FNIS 100: Interview with Dr David Gaertner

By Marcus Jung

Dec 5th, 2016

1. **Based on your experience, what do you see as key principles that non-Indigenous community members must consider when engaging with Indigenous people and issues?**

Dr Gaertner speaks to the importance of learning to be conscious of one’s own positionality and this relationship with the land and other communities. That this understanding is an ongoing process. (**humility**)

Investigating yourself is important because oftentimes, the attention is put onto “the other” and how to help them. But a large part of the challenge is an unwillingness to look at yourself. (**Humility**)

It is not only about learning about the other, but learning about yourself. Seeking to understand your own positionality is important because it can influence the powerdynamics and how you go about these. Even if you are welcomed into the discussion, your presence influences the discussion. He speaks about himself being a white, non-Indigenous, able-bodied male and that holds a lot of power and how “My body inflect how discourse happens in room”, speaking to how his positionality change power dynamics of dialogue and spaces. (**engagement: when not to engage and one can unintentionally be engaging by presence)**

Understanding when to step back is key. He expresses how “nobody is welcome in all situations” and that that is okay. That it is okay to feel bad when exiting but that it is more important that we learn how to gracefully exit situations that we are not welcomed in. **(respect: their decision regardless of how this makes themselves feel)**

Dr Gaertner said that there needs to be a mix between proactively and reactively removing yourself from situations. That one should be understanding when having someone tell you that you are not welcomed and reacting from that. Yet proactive exiting is important as well an requires an understanding of yourself.

These abilities seem to stem from the ability to listen, which Dr Gaertner speaks to. Listening to what people and communities are saying, their non-verbal cues when in discussion. Often people do not want to listen because the outcome is that they realize that the work that they are doing is not beneficial to other communities. (**freedom**)

I brought up the idea of humbleness as a principle that perhaps could be seen in one’s willingness to leave the conversation or challenge. And although Dr Gaertner agrees with the sentiment, he cautions to be conscious of how this word may continue to centralize the people in positions of power. That it should not be making a show of what we are doing and these gestures must be done quieter. (**humility**)

With an understanding of yourself and your own positionality

* Learning how to be conscious to land and culture
* On going process
* Relationship to land and community
* Deeper to my own history (german settlers)
* Own positionality
* Investigating yourself
* When to step back (nobody is welcoming in all situations
* My body inflect how discourse happens in room
* Different people feel different to different positionality
* it’s okay to feel bad if you are not welcome
* hard in the academic (when so eager)
* Listening what people are saying, the non-verbal cues, contradicting (even if you think that you are doing a good job) 0> open them
* Don’t overdie the universities
* Proactively and reactively removing
* Gracefully in exit
* Powerdynamics -> be aware of self so you know where you are in situations
* Space that they take up as while man
* Humbleness? Not benevolent -> it is still centering themselves.
	+ Not making a show of what we are doing
	+ It is a quieter gesture

 **2. What have been the most effective ways that you have seen non-Indigenous individuals and communities engage with Indigenous issues?**

Putting yourself in positions to listen by gaining a greater understanding of who you are.

Dr Gaertner says that the most effective ways of engagement have been ones that work WITH the community, and not work ON communities.

He says that the academy can be a competitive and isolating process of remaining in an office and writing papers, which is quite an independent task. But in this field of work, it is important to know the communities, whether it is living on the land or simply reaching out to the communities.

Dr Gaertner is collecting texts that have not been published and hopes to republish them as a newer version. He is conscious to include the voices of the community and to see what the community hopes to include or disregard when publishing with them. (**inclusion**)

Working WITH community again stems to the importance of listening. To hear everyone’s voices when the colonial system represses the voices of so many and to understand the specificity of each community’s needs for their challenges. (**inclusion**)

* How WITH community
* Academie isolating process
* Gotten to know the communities
	+ Live on the land
	+ Anthology of stories -> reaching out to community
* Texts written that have not been published
	+ In connection with community!
	+ Include their voice with the conversation
* With rather than on
* Heard everyone’s voices that colonial system repress
* Community specific

 **3. How do you think we can improve the engagement of non-Indigenous communities with Indigenous issues?**

This question was very broad and hence not as easy to answer. Given this, Dr Gaertner explains how it depends on the issue and it depends on whether these communities want the engagement or not. (**freedom**)

It is paternalistic when white communities want to “help” an act upon a “savoir position”. And although it is great to be willing to help, you do not necessarily have to be doing something FOR or even WITH the community. Oftentimes, it is about doing something to change yourself. It again touches on the point of looking inward and being willing to listen to others in order to inform yourself. And informing yourself in a way so that it allows you to be in a position to listen better. (**freedom: let them do because it is about changing ourselves**)

* It depends on the issue
* Depend on whether these communities does want it
* White community “help” -> paternalistic
* Not a savior position
* Willing to help -> to help
* Informing self -> so you are in a positions to listen

**4. What are some practical things that a student or faculty member in non-humanities/social sciences discipline can do to engage with Indigenous issues?**

This is the ultimate or perennial question: how to wake other communities to these issues. There is such a wide range of people so there is difficulty in sharing this grand ideas with others. (**voicing**)

Dr Gaertner says that sharing stories is something that can be done. He says it is hard to hate someone after hearing their stories as you can go past the stereotypes, hate and anger. He tries to pass on stories of his own through novels or film recommendations so the conversation is not central to himself. (**voicing**)

Connecting this idea of practical things to do with the previous question as people from other faculties can listen. Listen to new topics to them and learning from it.

* Perential questions
* How to wake other communities?
* Wide range of people?
* Through stories
	+ Hard to hate someone whom you know their stories
	+ Past stereo types, hate and anger
	+ Pass on stories
	+ Decenter yourself -> other people include in conversation

**What Keeps your going through these big challenges?**

What keeps Dr Gaertner motivated to continue his work in his field is the community and the sense of accountability. The more that he speaks and engages with community members, faculty, his own work and students, the more there is to do and it perpetuates. It starts with doing something that you love to do and growing it alongside other people.

* More work in this field, the more community that you find connected to and accountable.
* Start from the love of the work -> drew you in
* Accountable -> the more you do
* Help support that work others do, helping students share their voices
* Critic and scholar -> presentations and writes
* Platforms for other voices
* Making spaces

5. How do you think we can **increase the engagement** of non-Indigenous communities with the challenges that Indigenous peoples face?

\*answered in previous questions asked