Highlights of a Conversation with Students at the First Nations University of Canada

Group 1

First we were thinking about addictions, and really thinking about alcoholism or drug use. There’s some other kinds too, like shopping is kind of an addiction for somebody, body image, dieting control. So it’s like the concept about what we are thinking about here. It’s like way broader of a term. And then we talked about how culture does affect it, because culture is not just religion-based, it’s your shared past experiences, your friends who are influencing you and making a new culture develop from the old one, so it’s always been changing but it also does influence a person’s life and their perspective, what they’re thinking about. And then we were talking about how connectivity with the culture is so much important, like in some cultures, such as Muslim, and like for us, who are in Canada but we are still keeping some connections with our old traditions and with the churches. Like we have some occasions when Elders come in and tell you the values and how these should be the rules, and what your meaning of living is, like kind of church things, so they just keep you in touch with their rules and regulations. And then we talked about how lifestyle choices are, versus the addiction concept – like are you even thinking about you’re an addict? Maybe you are thinking that’s your lifestyle choice, drinking a whole bottle of wine an hour, or drinking for like two days straight, like are you thinking – that’s your concept – am I taking it as an addiction or am I taking it as a lifestyle choice? Then we talked about how role modeling, positive role modeling and negative role modeling affects young children, such as like a family, we talked about a family, where a dad was partying up with their teenage kids and he’s been charged and a week later he was still partying up, so it’s kind of bringing a normality into addiction in young teenage groups.
I guess I started off by sharing, I asked my peers what they were studying and maybe to trigger some conversation about, like will being involved with Aboriginal people affect their area of study? And if they would consider learning more about Aboriginal culture in general, and so from that question. I don’t know everybody’s names, but she’s also in health studies in pre-med, and so I had asked her, like if she planned to study in the province where there is a higher population of Aboriginal people, you know would she consider taking on more teachings of the Aboriginal culture to help her understand the higher population of Aboriginal people and what they will need. We looked at the future, and possibly opening the doors to understanding what it is to be on a healing journey. So she had stated that is an option for her to learn more about Aboriginal healing methods so that when she comes to that situation, maybe where she has a patient that requires that, she’ll have an understanding.

And I also point out that, I think its important – and I know that he’s in pre-med too and I think he would agree with me that Aboriginal education should be mandatory in high school, in university, even in med school because there’s some doctors and nurses that are just unaware of Aboriginal problems, or unaware that its important that, you know family’s in important, like family wants to gather around the dying in the hospital or they want to integrate some of their culture into that conventional medicine, like drugs that doctors would prescribe. And I think education just at an early age is very important.

Aboriginal culture is a way of life for me and not just to deal with addictions but to get through everyday life. So I don’t restrict it just to a healing methods, right. And I guess, our other peer was unaware of any type of Aboriginal culture until she took a course here at university, you know for her also it was difficult to answer the question, but you know because she was given that opportunity to be in that class, now the doors are opening to know she would like to learn more, that’s really hopeful and helpful for the future.
Group 3

We just wrote down some words that we thought of when we thought of the value that incorporating culture and that type of thing could bring. And the words we have are community, identity, family, social support, cultural continuity, cultural pride, connectiveness, that culture is non static, and that would, I think it would establishing a type of confidence in people. I remember in Indigenous Studies 101 course, they talked about how there’s racist attitudes that non-Aboriginal people would have towards Aboriginal people, but then because of like that oppression and those stereotypes, then often even Aboriginal people can develop that own type of self-hatred or like a shame kind of attitude. Then I would think that appropriating culture in a way that where people who aren’t even Aboriginal are valuing and seeing that, you know, I don’t know another word for value, but that there’s value in life, in that part of your life. It helps kind of break down those things that some people would have built up in themselves, of shame or whatever it might be. And yeah, that culture non-static is basically that it doesn’t necessarily mean that you do the ceremonies, or the songs or the Sweatlodges, but it can include that, but it’s not limited to those things. That is really just having that connectedness to your culture, and having that pride in who you are and in your identity, and within your community is really important.