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Creative Arts and the Indigenous Healing Circle Within an Indigenous Context
Les arts créatifs et le Cercle de guérison autochtone dans un contexte autochtone

Honoré France
University of Victoria

ABSTRACT
Within Indigenous cultures, there is a long tradition of the creative arts being interconnected within the everyday lives of human beings. Art, culture, and spirituality are the connections that are reflected in daily living. From a healing perspective, these connections remain one of the most successful ways of working with people. Through the lens of culture, specific clinical examples will show how the creative arts in therapy can be used with music, drumming, drama, storytelling, and woodcarving. Specific clinical examples involving these creative art forms and residential school survivors are described to demonstrate the healing power of the creative arts in therapy from an Indigenous perspective.

RÉSUMÉ
Les cultures autochtones comportent une longue tradition d'arts créatifs en lien avec le quotidien des êtres humains. L'art, la culture et la spiritualité sont les liens qui sont réfléchis dans le quotidien. Sur le plan de la guérison, ces liens restent l'un des moyens les plus efficaces de travailler auprès des personnes. À travers le prisme de la culture, on observe des exemples cliniques particuliers qui peuvent nous servir à illustrer la façon d'utiliser les arts créatifs dans la thérapie, en ayant recours soit à la musique, au tambour, à l'art dramatique, à la narration ou à la sculpture du bois. On y décrit des exemples cliniques précis ayant recours à ces formes d'art créatif dans le cas de survivants des pensionnats autochtones, afin de démontrer le pouvoir guérisseur des arts dans la thérapie telle que conçue par les Autochtones.

> For [Indigenous] people, traditional arts, culture, spirituality, and healing were, and are, interconnected. Where there are many similarities between Western and Indigenous approaches to the creative arts and healing, this is one of the most significant differences. Indigenous approaches include arts and culture in a holistic model of healing that encompasses the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual world. (Archibald, 2012, p. 7)

Creative arts are a big part of how I live my life, using the arts not only to help others as a professional counsellor but also to help myself in my healing journey. When I work with clients on their issues, I use the arts to keep everyone present and remind them that the arts are more than expressions of what we see, feel, hear, and experience; they offer ways of transporting our spirits into something living and tangible. Implicit in Linda Archibald's (2012) idea is that we as Indigenous people live with the spirits of our ancestors always present in our lives, and that nothing we do is separate from the physical and metaphysical world.

The symbols that are found in my art not only are intricate pictures but also are symbols that are embedded in our culture and that bring to mind stories from the past. This helps me relate to the present and remind myself that all living things are related as brothers and sisters. Most early art revolved around people's relationship with nature and the cosmos, although today, art—especially avant-garde art—has become a more general expression of creativity. Unfortunately, many people do not tap into their artistic creativity and therefore are cut off from increasing their awareness and self-knowledge.

In this paper, I describe the use of creative arts to achieve wellness, with a focus on clients who participated in Healing Circles for survivors of the residential school system in Canada. To provide a context for working with Indigenous people, philosophy, culture, and historical background need to be described from a perspective of reconciliation. Trauma therapy, along with creative arts, highlights the importance of culture, family, the environment, and the spirit to the process of reclamation.

There is an intrinsic human ability—the impulse for self-transcendence—that in an Indigenous context brings about a sense of wholeness when one is connected to something far greater than what is known through our senses. Those like me who have been trained in Western counselling psychology and become professional counsellors have to walk in two worlds. Culture and identity are important elements of who we are when we live in a place that has changed because of colonialism. Hence, as we work with our clients, we stress the importance of cultural identity and living in modern Canada as Indigenous people. Therefore, we enter a space of the spirit in which our conscious selves can be transformed. In essence, it is a blending of the wisdom of Indigenous spiritual traditions with the tools of Western psychology where we are moving to the broader spiritual context to survive (France et al., 2013).

As an anchor for my clients, I rely on the creative arts, on traditional Indigenous teachings, and on my training as a professional counsellor. In this paper, I will describe the therapeutic process I developed and used in facilitating a Healing Circle. Also, I will describe 15 years of work in Healing Circles and how we followed ceremonial protocol and the teachings of Kwakwaka'wakw elder George Cook (personal communication, April 2004 to October 2019), along with the teachings voiced by Black Elk and Eduardo Duran, to name just a few

philosophers and practitioners. I will describe some of the case situations that illustrate how the creative arts in their many forms were used in the healing and therapeutic process and how the creative arts approach has had profound effects on our bodies, our minds, our emotions, and our spirits. I will use specific examples from the following creative arts: dance and drumming as medicine, the use of drama in therapy, storytelling as narrative medicine, woodcarving and traditional arts and the broader implications of culture-infused counselling processes, and the counsellor as storyteller.

An Indigenous Perspective on Constructive Living

As an Indigenous person, I have come to believe and agree with the Indigenous philosopher Black Elk, who stated that humankind has a choice of two roads: the "road" to technology and the "road" to spirituality (Jackson, 2016). The "road" to technology, strongly associated with European civilization, has led society to many advances in technology and science that have produced a high standard of living, but with these advances has come a price that has produced pollution and climate change.

The "road" to spirituality, while less scientific, reflects traditional Indigenous beliefs, specifically the belief that the environment is reflected in how humankind relates to a Higher Power. While there is one Supreme Being, the Great Spirit, there are also spirits of locality, spirits of natural forces, and animal spirits. All have distinct powers. In some ways, the animal powers are utilized far more in everyday life than those of the Great Spirit or the Creator. In fact, the Great Spirit is rarely invoked, while the spirits under the Great Spirit are routinely involved. One spirit is not greater than another, but they are all omnipresent, in Mother Earth, Father Sky, and the four directions. What is divine is everywhere, including the spirit in the trees, in the universe, and in all life.

This continuity of life is often represented by the Circle, which appears in many of the symbols used in Indigenous ceremonies (e.g., artwork, drums, dances, and meetings). When humanity respects everything, there is a love of all things, because we see the divine in the trees, in the animals, and in the rocks. Everything has experienced the same sacred breath, because when there is respect, which is the essence of the healing spirits, we feel love in our hearts, and this demonstrates how humanity can coexist harmoniously with the environment.

What is the cosmology or Indigenous world view, and what does it tell us about healing? According to B. Duran and E. Duran (1995),

> In Western experience it is common to separate the mind from the body and spirit and the spirit from mind and body. Within the Native American world-view this is a foreign idea. Most Native American people experience their being in the world as a totality of personality and not as separate systems within the

> person. This becomes more complex for the Western therapist/social scientist when the idea of the personality being part of all creation is discussed. Thus the Native American worldview is one in which the individual is a part of all creation, living life as one system and not in separate units that are objectively relating with each other. (p. 15)

This idea is important because it brings more understanding for counsellors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to have a better understanding of their Indigenous clients.

In the same vein, I would add Whyte's (2018) idea that "by understanding the interconnectedness between land and body, culture and self, communities and others, an Indigenous research paradigm creates a space to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the art therapy practice as well" (p. 32). In other words, the need for healing can be explained as a process in which our relationship with the world is about striving for harmony with all of creation and where passion is seen as a more important factor in healing than time passing. Healing is a process of restoring balance within the self; this can be achieved by participating in ceremony and rituals, in connecting with elders, and even in learning one's Indigenous language. Therefore, getting in touch with our ancestors through our body processes can bring back these experiences, which is why Elder Sarah Modest (Tse-e-llat) from the Hul'qumi'num Nation would remind the Circle participants often to "never forget that we never lose our ancestors, but we carry them in our blood, and they pass on to our children and their children, so remember to take care of yourself" (personal communication, August 24, 2012).

Music and Dance as Medicine

> For any kind of healing, and especially for trauma recovery work with First Nations people, the sounds of traditional songs and the vibrations of the drums and rattles greatly help to move trauma out of the body. I find traditional healing methods work more effectively to release trauma than other methods that involve talking and focus in the mind. Trauma is stored in the body and singing and drumming and the vibration this creates allows people to get in touch with their body and feel where and, often, what the trauma is. (Thais Sewell, quoted in Archibald, 2012, p. 42)

In our Healing Circles, we use music and dance as healing tools because music affects our emotions and even our bodies as we listen to it. Singing and dancing are not for entertainment, although they can be, but are expressions of the spirit and a form of medicine for healing. We have not only hand-held drums but also a powwow drum to energize our groups for the day, which we use right after opening prayers. At the beginning of every session in the Healing Circle, we invite

participants to join us on a powwow drum, which can allow 10 or more players to drum together while we sing a song for our ancestors.

As in traditional cultural meetings, a powwow drum creates a powerful sense of cohesion and purpose. Many participants in our Circles have described the drum as thunder or as natural rhythms from the earth; drumming connects us to each other and to the spirits around us. Historically, drums were some of the first musical instruments, and they have existed in most cultures. Drums have come to represent Indigenous culture through the art of making a drum and through singing songs from the present and the past. Songs often represent the importance of harmony, reminding everyone of the natural world and of the importance of living a respectful life. Musical rhythm has this magical ability to help us connect with the earth and to the Spirit.

Usually, during each counselling and healing program, a master drum maker would be invited to an evening session to teach the participants the art of making a drum using animal skins and natural fibres. According to the elders, the drum must be played in a bold yet soft beat consistent with the skin of the deer hide, who in the animal world moves eloquently, with precision and grace. This is the gift of the deer that is honoured every time we play the drum (Elder Sarah Modest, personal communication from April 2004 to October 2019). According to Ahonen-Eerikäinen (2002), the feeling side of our brain is also the place where we process music and art; thus, art and music help us get in touch with our emotions. When I play the drum and sing, something deep inside me is released, and I feel transported away from logic and into a place of emotional peace.

Dance is also used in our Circles to express gratitude and to energize us as a group. While the rhythm of dance brings happiness and a sense of power, it is also a way to dramatize a narrative of one's story; it is a method of opening oneself up to actions, not just words, and to the oral tradition of Indigenous practice. We open ourselves to the story and live it through movement. Dance has the power to bring us to the present and to a state of mindfulness, which embodies much of what is most characteristic in Indigenous spirituality. Yet the power of these ceremonies, in which dance can be used, is that it brings about a sense of renewal or rebirth in the participants. It is not just the healing of particular problems but the beginning of a "new person." Thus, culture is an important ingredient in successful psychotherapy, particularly with those clients from Indigenous cultures.

Finally, the transcendent nature of the creative arts approach can be illustrated by a performance by one of the participants as a way of sharing his transformation. He performed the dance and enactment of the Kwaklt-wah story of the "Bookwas" or the wild man of the woods. This character is performed in the Winter Ceremonies of the secret societies called the Hamatsa, which the client had been initiated into as a member of the Big House in his community. In his healing, he wanted to share his estrangement from his community as well as his redemption. In this sacred dance, the wild man dances in a frantic way, screaming

and yelling, not really communicating understandably, but as the dance goes on, he slowly becomes human again and casts off his wildness in order to rejoin the community of humanity.

It is the transformation in this dance that teaches all of us as Indigenous people that no matter how estranged we become, we can regain our humanity and build a constructive life. This individual danced as part of his healing in therapy within our Circle. Dancing has also been used in our Healing Circles to express deep feelings and emotions that cannot be shared satisfactorily in any other way, which is part of the Indigenous approach in expressing creativity. In the same way, art is used by most human beings to bring a sense of peace while focusing on the creative energy that produces not just a desired art piece but also a sense of peace.

Storytelling and Narrative as Medicine

According to Wendy Edwards (2013), a Nuu-chal-nulth author of children's stories, children hearing the traditional story of Big Brother and Little Brother from the village of Snaw Naw As would recognize the lessons of cooperation in the story immediately. One goal of this Indigenous story was

> to ensure that knowledge did not get separated from experience, or wisdom from divinity, elders stressed listening, watching and waiting, not asking why … Storytelling was also an effective means of preserving the origin histories. In these stories, individuals are told where the people came from, how the stars were created, where fires were discovered, how light became divided from darkness and how death originated. (Edwards, 2013, p. 412)

These stories were to teach not just a way of living in the world but also important knowledge about identity and one's origin as an Indigenous person. To be a good person who acts respectfully toward parents, elders, and ancestors is a message of how the world works and how one can survive in times of trouble. Elder Tse-e-llat, Sarah Modest (2011), reminded us that,

> As children, we were never lectured or punished, but always shown what we needed to do to honour our families … [And we must remember that] children are not ours but are here, and as parents, we are there for their care.

In one of our Healing Circles, I had a participant who was upset and angry because he had contracted AIDS, and it changed everything for him, not only in terms of how he saw himself but also in terms of what he could do with a potentially fatal disease. In describing the disease, he was angry at himself and at others who had passed the disease on to him. I asked him to give AIDS a personality, after which we had a talk with this personification of AIDS, who, as

it turned out, was an entity in his everyday life and was not all mixed up in his identity as a human being.

I asked him to talk to this "AIDS Identity," and his response was a surprise because he didn't want to talk but to "beat the crap" out of the identity. I suggested that he do that with his hand on a pillow, which he did with great enthusiasm. At a certain point, he began to laugh, and then I asked him what he had learned from this entity and to tell AIDS directly as if the entity was sitting in a chair across from us.

He told of the hardship of living with "him" and of what he had learned from living with AIDS. I asked him to write it down in a story and to bring it back later to share. What was fascinating to me was that the participant described in his story that he would be spending the rest of his life dancing with the entity called AIDS and that they had to learn to get along and to work together because they were going to be "together" for the rest of their lives.

The client wrote and spoke of living a more purposeful life in which he would become an educator and a playwright to help people living with challenging situations such as a fatal disease or the crippling effects of an accident. His narrative was now in his control and not something imposed from outside. Thus, clients have the power to influence the narrative, to change it, to modify it, to write a different ending, and to take control of their life space. Mehl-Madrona (2007) called this "narrative medicine." As Indigenous people, we have to honour

> the many different paths to wellness and [to] understand[] that healing is not necessarily rational. It lies more within the new quantum physics than classical mechanics. It can be unpredictable and not replicable, but nevertheless valid. Its reality is contained in the stories we tell. (Mehl-Madrona, 2007, p. 300)

The Use of Drama in Therapy

Traditional Indigenous healers often used a story to describe what people were experiencing and used live actions that involved everyone in the process. Acting out the story—dramatic enactment—allowed the past to become the present. Correspondingly, what Jacob Moreno, the founder of Psychodrama, did "was to stylize [his] method to utilize acceptable dramatic expression and incorporate psychological beliefs concurrent with his time … in fact [he] was influenced by the Shamanistic traditions of First Nations people of North America" (Moreno, as cited in France, 2002, p. 151).

In our Healing Circles, drama was used in a natural way to understand someone's situation and to involve everyone in the group. Instead of a person telling their story, the group could act the story out. This served as a means for bringing immediacy, spontaneity, and creativity to the healing process. Typically, the stage for the enactment was the centre of the Circle. For example, one's life

and the characters in the story would be played out with the same idea put forth by Moreno as scenes from one's life. The story could be as simple as acting out what had happened in a given situation or could take on a more complex story in which time travel or superheroes could be injected into it. Also, participants could rewrite the story and use elements of the spirit in which the one could become an animal spirit to change the outcome of the story.

Experiencing catharsis in which the client could emote and work at letting go of the pain from the past was an essential element of our use of drama. In our Healing Circle, elders play an important role in the healing process and, at any point, can speak up about the therapeutic process; thus, I often consulted with elders before and after my work with clients. Some elders have teachings, such as Sarah Modest, who called it Snuw'uyulh, or how to be a good person. She would encourage clients to use drama to bring the experiences of everyday life back from the past (personal communication, June 2010 to August 2012).

Clinical Examples: The Use of Drama in a Healing Circle

The client was a middle-aged man, living with a partner and her three young adult children, whom he described as dysfunctional and unhappy. After listening to his story, I sensed that we as a group could experience his story by playing out parts of his life that I divided into quadrants that the client would take me to as a spirit visiting the past.

Quadrant 1: Past Life as a Child

The client's father is a man with secrets to tell; he is an alcoholic and is concerned only about his own needs and desires. Messages to his children are that alcohol is a normal part of family life. He fights a lot with his wife and ignores his children unless there is something in it for him. On the other hand, the mother is a woman with good intentions, also an alcoholic, but is overshadowed by her husband, who is at the centre of power; as a result, she becomes defensive and angry a lot. The client's childhood experiences taught him "dysfunctional" lessons about family life.

Quadrant 2: Present Life in His Relationship

In the quadrant called the relationship world, there is a scene from the present; his girlfriend and her children populate it. She looks at her partner, the client, for the cheque that can finance vodka and bingo. She sleeps in a separate room, watches TV all day, has two cars, seldom drives her partner to or from work, and wants her meals on time regardless of whether he worked all night. While the children see the client as a cook and an all-around provider who does everything selflessly, they see their mother making demands, and they do it too, but innocently, not in a selfish way.

Quadrant 3: The Spirit World

In this quadrant, the client explores the world of tradition and teachings, where the past before colonial contact was the reality. An elder working with the group took on the role of the past, sharing the teachings that formed the way the client's ancestors had lived their lives. This context is pure, deep, and where the wisdom of the ancestors live; one can come here to experience the positive energy and power of one's ancestors. Alcohol is alien and not normal. We sat with the elder while she told him about the teachings, about the importance of family, and how these principles of family life that were respectful could be used today. She instructed him about how he could find people in his community who lived according to these principles and how he could live respectfully.

Quadrant 4: The Cosmic World

This is heaven, where the Creator and all that is good, universal, and all-compassionate exist. It is near and far, but full of wisdom, love, and all things good in the universe. The miracle force in the drama is the "Indigenous Superhero" who brings in elements of fantasy and wish-fulfillment. As a superhero, they have a positive energy that is all around and can come and rescue us; they can provide us with anything to get us out of bad situations; they can make us laugh and cry. They are the ultimate energy force that we can draw on anytime we need it and is universal and everywhere.

The therapist sets up the stage, returns to each quadrant of the client's life, keeps the action going, and ensures that each character stays in their role. The client experiences scenes from their life and can react in any way they want. After the drama, the worlds come together and the lessons from the four quadrants are integrated: the Circle shares what was learned, what was felt, what could be, or what each participant wants to be and do. Decisions can be made, and one can make changes, adjust to new conditions, or choose to keep things static. It is a choice.

Some of the drama tools that are used in Psychodrama include the soliloquy, whereby the client and the actors come out of character to talk to the Circle, as well as fantasy reality ("Indigenous Superhero"), exaggeration, the double, and role reversal. However, it is the sharing part of the drama where much of the meaning and the work are done. Our experience is that the client needs to hear from the group, the collective community, to put things into perspective and to make constructive changes in life. What the therapist does is help to reframe the meaning of what everyone contributed into actions for the client to live a more "sacred" life in staying on the "red road." Black Elk's teaching referred to the choice Indigenous people have in dealing with the challenge of the settlers coming into their lands by choosing "the road to technology (blue) or the road to spirituality (red)" (France, et al., 2013, p. 293).

The Counsellor as Storyteller

One cultural tool that a counsellor can use as a counselling strategy is adopting the role of storyteller. The art involved in storytelling in the Indigenous community is well known and widely appreciated in a variety of situations in which legends are used to share histories of places, people, and events. Stories can be used to teach and to inspire, but they can also be told in a therapeutic situation. Consider the words of traditional healer Jan Kahehti, who uses music and dance therapeutically:

> "*I da wa da di*" literally means "let us speak, let us find our voice." Through residential school, voice was taken away. It took some time, probably a good year. I worked with them through writing, journaling their story, then sharing it vocally, then singing, and laughing, and crying—all the things the voice is used for. It was quite an amazing transition. That was how we began to heal through the creative arts—singing and storytelling. (Kahehi, cited in Archibald, 2012, p. 41)

There are different ways of working with Indigenous people that create a more natural process yet have similar therapeutic effects as the traditional Western uses of the creative arts. In one Healing Circle, after a long day of counselling work, one client approached me and told me that she was ready to share her story with the Circle but felt uneasy about telling the story herself. This may seem contradictory from a Western counselling perspective, but consider that in traditional Indigenous teachings, storytelling plays a key role in reinforcing cultural traditions and helping communities navigate a complex world. From an Indigenous perspective, there is a different way of seeking the truth. Consider Umeek E. Richard Atleo's (2004) brilliant discourse:

> Is it possible there are other ways to access truths about existence other than through science? … Heretofore, scientific truth has been constrained by evidence founded in the context of a physical world. In contrast, spiritual truth is based on evidence founded in a spiritual context. Rules of evidence in one context do not necessarily apply to rules of evidence in another. For example, according to one common saying in the English language, a leopard cannot change its spots. This seems to be true in the physical world. However, in the spiritual world, transformation from one outward manifestation to another is commonplace. (p. 5)

The storytelling traditions from the past to the present have been important in the Indigenous socialization process that Catherine Swan Reimer (1999) described in the Inupiat oral tradition as a means of learning about another

person's experience, which is why stories hold a unique place in Indigenous societies around the world.

After being unable to persuade my client to share the story herself, I volunteered to tell her story in a dramatic way that would allow her to release the feelings of pain, anger, and humiliation that she had repressed since childhood after a series of sexual assaults by one of the priests in residential school. I outlined to her how I could tell the story based on what she had told me and asked her to help me choreograph the event. What we came up with was an approach that excited her and gave her the confidence to share the story of her assault as a child. Since the story was so powerful to me, it was important to think of it as a ceremony, so she was drummed into the Circle. I arranged to have the female participants of the Circle prepare a blanket for her to lay on after entering the therapy room, after which she covered herself with another blanket. She was encircled with the other female participants touching her to give support and to share their positive energy.

In contrast, the male participants were instructed to stand in a circle facing away from her and from the other women as if they were guarding her. As I dramatically told what she had shared with me privately, she began to emote, and all the feelings that had been suppressed, all the self-blame and oppression that she had internalized came out, and she released the pain. An agreed-upon song by the well-known Kwakwaka'wakw singer Frank Nelson was played on a CD, and at this point, she stood up and started to dance while the other female participants joined her dancing in a circle—all of them were now smiling.

At this point, she was "brushed off" with cedar boughs, and she proceeded to the nearby water and had a ritual bath with some supporters. Once she returned to the Circle, we all began to process the experience for her and discussed how she could live her life in the future in a constructive manner. In a Healing Circle, with all of the participants helping the client, facilitated by the therapist and by elders with ideas, insights, and personal anecdotes, a space is created in which voices can be heard and strategies found for supporting clients to "find their voices."

Woodcarving as Therapy

Among the creative arts that are cited often by those working with Indigenous people is woodcarving, which has become one of the most visible art forms, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, with distinctive totem poles, wooden boats, and small handicrafts. In our Healing Circle, we include woodcarving as part of the therapy creative arts activities, and I believe this inclusion is an important part of the healing process. At night after supper, as a group, we spent numerous hours carving a paddle that was one of the metaphorical tools of the "healing journey"; clients become aware that "tools" such as paddles are necessary to complete the journey. A carved paddle that I made during one of the Healing Circles

Figure 1
A Carved Paddle

(see Figure 1) is approximately three feet long, is made from yellow cedar with inlays of abalone shells, and sports the symbol of an eagle, a feather, and shapes representing behaviour characteristics. I asked everyone in the Circle who had carved a paddle to share what their choices of symbol and pictograph had meant to them. For me, the eagle is the most important symbol of our relationship with a higher power—the Great Spirit—while the feather symbolizes the importance of cleansing the mind, the body, the emotions, and the spirit as a part of staying on the sacred journey. As in this example, each client shared similar hopes for being a better person after our healing journey.

Each of the participants in the Circle to the Creator workshop included on the back of each paddle their signature and a positive message of hope. According to Hamilton (2016, p. 67), woodcarving, particularly among Indigenous people, has positive, beneficial results in people's physical and mental health, given that it is conducive to flow and mindfulness, reduces stress and promotes positive emotionality, helps with emotional processing, fosters a connection to nature, and provides social engagement and cultural meaning in one's life.

In my experience of woodcarving in our Healing Circles, Hamilton's (2016) conclusions are very much true; participants not only were more open after carving sessions (which occurred at the end of the day of therapy) but also were more cohesive as a group. Usually, almost everyone in the Circle—the participants, the elders, and I as therapist—participated in the carving session.

Particularly in therapy, this creative process parallels what an artist does, and the benefits are beyond description and fall into the realm of transformation. As in the artistic process, woodcarving brings people into the "here and now" so that, according to Liberman and Trope (2008), they "transcend the present and mentally traverse temporal distance, spatial distance, [and] social distance" (p. 1201). In other words, when doing art, not only do artmakers become engaged in the creative process, but also, they literally go somewhere else so that even sickness, pain, and dislocation are forgotten; the creative process and creative endeavours are therapeutic in themselves.

Every carving that I have made has a story of a time and a place in my life that, in its creation, symbolizes my hopes and reminds me that the act of creation

Figure 2
Wo'hali: Spirit Mask

is something holy, something beyond myself, and a potent reminder that art transforms the spirit in ways that are difficult to verbalize because the finished piece is indescribable in words alone. This is embodied in a mask I made of my spirit (see Figure 2). The Wo'hali spirit mask not only was therapeutic to make, but also, it transforms me when I wear it or even look at it and reminds me of a sacred place beyond time. I hope that all the participants in the Healing Circles will see that the creative arts are activities that can continue to help clients heal and stay on the "sacred" path to good health.

Integration: Decolonization, Liberation, Cultural Symbols, and Cultural Stories

According to E. Duran et al. (2008), counsellors should keep in mind when working with Indigenous people that

> soul wounding has been offered as a pivotal issue that is asserted to be at the root of many of the psychological problems facing society and the counseling profession. In order to heal the soul wound, it is suggested that the notion of soul healing needs to become a central metaphor that guides the daily activities of counselors and therapists. (p. 294)

A soul wound from an Indigenous perspective has been caused by oppression: The spirit has been hurt so profoundly that the only course of action is to liberate the mind, the body, and the spirit of the oppression causing the wounded soul.

In Healing Circles, decolonization and working to eliminate the internalized oppression in residential school survivors is crucial. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) examined several studies that demonstrated that "there is evidence that art-based interventions are effective in reducing adverse physiological and psychological outcomes" (p. 254), which reflects my personal experiences with my clients, my family, and my friends. Therefore, I am of the firm belief that the creative arts, especially for those who work with Indigenous people, are culturally appropriate and effective approaches to healing.

I have stressed that knowledge of Indigenous healing philosophy, practices, and traditions is a must for those who wish to employ the creative arts—such as music, dance, and drama—in their healing practices. What distinguishes Indigenous healing using creative arts from Western forms of healing is the holistic nature of how art is infused with culture and with the healing process. Symbols provide not only important meaning in art and ceremonies but also the importance of identity in decolonizing ourselves.

In the Pacific Northwest, fish of all kinds have been a food source and part of the symbols and stories of Indigenous people in the western hemisphere. In my experience in counselling, having symbols available to work with as tools for my clients to hold and to talk about brings in a tangible element that clients can see or hold in their hands as I work with them in a Healing Circle. An eagle feather, a drum, a medicine bag, and a carving are some examples that symbolize concepts, history, and stories that make it easier for clients to relate to culture and identity.

Appreciating or creating art has a well-known healing effect that seems to strengthen important values that are key to building on strength. For example, Figure 3 is a metre-long carving on yellow cedar of a salmon with various cultural symbols that can become talking points, such as a Wolf (loyalty), a Warrior (guardian), an eagle feather (spirituality), and arrowheads (tools for fighting oppression). Even the materials that are used in the art piece can be highlighted in order to increase the client's awareness in describing characteristics that they want to emphasize, such as yellow cedar (providing sustenance), abalone shells (beauty and light), paint on the warrior (creating identity and personality), and deer bone (relations). When I created this carving, there was a story that I wanted to emphasize in sharing my inner and outer selves so that my clients can interpret any of the symbols in their way to tell their story.

Thus, the use of creative arts has a curative effect on the mind, the body, the spirit, and the emotions in themselves. Each act in creating something, whether it is a symbol, a song, a story, or a dance, is a reminder of our humanity and of our relationship with the spirit world of our ancestors. In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King (2003) emphasizes that

Figure 3
Salmon: Integrated Identity Symbols

> one way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. (p. 153)

The stories we were taught as children to visualize in our minds are given in word form but are seen in our minds as living actions of people, animals, and deities. Books, whether in word or in picture form, fire our imagination and we experience great emotion, ideas, and hope that inspires. All creative arts used therapeutically help us as counsellors and help our clients connect with the spirit world by engaging in painting, drama, singing, and so on to something greater than our natural selves. I sense that once our clients see what they can do to bring about their healing, they will have to choose how they will live their lives. This takes commitment and hard work, which can ensure successful change to constructive living or to living in harmony with all things.

Most counselling and healing practices fail because they require hard work and require establishing new ways of being, which is why my experience with the creative arts provides something tangible, something that you can hold in your hands and touch and always be able to see differently at each stage of life. What characterizes creative arts in Indigenous healing is that it provides all participants with a meaningful collective endeavour, a chance for group support, an individually ego-strengthening experience, and a "map" for the transformation of our lives. Yet it is the power of the creative arts that brings about a sense of rebirth for all participants in a Healing Circle and the beginning of a "redeemed person."

Conclusion

In this article, I have offered my perspective on the importance of the culture, the diversity, the context, the protocol, and the values that need to be understood by counsellors when working with Indigenous clients through the creative arts. I have stressed that counsellors must have an overall objective in decolonizing their approach, which involves understanding what it means to live a constructive life in an Indigenous context, either in a "village" (Reserve) or in an urban environment. I have made the point that creative arts are an important aspect of Indigenous cultures by providing from my clinical experiences some ways of working with clients through the media of music, dance, storytelling, drama therapy, and woodcarving. Finally, the use of symbols in art pieces, such as the three carvings included in this article, can help clients see their culture as a means to strengthen identity and as useful reminders of what each client carries with them. E. Duran (2006) reveals the following idea that most of my clients and I can relate to:

> Over the years, I have accumulated several "power objects." These objects either are known to possess power derived through ceremony or are simply ones that Native culture has accepted as objects with healing power … These objects should be visible to anyone who walks into the container or office. The Native patient will relate to these objects as much as [they] will relate to the therapist, either consciously or subconsciously. (p. 43)

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About the Author

Honoré France is from the Ani-yun-wiwa First Nation and is an associate at Arrow to the Moon. He is also a professor emeritus in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria (Counselling Psychology Program). His current research and teaching interests are reconciliation and residential schools, cross-cultural issues, eco-psychology, and spirituality. He is active in sports, furniture making, arts (especially carving), and handyman activities.

Address correspondence to Honoré France. Email: hfrancer@uvic.ca