sustainability approach to NL Mi’Kmaq (especially Flat Bay) but also because he includes rural NL communities in his analysis and practice. He generously includes me as an ally in a participatory action research process.

I would suggest that our collaborations have endured because they are “based on effective communications, transparency in decision making mutual respect and trust. (Olivier et al p.453, 2018)

The concept of sustainable development achieved worldwide prominence with the publication of the UN Bruntland Report in 1987. The report stressed meeting the needs of future generations (Meadowcraft, p. 38, 2017). This is, of course, compatible with the indigenous concept of seven generations. Thinking seven generations ahead is necessary for protecting the natural environment and contrasts with the Western democratic politicians who can only plan for the next four years.

Calvin believes that European settlers to Newfoundland adopted the traditional Mi'Kmaq subsistence living style when they created remote villages on the shores. (Calvin White, personal communication, October 2020).

Calvin is supportive of the Mi'Kmaq relationship with Grenfell College and he has talked to me about "Two Eyed Seeing," a concept developed by Albert Marshall and others at Cape Breton University. It recognizes the environmental wisdom of Mi'Kmaq practice and suggests it is possible to join Mi'Kmaq and academic knowledge. (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, 2012)

A major learning for me in the TRSU program was when advisor Barbara Barter introduced me to adult education emancipatory theory and critical theory. The initial question in our research proposal of to analyze why each wave of support for NL participatory development support communications from 1979 to 2016 was terminated made sense after reading critical theorists.

My argument is that shutting down outposts for economic reasons is immoral and the cause of mental anguish and trauma. (Blake, 2023)

For example, Steinberg and Kincheloe argue: "Critical theory, if nothing else, is a moral construct designed to reduce human suffering in the world. In the critical theoretical context, every individual is granted dignity regardless of his or her location in the web of reality. Thus, the continuation of human suffering by conscious human decision is morally unacceptable behavior that must be analyzed, interpreted, and changed." (Steinberg, and Kincheloe, p 140, 2010)

"Contemporary critical theory argues that so-called democratic society is not as democratic as generally believed. Democratic citizens are regulated by the forces of power operating in a general climate of deceit. In this contemporary condition individuals and schools are acculturated and schooled to feel comfortable in relations of domination or subordination rather than equality or interdependence." (Steinberg, and Kincheloe, p 140, 2010)

There are alternatives to resettling rural communities. According to DeGuerre (formerly of Concordia University) and Mohawk scholar Deering: “Open Systems Theory (OST) as primarily developed by Fred and Merrelyn Emery in Australia, provides an integrated set of concepts, and constructs in both theory and practice to describe reality more accurately. A major part of the work is to research participative democratic structures, processes, and governance as an alternative to dominant hierarchies.” (DeGuerre and Deering, n.d.)

E.F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful – A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* – questions the socio-economic system that dominates our lives. By the mid-70s, when he wrote, it had become apparent that unbridled capitalism was not only detrimentally affecting the lives of the majority of the world’s population but also destroying the planet itself. (Schumacher, 1974)

Schumacher writes of the “idolatry of economism” – a Russian term used by Lenin to describe socio-economic systems where only money matters. (Schunacher, p. 95, 1974)

Neil Tilley (former MUN extension fieldworker) once told me he was on a rural wharf talking to an old guy about the economy and he was told the problem is “simply greed, human greed”. (Neil Tilley, personal communication, 2000)

Mebratu writes the same thing. As Ecosocialism argues, “sustainable ecologically sound capitalist development is a contradiction in terms. (Mebratu).

Fred Gale seems to agree. “Once again, grotesque levels of domestic and international inequality dog capitalism, dramatized in Oxfam’s claim that “just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people – the bottom half of humanity’ (Oxfam, 206, p2, as cited by Gale, introduction p. 2, 2018)

Gale reminds us about “the fact that Homo Sapiens has spent most of its life living in small, autochtonous groups, endorse a more localized, subsistence form of provisioning using appropriate technologies via frequent and multifaceted face to face interactions. “(Gale, p.6, 2018)

This view would seem to support my point of view that rural, interdependent outposts are ideal communities.

But Weisman asks “Whether it (transdisciplinarity) will ever reach the format of an established discipline is questionable...since transdisciplinarity addresses boundaries between forms of knowledge, taking into account the diversity, complexity, uncertainty and values of issues”. (p28)

Wolff and Ehrstrom suggest “We need strong utopias as guiding principals”.