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The Greatest Distance between People is not Space but Culture

By Carolyn Kenny [\[Author bio & contact info\]](#) & Brynjulf Stige [\[Author bio & contact info\]](#)

Blackfoot scholar, Jamake Highwater (1981), described this "distance" in his work titled *The primal mind: Vision and reality in Indian America*. His work is a powerful explanation about why art is so important to our survival as human beings. He reminds us that art is often the last remnant surviving the coming and going of people and cultures and advocates the continuing appreciation of cultural artifacts as a way of keeping ourselves alive and well. Why? On this point he quotes Octavio Paz:



What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death. The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life (Paz in 1967, cited in Highwater, 1981, p.x)

The relationship between the arts and culture is the key. As many scholars have indicated, culture is difficult to study because it is implied (Hall, 1976; Stige, 2002; Kenny & Stige, 2002). The function of art is to make the implicit explicit. So through an appreciation of the arts, we come to know culture.



Let's consider multiculturalism in the context of music therapy.

Vitality. Immediacy. Intensity. Possibilities. These are some of our treasured concepts in music therapy.

How do we keep concepts like these alive in our work? Jean Gebser, a Polish-born cultural philosopher, proposes, in his great work, the *Ever-present Origin*, that only through a state of consciousness that accepts our tribal origins, can we stay truly alive in the deepest sense. He proposes that instead of discarding previous structures of consciousness, historically speaking, and regarding them as un-"Enlightened", we integrate, and remain aware of our "origins", the sources of life (Feuerstein, 1987).

Gebser presents us with five "structures of consciousness" – the archaic, the magical, the mythical, the mental, and the integral structures (not stages). This is an elaborate work that considers concepts like perspective, latency, transparency, and many others. He traces our human development from the earliest times. Certainly, the first three structures of consciousness were in times when tribal realities were primary. Perhaps, if Jean Gebser were alive today, and commenting on our problems in multiculturalism, he would say that many of our problems are caused by our rampant individualism in the Western societies. If we had only kept some of the consciousness of our tribal sensibilities, we might have a deeper understanding of cultures that still function with tribal norms. There has been much discussion about the distinctions between individualism and collectivism in the multicultural literature. But tribalism is much more specific.

In this issue of *Voices*, there are several texts that consider tribalism and how music therapy and music are related to tribal systems that use ritual at the core of their healing systems. Gustavo Gattino offers us an interview with a Brazilian anthropologist who studies the Guarani, a South American tribe that has occupied the rainforests for thousands of years. And Charles O. Aluede and Pastor (Mrs) M. A. Iyeh offer an very informative article on how Music Therapy is developing in Nigeria. Kate Williams and Vicky Abad also describe their work with Aboriginal families in Australia in our archival text for this issue.

Through the concept of "ever-present", Gebser emphasizes our music therapy concept of "immediacy." And through his concept of "origins", he reminds us of our vitality, the possibilities, and the intensity of new beginnings – the source of life itself. He believes that we are moving into the possibilities of a more integrated consciousness, one that will embrace our tribal roots, but also the positive aspects of the Age of Enlightenment, reflected in the mental structure of consciousness. This is good news for the multicultural efforts.

Gebser offers cultural/philosophical support for our work.

Now moving to a practical aspect, we might consider the works of Paul Pedersen and Pamela Hays, both psychologists who take on the dilemmas of multiculturalism in counseling practice.

Paul Pedersen, a Danish-born counseling psychologist, presents a new idea titled "Inclusive Cultural Empathy" (Pedersen, 2008a). Since the early 1970s Pedersen has taken up the issue of the discrepancies between individualism and collectivism through his work in China, the United States, as well as many other International venues.

As therapists, Pedersen proposes, we develop the meaning of "empathy" around one-on-one relationships. He suggests that we need to modify this approach into a more inclusive concept of collectivity. He writes:

The intellectual construct "empathy" developed in a context that favored individualism and described the connection of one individual toward another individual. However, globalization is changing that perspective. . . In the more collectivist non-Western cultures relationships are defined inclusively to address not only the individual but the many "culture-teachers" of that individual in a network of significant others. Being empathetic in that indigenous cultural context requires a more inclusive perspective than in the typically more individualistic Western cultures (Pedersen, 2008b)

He emphasizes the familial orientation in these indigenous or tribal societies. For Pedersen, cultural teachers include Ethnographic (Nationality, ethnicity, religion, language); Demographic (age, gender, affectional orientation, physical abilities); Status (social, economic, political, educational); Affiliation (formal like family or career, informal – shared idea of value). He positions these cultural teachers on a grid that considers how each influence our behavior, expectations, and values.

Pam Hays (2001) also offers a practical approach to therapists that is similar to Pedersen's. Hays is an American who lived and studied in Tunisia and thus has a tremendous amount of experience with the Arab culture. Now she works with clients from many cultures, but primarily Native Alaskans.

She proposes the ADDRESSING framework for assessing the therapist's own capacity to work in a multicultural context. So often, we imagine "assessment" to refer only to the client. But in this case, Hays is encouraging understanding across cultures by asking the therapists to examine their own identities. Her formula is:

- A** Age and generational influences
- DD** Developmental and acquired Disabilities
- R** Religion and spiritual orientation
- E** Ethnicity
- S** Socioeconomic status
- S** Sexual orientation
- I** Indigenous heritage
- N** National origin
- G** Gender

One of the important additions here is Hays' emphasis on "indigenous heritage." All people have tribal roots, one way or another. In her framework, this might give us this sense that Gebser suggests of the first three "structures of consciousness" – archaic, magical, and

mythical.

Hays writes:

The ADDRESSING framework conceptualizes cross-cultural work as involving two broad categories of effort by the therapist. The first category concerns the therapist's personal self-exploration and growth; key to this process is a growing understanding of the influence of culture on one's own belief system and worldview. The second category consists of the therapist's self-education about clients' cultures, which usually leads to a deeper understanding of clients (Hays, 2001, p. *).

In Kenny's (2006) theoretical work, the Field of Play, the works of Gebser, Pedersen, and Hays would be interpreted as "conditions" in the space of the aesthetic, or the human person (therapist or client). Stige also considers the central role of culture in music therapy in his important work, *Culture-centered music therapy* (2002).

The function of art is to make the implicit explicit. Through appreciation of and participation in the arts, we come to know culture. This allows for bonding. Bonding may create groups and thus also *gaps*. Sometimes the greatest distance between people is not space but culture. But the arts may allow for bridging too. So – we could think of culture as a space too, a space that allows for both distance and association.

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