PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

Can healing intelligence exist beyond the individual?

Rethinking inner healing intelligence through critical vitalism and Indigenous thought



MAPS CANADA

Overview

This conceptual paper rethinks inner healing intelligence, the idea that organisms possess an **innate capacity to move toward healing.**

Drawing on critical vitalism and Indigenous philosophies, the authors suggest that **healing does not occur in isolation.** It develops through relationships with the body, other people, culture, place and the more-than-human world*.

More-than-human world:

the interconnected domains of existence that transcend the boundaries of the individual ego and physical body

The Central Principle of Inner Healing Intelligence (IHI)



PARTICIPANT

The participant remains an active agent in healing,



THERAPIST

while the therapist avoids imposing a predetermined direction.

Stanislav Grof developed IHI through his work with psychedelic therapy and non-ordinary states of consciousness over 60 years.

MAPS CANADA

Healing through relationship and place

The paper draws on **Acoma**, **Haudenosaunee**, **Wixárika** and other Indigenous teachings.



LAND



COMMUNITY



CEREMONY + MUSIC



MORE-THAN-HUMAN

Across these distinct traditions, health can involve reciprocal relationships with land, community and the more-than-human world. Ceremony, music and territory actively participate in the process of healing.

Why "inner" may be too small

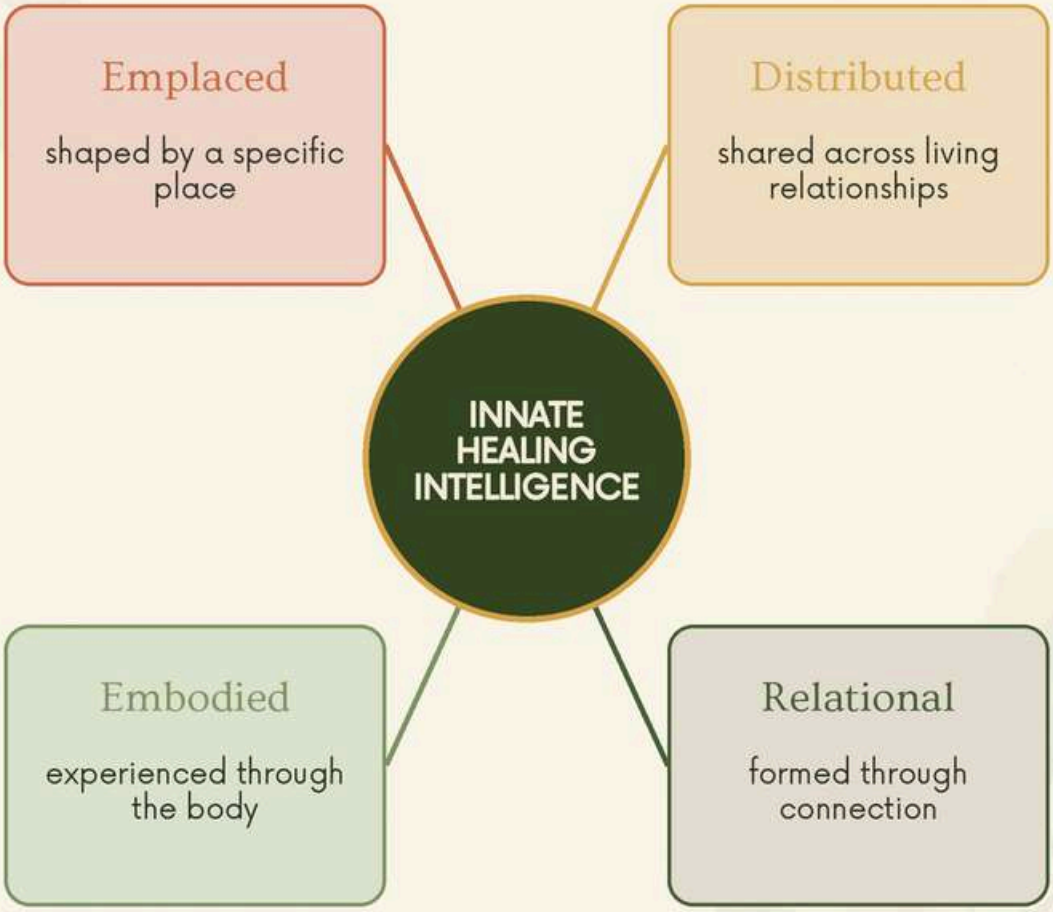
The authors argue that not only does it place the onus on the individual, but that **healing also develops through relationships with the external world** - like community, culture, fungi, plants, animals, landscapes.



An expanded definition of healing

The authors suggest the term **innate healing intelligence.**

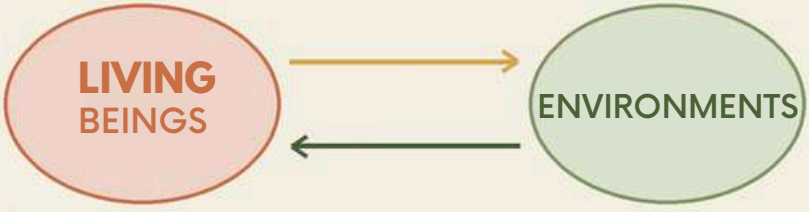
'Innate' describes a healing capacity that is:



What is Critical vitalism?

Critical vitalism understands life as a dynamic process. Living beings continually shape and respond to their environments. Bodies, minds and places develop through these relationships.

The authors use this philosophy to explore IHI as a possible healing process and an ethical way of relating to life.



Bodies • minds • places

Implications for psychedelic therapy

This framework expands set and setting beyond mindset and the treatment room.

Practitioners could pay closer attention to:

- Culture, community and belonging
- Music and sensory surroundings
- Local ecology and natural settings
- The participant's relationships with place

Inner-directed practice protects participant agency while recognizing that healing is shaped by relationships, culture, place, music, environment and the more-than-human world.

Evidence gaps

IHI remains difficult to define and test.

It may also:

- Make participants feel responsible for poor outcomes
- Encourage therapists to misread participants' refusal as part of "the process"
- Support decontextualized use of Indigenous knowledge

The authors recommend:

- Continuous consent
- Qualitative interviews
- Further research into awe, mystical experience and expanded selfhood.

MAPS CANADA

References

“Skin contains land and birds”: Understanding inner healing intelligence through critical vitalism and Indigenous thought.

Williams, K., Bédard, A.-A., & Pustarfi, L. (2026).
Journal of Psychedelic Studies, 10(1), 59–74.
doi.org/10.1556/2054.2025.00448