

**'Two-Eyed Seeing': Our Only Way Forward**

BIOL 510

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## **Introduction**

### *Why do we need a mindset shift?*

It is no secret that current solutions to the environmental crisis are failing. Global temperatures are rising, amphibian populations are declining, and habitats are continuing to be destroyed, but the Western world has yet to find and implement a solution to any of these issues. In 2015 the United Nations developed a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to attempt to solve current world issues, including environmental issues (United Nations 2015). Although these goals have been developed, we have yet to see any substantial outcomes. In the words of Indigenous elders, “neither world leaders nor modern institutions have the tools to adequately address climate change” (Horton et al. 2019, p. 160). The Western approach to tackling the climate crisis is not working, so Indigenous leaders are suggesting another way forward: ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ (Broadhead and Howard 2021, p. 111).

### *What is ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’?*

‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ is defined as “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Bartlett et al. 2012, p. 335). It is important to note that ‘ways of knowing’ differs from ‘knowledge’ in that the former ‘ways of knowing’ refers to the different types of learning and knowledge that exist, such as emotional or artistic knowing (Queen's University n.d.). ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’, as a method which evaluates both Western and Indigenous concepts, does not involve simply incorporating Indigenous knowledge into a Western mindset: it involves weaving between two knowledges and ways of knowing, applying whichever is best for a particular

situation (Bartlett et al. 2012, p. 332). ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ is valuable because it allows for utilizing the distinct advantages of Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and minimizes the associated limitations. In addition, ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ will result in a change of actions at individual and governmental levels: a change which is desperately needed if we are going to live sustainably. In this essay, I will argue that ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ is essential to developing more effective and appropriate responses to the major environmental and social sustainability issues of the 21st century.

### **What are Indigenous and Western ways of knowing?\***

To understand ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’, one must understand Indigenous and Western ways of knowing respectively. I would like to preface that my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing is based on limited knowledge and is primarily focused on Anishinaabe ways of knowing. It is in no way comprehensive or a complete understanding of Indigenous cultures.

#### *Indigenous Ways of Knowing*

My understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing regarding the natural world can be described through interconnectedness and reciprocity. Interconnectedness describes how everything in the universe can be seen as interdependent; instead of humans and nature being separated, humans are unified with nature (Mazzocchi 2020, p. 79). In her work, Kimmerer lists guidelines for the Honourable Harvest, mentioning “introduce yourself” and “ask permission before taking”; this highlights the perspective that nature is an equal, as opposed to something to exploit (2013, p.183, Mazzocchi 2020, p. 79). Another major pillar of Indigenous ways of knowing is reciprocity. This can be thought of as a symbiosis where Indigenous people benefit

from the environment, and the environment benefits from their work in return (Mazzocchi 2020, p. 80). Additionally, gifts taken from the natural world are used respectfully and there is an action taken to give back (Kimmerer 2013, p.183). Interconnectedness and reciprocity highlight that humans are part of nature, not above it, and therefore must give and not just take.

### *Western Ways of Knowing*

Both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing acknowledge that humans are currently on a path toward environmental destruction and that our current tactics are not working. Western ways of knowing, however, stray quite far from interconnectedness, reciprocity and giving. Western science tries to control and manipulate individual variables, instead of utilizing an interconnected perspective (Broadhead and Howard 2021). Dr. Leroy Little Bear refers to this type of thinking as our left-brain metaphysics (2021). This left-brain objective view embraces individualism and further separates humans from the natural world, allowing for more environmental exploitation. In addition, our left-brain metaphysics can be related to another major pillar of Western ways of knowing: materialism (Little Bear 2021). Materialism describes how individuals seek relationships with objects they have purchased: the relationships with objects have equal importance to them as relationships with living beings (Kilbourne and Pickett 2008, p. 886). Western individuals consume much more than individuals in any other part of the world, and this is partly due to the value placed on consumption.

### **Why ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’?**

Both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing have advantages and disadvantages. Highlighting the advantages, Western science's technological and scientific understanding are

extremely valuable and certainly part of the environmental solution. Indigenous ways of knowing, however, offer a mindset that, if adopted, could help the Western world reduce its consumerist ways (this is further elaborated below). Current environmental solutions involve choosing between the two, when the best of both can be utilized.

The advantages of each mindset point out precisely why ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ is so powerful and essential: it utilizes advantages and mitigates limitations. ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ would allow for use of scientific and technological knowledge, combined with a mindset shift from consumerism and individualism to interconnectedness, reciprocity and giving. ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ means correcting our over-dominant left-brain metaphysics perspective and instead using a more well-rounded view of our world. The current solutions to the climate crisis, which only utilize Western knowledge, are not working. We need to introduce a new way of thinking, and ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ allows for a shift in mindset while still utilizing Western scientific and technological knowledge.

### **How could ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ approaches allow us to develop more effective and appropriate responses?**

It is easy to see how ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ would radically shift the Western mindset, given how far we currently stand from reciprocity, interconnectedness and giving. But why is a mindset shift to ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ essential? I argue that shifting to ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ will lead to a shift in Western behaviours; a change that we desperately need to see if we want to live sustainably. This stance is based on research which demonstrates that our values contribute to our behaviours (Maio et al. 2001). If Western society started seeing the Indigenous values of reciprocity, interconnectedness and giving with one eye, our actions would slowly start to reflect

this. Individually, employing a mindset of ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’, and therefore attempting to correct our over-dominant left-brain metaphysics and related materialistic values, can result in a decrease in consumption, an increased connection with nature and others, as well as more gratitude for the natural world. At a governmental level, this shift in values would result in taking more climate actions, and generally taking actions that demonstrate prioritizing the climate over the economy- i.e., responding more effectively and appropriately to the climate crisis. Imagine what would happen if Indigenous ways of knowing and scientific knowledge were regarded equally and held at a higher value than the economy when making policy decisions. I would argue that governments would be actively achieving their much stricter climate goals and we would be slowly climbing out of the situation that our left-brain metaphysics and associated values have put us in. I believe this change in action is key to living sustainably. Both Western and Indigenous views can acknowledge that our current trajectory is unsustainable; ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ provides a new paradigm we can shift to that will change our actions.

### **Conclusion: A Way Forward**

‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ is essential to humanity developing more effective and appropriate responses to the major sustainability issues we face. By weaving between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ allows for a tailored approach to each situation which considers the advantages of each way of knowing and mitigates the limitations. Although the current environmental situation is grim, ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ is the light at the end of the tunnel; through implementation on individual, scientific and governmental levels, we will begin to see a shift in our actions, one that is desperately needed. Humanity is at a fork in the road, and if a switch to ‘Two-Eyed Seeing’ occurs, we may be able to move forward sustainably.

\*This essay is based on the perspective that Indigenous and Western cultures have distinctly different 'ways of knowing'. However, there are other ways of perceiving 'ways of knowing', such as that individuals from either culture regularly utilize multiple different 'ways of knowing', but that Western cultures prioritize some over others (e.g. rationally-based knowing as being of more value than emotionally-based knowing), whereas Indigenous cultures take a more balanced approach.

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