



## **Finding Our Way Home: An ecological sense of self and honouring the places we are from**

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the role of the pedagogy of place, specifically places where we feel at home and how they have acted pedagogically upon us. It also examines the role of the pedagogy of the imagination and how we locate ourselves within cultures and worldviews. Indigenous people understand the environmental ecology and the cultural ecology of a place as a living animated wholeness. Indigenous people and their lands are an interwoven whole. This living wholeness as well as the individual parts are struggling for survival. As an Indigenous scholar, artist, educator I have tracked my lived experiences within this integration of the biosphere with the ethnosphere and witnessed how they have created a specific sensibility, view of the world, and perspective on environmental education. This article describes how these experiences became the foundation for the creation of an Indigenous pedagogical approach to environmental education and eventually informed a course for in-service educators. The final section of the article outline this pedagogical approach as well as its resulting curriculum and concludes with a vision of the implications for such an Indigenous arts-based process in environmental teacher education.*

 REGIONAL CENTRE OF EXPERTISE  
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## INTRODUCTION

I am an Indigenous scholar/artist/educator who grew up on the back of the Great Turtle, surrounded by the rugged Canadian Shield of Northwestern Ontario in Canada. I have witnessed in my homeland and elsewhere in the homelands of other Indigenous people a great struggle for survival, the continued existence of their traditional lands as well as their cultural heritage. In my travels I have been gifted by experiences in which Indigenous people have shared their lands and culture with me. Some of the most compelling and moving moments have been when in an act of great generosity they share their creation stories, and other stories as we visited the sacred sentient landscape of their people. Again and again my imagination begins to move and morph, such that I can experience a vitalizing and animating of their land, or environmental ecology of place through participating in the telling of their stories. Their cultural ecology or cosmology also acknowledges the animating spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1994) of their sentient geography. In these shared moments their landscapes are transformed for me into revered living and breathing places of being-ness. They are alive in all ways and their understanding or imagination for reading the unique patterns, or decoding their place lives within their stories and their Indigenous ecological knowledge. These experiences have deeply affirmed my own experience of growing up wherein the land and the culture were an oneness, a living whole. I have also witnessed, at home and abroad, the wounding of the environmental ecology through multiple forms of extractive industry and community development, as well as the wounding of the cultural ecology of Indigenous people around the world (Deloria, 1973, 2001).

In their stories Indigenous people are describing the sentient ecology of their land and in so doing are articulating how their cosmology and sacred geography created a unique environmental and spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1994). I believe they are inviting us to acknowledge the unique ecological wholeness of their places, and I appreciate the way in which they vividly describe how their people have lived well in these places for thousands of years. In them we are witnessing the

powerful interplay of the bio/cultural diversity (Turner, 2010; Maffi et al, 2011) of their place and by visiting these sacred sites with them we were honouring the unique and utter congruence or complementariness of their place and its people. We are witnessing the profound reciprocal relationship between the a environmental ecology and it's spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1994) or the wedding of biosphere with it's ethnosphere (Davis, 2009). The following quote from Davis eloquently describes this relationship:

Together the myriad of cultures makes up an intellectual and spiritual web of life that envelops our planet and is every bit as important to the well being of the planet as the biological web of life that we know as the biosphere. You might think of this social web of life as the "*ethnosphere*," a term perhaps best defined as the sum total of all thoughts and intuitions, myths and beliefs, ideas and inspirations brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness. The ethnosphere is humanities greatest legacy. It is the product of our dreams, embodiment of our hopes, the symbol of all we are and all that we, as a wildly inquisitive and astonishing adaptive species, have created.

And just as the biosphere, the biological matrix of life, is being severely eroded by the destruction of habitat and the resultant loss of plant and animal species, so too is the ethnosphere, only at a far greater rate. No biologist, for example, would suggest that 50 percent of all species are moribund. Yet this, the most apocalyptic scenario in the realm of biological diversity, scarcely approaches what we know to be the most optimistic scenario in the realm of cultural diversity. (Davis, 2009, p. 2-3.)

This description highlights much of what I have experienced on my journeys. Through the telling or sharing of oral traditions, the graphic depictions from their mythology, as well as their histories are actively and collectively remembered each time through the retelling. The language and the stories hold knowledge (Archibald, 2008), as do the Indigenous knowledge practices. They offer us a unique imagination of what it means to be human and how to live well in a particular place. And it is this living whole-ness that is struggling to survive.

Among many Indigenous peoples there is also a great sadness in the telling of their new story. I remember wandering down to the edge of a polluted river feeling a tearing tension in my heart, because I could see how deeply distressed the elders were. The once glorious river of the past was now laboring for it's own existence let alone her ability to offer her sacred waters to others. These transformations are happening, not only ecologically, but they are also challenging the very core of a peoples understanding of the landscape as a sacred place, as a sentient ecology of being. It also challenges their essential understanding of themselves, as beings of that place. Cajete describes the profound reciprocity of relationship between Indigenous people and the land as follows:

An ecological sense of relationship encompassed every aspect of traditional... life. American Indians understood that an intimate relationship between themselves and their environment was the essence of survival and their identification as a people... their understanding of ecological relationship reflected in every aspect of their lives, their language, art, music, dance, social organization, ceremony, and their identity of themselves as

human beings... they understood that the natural universe was imbued with life and with sacredness. (Cajete, 1996, p. 136)

What once had been a rich place naturally and culturally is disappearing before the Elder's eyes. And the local governance and economy are radically changing for local Indigenous communities. They are impacted in significant ways as they struggle for their own survival within their own territory. I remember standing on the edge of a man made canal, which was really the edge of the river as it flowed through the middle of a city. The local community had decided to contain and constrict the waters of the once mighty river by building walls of timber and cement; here the river was not allowed to be a river, and the dirty water flowing through the canal made it more like a sewer flowing through the town. On this particular trip a group of Indigenous scholars and elders had stopped at that place because it was also an important site within their creation story. In my experience at the time the two imaginations collided and defied reconciliation (Littlebear, 2000).

Many years have passed and to this day, that amazing journey with the elders through their sentient landscape or sacred geography still haunts me. It left me unsettled for days, weeks, even years and it still lingers because it created such a deep tension within me as I witnessed the profound reciprocal relationship between their amazing cultural and mythological imagination, as well as the wealth of Indigenous knowledge practices they cultivated as a people as they lived well and participated fully in the circle of life in that place. There was such a profound marriage between the environmental ecology and spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1994), between the people and their land-scape. What happened to this landscape over the passage of time as well as the tensions and conflicts it created between the Indigenous community and the local business community around the issues resulting from environmental degradation were augmented by the struggles that resulted when two juxtaposing worldviews encountered each other. For the elders spoke of how the environmental crisis was bringing the communities together as they attended to the recovery or healing of the sites like the ones we encountered that day: a magnificent river almost dry; a wetlands that became a salt marsh and a rain forest that had become a dessert. This is not an isolated story, nor is its full impact to be found only with Indigenous people (Hawken, 2007). It has become one of the central issues to be addressed by Canada as a whole (Saul, 2009, 2014) and its impact is to be found within each and every course in Ecological Education that I teach to in-service educators.

#### A COMMON STORY

As a Canadian I grew up in a landscape where there was as much water and land due to the vast glaciers that carved and gouged out the Canadian Shield and left bare backs of granite bedrock exposed. Some of the rounded stone surfaces where I played as a child are some of the oldest rock formations on the face of the earth. This quilted textured landscape of lakes and rivers blended with boreal forest is my homeland. However, during a visit to Australia I experienced a startling moment where I noticed that I felt not from that place in profound ways. It was a landscape that was very dry and thirsted for water. It was also a kind premonition because I realized that Australia was once a vibrant vital green place that gradually became a

continent whose heartland was no longer a rainforest but now a vast desert landscape.

On my many trips around the world, either attending the World Indigenous Peoples Conferences or hearing presentations from scholars and elders from many other Indigenous nations around the world, I have heard fragments of similar narratives that were almost a retelling the same profound story. This process is happening in the United States, in Canada, in South America, in Africa and in many other places. What has struck me most is that the living memories of Indigenous peoples around the world, as cultivated through strong oral traditions, allow them to tell the stories and to bear witness to the overwhelming impact of what was happening to the earth (Hawken, 2007). This was because they cultivated the living memory through oral tradition and the continuous re-telling of their stories. It was because they 'remembered to remember' (Cajete, 1994).



#### ANOTHER WORLD

During my many trips I am often reminded that I grew up in a landscape where Nanabush leapt across Lake Superior and rested on the giant basalt chair far from the rocky shore where one finds agates, amethyst and quartz crystals. I have kayaked along the rugged northern shore of this vast inland sea and from a bush plane I have seen the dappled landscape where I grew up, with water everywhere. It is the land of the silver birch and the rich boreal forest with all its animals and plants, creating a pristine ecology that was still in a state resembling how it was when Gitchie Manitou first created it. In the early years when I was growing up it hadn't been touched much by the effects of modern civilization. I had grown up watching the northern lights move in a cosmic choreography in the night sky and marveled at the reflection that danced upon the dark waters of the still and silent northern lakes. For me it was like being/living within a sacred landscape.

My experience in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, helped me to deeply understand that I was not of those places for it was hard for me to understand them whether it is their powerful parchedness, their cavernous canyons and awesome austerity, or their persuasive potency that is quite different from the land that I had come to know. I realized that where I was from was quite other and the cultural background also reflected this as well. These experiences taught me to recognize what I had become through my own lived curriculum, and the pedagogy of place. My understandings of place were cultivated by an Anishinaabe imagination. Where I am from, what Cajete (1994) calls the environmental ecology: the land, or the natural world with its affective foundations has profoundly shaped me. So to my Indigenous heritage with all its various aspects of cultural understanding and community practice, the language as well as the Indigenous knowledge that helped one live well in that place have also shaped me. Perhaps most importantly, the Anishinaabe storied reality helped me understand my role and my responsibility to the land as part of a sacred reciprocal relationship. The stories from my place also left tracings in the landscape of the Canadian Shield in a similar way that I had witnessed on my travels with other peoples and their landscapes. There are places in North Western Ontario that are part of the mythological landscape of the Anishinaabe people; and their ecological practices and language also arose in reciprocal relationship with that place. The vocabulary of the Anishinaabe language is a vessel for the understanding of the people in that place, the words are the containers of life lived well and they act pedagogically upon us informing and shaping us through the subtle pedagogy of place. Many of these experiences are realities that cannot be translated easily into English because the nature of the experience as well as the concepts or images provoked by it are part of another imaginative landscape. There is often little understanding for place as a living ecology that includes the human and more than human: the elements of earth, water, air and fire, the plant beings, the animals and also the animating forces of the Manitou (Johnston, 2001). Ultimately, this storied landscape of oral tradition, is engaged with pedagogically in what I have come to understand as the pedagogy of the imagination and this creates the unique Anishinaabe worldview, or way of seeing the world.

I was schooled in these stories and they helped me to understand my environment as a storied place, as a place to understand my intimate integration within the family of relations with all the other sentient beings of that place. I would call it a northern lakes sentient ecology where rocks were visited because they held stories and told stories; where pictographs were painted on rock surfaces and depict central happenings of the Anishinaabe people. All of these rich deeply aesthetic experiences gave the foundation or gave birth to a sensibility for place and for what I have come to understand today as the aesthetic instrument of what has become my artist way. The senses and my sensibility were schooled through a participatory engagement with the landscape as I paddled on modern pilgrimages or quests for vision and understanding. Gregory Cajete's (1994) understanding of spiritual ecology including mythology, the arts, and vision; this too I came to understand as an Indigenous pedagogy of the imagination. One that shapes ones worldview or in my case the worldview of the Anishinaabe people and I recognize this has profoundly shaped my imagination through the pedagogy of the imagination.

As an Indigenous scholar/educator, I have learned through my lived curriculum how this environmental ecology of land, culture, and the affective domain of Indigenous pedagogy honors living well within a particular place through the cultural practices, language and Indigenous knowledge. And the biosphere of a particular place, is complemented and interwoven through and through by a spiritual ecology with the human cultivation of story, art, ceremony, and Indigenous spiritual practices as well as vision (Cajete, 1994). These cultural legacies are the elegant sufficiency of the natural landed ecology, the natural environmental ecology. Together they create the biocultural diversity of a place. I have learned to acknowledge the qualitative signature of the place that I am of or from and to see the elegant sufficiency of the cultural ecology in response to the sacredness of land. What Wade Davis calls an ethnosphere, is profoundly integrated into the circle of relations with the land. The reciprocal relationality between the human and the more than human world are represented in the culture and the language of a people and integrated into the living whole.

The myriad of cultures of the world are not failed attempts at modernity, let alone failed attempts to be us. They are unique expressions of the human imagination and heart, unique answers to a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human and alive? When asked this question, the cultures of the world responded in 7,000 different voices, and these collectively comprise our human repertoire for dealing with all the challenges that will confront us as a species over the next 2,500 generations, even as we continue this never ending journey. (Davis, 2009, p. 19)

In the Anishinaabe tradition, the Creator Gitche Manitou gave the capacity for language, but the Anishinaabe language was shaped and created through the reciprocity of people living well within their environmental ecology. As Davis acknowledges, “every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed of thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities” (Davis, 2009, p. 3)

During my lifetime, I have also experienced the terrible tension and sadness similar to what other Indigenous people in various places around the world have experienced, for when I was an adolescent change began to happen everywhere around me. I was constantly witnessing the dreadful destruction of the ecosystem, through clear cutting and the forestry practice of denuding the landscape. I also worked for two summers in an open pit iron mine, one of the largest iron mines in the world, where in order to develop the mine site they had to drain a lake, Steep Rock Lake, and flood some thirty square miles of boreal forest which created a large expansive waterway now known as the Flood Waters. This very real experience of the natural order of the environmental ecology and the Anishinaabe way of looking at it or beholding it, was also cultivated throughout my later life, through ecological education, canoe trips, Outward Bound, solo journeys and profound experiences of being alone in the wilderness. All these experiences created an enormous tension between the modern life that was developing everywhere around me and the living legacy of what I had been given by being Anishinaabe and growing up in that place with the land I was from.

## HONOURING WHERE I AM FROM

I am filled with gratitude for this gift of growing up in a place of near pristine beauty and being allowed to witness it unfold as it was created. When I was twenty-one I went on a very long canoe trip after returning from a prolonged visit to New York City and the surrounding area. There I had many experiences that exacerbated the complicated feelings, agonizing tensions, and profound sadness I carried with me as a person witnessing the destruction of the natural landscape. I was asking, as many do and at that time in life, what I should be doing with my life? What I had grown up in as ecological integrity was being systematically dismantled. And at this profound turning point in my life I was on a two-week canoe trip in Quetico Wilderness Park, *Quetican* meaning a place of unusual or unique beauty. One evening after a long day of paddling and portaging I remained by the edge of the lake after the others had retired to the tents. It was a particularly stunning evening with a rose wash caressing the landscape. I was lying on a large granite rock absorbing the lingering warmth of the day. As I was lying there watching the sunset and nightfall I was pondering that big question I just mentioned earlier, wondering what I should be doing with my life. Suddenly on three horizons, there appeared the swooshing swaths of moving light, the Aurora Borealis or northern lights, one in the north, one directly above me, and one to the south. The horizons to the north and south shimmered with the glow of a pulsing greenish luminosity. While the northern lights above me began to move, condensing and spiraling, then expanding and reaching in an amazing cosmic choreography. As I lay still and spell bound on the rock face it felt like someone was running their fingers over and along my heart, touching my spirit. As I was lying there, the swirling started to gather and then to ray out from a dark center, so that it suddenly became like an enormous eye, with a dark pupil and a radiating iridescent iris. It was like looking into the Eye of the Creator who was looking down from above into my soul. It has gradually become clear to me that this was a profound experience of being surrounded and embedded within a living sentient ecology. Throughout my life I was deeply participating in the northern wilderness as a sacred geography (Basso, 1996; Kimmerer, 2003, 2013) and I had come to so intensely love this storied landscape that I was now deeply distressed by the receding and diminishing of the boreal forest. It and I would have to move more and more to the north, away from the assault of modern life. Would I have to spend my whole life retreating to it and with it, further and further into the arctic regions as the clear cutting, and the large mining operations were continually being developed. I'd be forced to go on more and more pilgrimages further and further afar in order to find what I had been witnessing that night on Poohbah Lake. Gradually, in the months ahead I made the decision to study art as a response, what to do in the face of the ecological destruction, both environmentally and culturally that I was witnessing. The intent of my response was to bring to people experiences similar to what I had known on the land... through an Indigenous understanding of the world and through artistic creation. My response was to turn to the arts, dance, music, poetry and the visual arts. And like many before me to lift and revitalize the culture through the art.

What I have learned as an Indigenous scholar/artist is how these sentient ecologies, both the environmental ecology and the spiritual ecology shape not only our instrument for knowing, our bodily senses through aesthetic ways of knowing, but a cultivated sensibility as well. In addition there occurs simultaneously our

engagement with the spiritual ecology of the landscape and our cultural legacies through story, artistic practice and vision. This acts pedagogically on our imaginations, upon our psyche. Indigenous artistic practice transforms and heals.



#### THE PEDAGOGY OF PLACE

Over the years I have discovered how Indigenous research or an endogenous inquiry process, similar to what I have described above, can help educators situate themselves within their own pedagogical practices. By inquiring into the nature of their lived curriculum and acknowledging the pedagogy of place as well as the pedagogy of the imagination in their lives they come to an intimate understanding of their worldview and educational perspective. How I have experienced my lived curriculum within the living ecological world acts as a teaching story as I share my understanding of Indigenous pedagogy and explore its possible contribution to educational practice in general. I invite my students, pre-service and in-service teachers, to take up this living inquiry (K. Meyers, 2006) within themselves to the end that they have an experience of Indigenous pedagogy and honour their own endogenous inquiry process. What kinds of landscapes or ecologies have they emerged from? How is that different from what they are hearing from their dialogue partner? What can they learn to know from another human being growing up or being of another landscape or ecology? What are the places that we are from or of? (To use the Indigenous phrase) In my courses I invite, pre-service and in-service teachers to enter into an Indigenous pedagogical process, based on dialogue, living inquiry (K. Meyer, 2008, Reason, 1994), and lifewriting (Hasebe-Ludt et al 2009).

In the following I describe the specific process that M.Ed. students in an environmental education cohort participated in, in order to track (Cajete, 1994) and to trace their own footsteps back, to the places they are from, the landscapes that

they are of, as well as the family of relations that they have emerged from. Understanding that these places act pedagogically, that they educate the senses and thus the sensibility of a person; and they shape the images, stories, values and perspectives that inhabit the mind and the imagination of an individual. And by so doing they create through a subtle pedagogy, the instrument for knowing; and this instrument for aesthetic ways of knowing is met or interwoven by the cultural or spiritual ecology that the person was immersed in. Thus, the stories they were told, the view of the world that they grew up with, the ways they were taught to interpret the pattern of life, all actively shape their educational perspectives and worldview. We begin the process by tracking these interwoven and integrated ecologies (environmental and spiritual), using Indigenous pedagogy and understandings. An arts-based process of drawing, poetry, and life writing also accompanies the dialogue process.

I often begin with the Anishinaabe creation story, using the story as an analogue or metaphor (Bowers, 2001) for depicting the web of relations that has acted pedagogically on ones emerging worldview, be that within a rural community, on a farm, or in the wonderful vital cultural ecology of the city. These land-scapes or city-scapes have formed and informed us all. It has formed our sensibilities and left delicate tracings within our imagination and created a deeply intrinsic disposition of the person we gradually become.

I know you may be wondering why one would begin with an Indigenous creation story, particularly an Anishinaabe creation story? I present this in terms of my own tracking (Cajete, 1994) and wayfinding (Davis, 2009) process and as an example of the practice I am inviting my students to enter into. Therefore, the sensibilities, dispositions, and embodied lived experience of our worldview, is one we achieve through full immersion in our place over time. This needs to be cultivated to be congruent, to have integrity and authenticity. So by tracking the places we are of, oneself, by seeing how one fully participated in the places one is from we can also track the emergence of our selves. I recognize that within the oral traditions of the Indigenous people there are many examples. I am speaking from my place and I cannot speak from another place, this is where I am situated hermeneutically (Smith, 1991; M. Meyer, 2003, 2008) within the circle of understanding. Thus, my stories, metaphors, and experiences are only windows or signposts, examples to help the students navigate or wayfind within the living landscapes of their own lived curriculums (Chambers, 2002; 2008). They take up the inquiry, living inquiry (K. Meyers, 2008) to discover how the environmental and cultural ecologies they are from have shaped and informed them.

What I am actually telling is a teaching story, a teaching story that is interwoven with the Anishinaabe creation story, which has pedagogically informed my worldview, and thus my experiences of the world. I aim to make transparent this process or pathway from the phenomenology of my lived experience, to show how the capacities or a subtle sensibilities have arisen from my being from a place, in other words to bear witness to my own becoming and glean understanding of the implicit causality within my own life. In the telling I acknowledge the tacit infrastructure of my view of the world or worldview as well as my way of reading the patterns of life. This, I humbly offer as an example of the process, I am inviting them into, to participate in a living inquiry into their indigeneity though the re-telling of their own story of becoming. We track these experiences through the lived phenomenology of what it means to be human and from a place honouring

the dimensions of experience that Manu Meyer (2008) calls the triangulation of meaning, from gross empiricism to a causal meaning making, from an Indigenous epistemological perspective. In order to experience this hermeneutic inquiry one must perform one's wayfinding; enact the quest, an inquiry into who one is and where we come from. If one has the courage to ask: Who am I, and where am I from. Then one has the courage to ask: what is my worldview and ultimately what is my vision for the future? Through the stories, my examples act as a metaphorical template or gateway for others to enter into a similar process for themselves through acknowledging their own metaphors, their own language, words, their own gestures, images, and stories. For I believe like Thomas King, "the truth about stories is that that is all we are." (King, 2003, p.2)

I am inviting my students into a landscape that is somewhat different than their own, or a paradigm that may be different from their own, to help them become awake to their own place and to the waters in which they swim. As Maxine Greene (1978) says this act of the imagination helps us to become "wide awake" to our own worldviews, ways of knowing, being, doing, and creating.

And so it is that I begin:

In his wisdom Kitche Manitou understood that his vision had to be fulfilled. Kitche Manitou was to bring into being what he has seen, heard, and felt. Out of nothing he made rock, water, fire, and wind. Into each he breathed the breath of life. On each he bestowed with his breath a different essence and nature. Each substance had its own power, which became its soul-spirit. From these four substances Kitche Manitou created the physical world of sun, stars, moon, and earth.

To the sun Kitche Manitou gave the powers of light and heat, to the earth he gave growth and healing, to the waters purity and renewal, to the wind music and the breath of life itself.

On Earth Kitche Manitou formed mountains, valleys, plains, islands, lakes, bays, and rivers. Everything was in its place; everything was beautiful. Then Kitche Manitou made the plant beings. These were four kinds: flowers, grasses, trees, and vegetables. To each he gave a spirit of life, growth, healing and beauty. Each he placed where it would be the most beneficial, and lend to the earth the greatest beauty and harmony and order.

After plants, Kitche Manitou created animal beings conferring on each special powers and natures. There were two-leggeds, four-leggeds, wingeds and swimmers.

Last of all he made the human beings. Though last in the order of creation, least in the order of dependence, and weakest in bodily powers, human beings had the greatest gift—the power to dream. (Johnston, 1976, p. 12)

After telling the creation story, I ask the students to sit in pairs and engage in a dialogical inquiry into where they are from. I ask them to imagine the place they would go if they wanted to go home, or to the feeling of being home. I invite them to visit the places where they feel most themselves, the places where they feel most endogenous, be they places that are natural or manmade, be they wild landscapes or cityscapes, be they places or spaces. I ask them to visit these places, in their imaginations, to dwell there. I ask them to attend deeply to the phenomenology of

their place. I ask them to describe what the earth is like, to describe richly the nature of the rock, clay, sand or soil. Ultimately, I invite them to discover, what the humus is like in the place they are of, where they learned what it means to be human. Then I ask them if there is water in that place? What is the quality of the air, the breezes, the wind, the scents, and then the quality of warmth... is it warm and moist, hot and dry, or cold and crisp? I invite them to open all their senses to the phenomenology of the place where they feel most at home, and to acknowledge the four elements out of which Kitché Manitou created the world and also gave to them their animating force and the breath of life. And if it is a city landscape they turn to, then it is the qualitative signature of that place, its characteristic elements, the sounds, smells, and the feel of the place. So they are using my story and my examples as metaphor or analogue (Bowers, 2001) to evoke a translation or create a bridge into their own lived experiences.

And then I ask them, who lives there in that place with them. What forms of life and vitality, what plant beings grace that place? And of all the plants which one are they most drawn to? Where do they feel a special relationship? And I invite them to acknowledge these as reciprocal relationships. I often give the example of my own favourite place sitting on the top of a granite cliff high above a lonely northern lake, resting with my back against a white pine tree... or I share my childhood love of lying in deep, lush green moss or walking through a hemlock forest while listening to the wind and birds. These are all places where I have found profound solace and welcome, they are my home. Proceeding with the next part in the creation story, I again ask them who also lives there? Which of the two leggeds, the four-leggeds, the wingeds, crawlers or swimmers share this place with them. Again, if it's a city, I ask them to describe the qualitative signature of the vitality and animation of that space, I invite them to describe the activities and people who inhabit their place with them. Then, I ask them to which of these beings do they have a very special relationship. In the Anishinaabe tradition, I ask them to think of who has been their animal guide or teacher? Which animals have they been fascinated by, loved and profoundly learned from. I share my own profound fascination and connection to bears, for since childhood I seem to have many encounters with them, often I would find them back along the power lines or along the logging roads where I grew up. And even to this day as an adult I still have them wandering through the land that I share with them at my place on the lake. It was only much later in my life that I learned of my own family's traditional connection to the Bear Clan, and only much, much later did I have all my flutes created with Zuni bear totems with mother of pearl or turquoise heart-lines. For you see I have been inquiring into the traditions of how a guide or teacher becomes a medicine, gifting us with essential understandings, ways of being, for our life journey. I have been tracking Bear, or in search of understanding Bear'ness throughout my life. As I will explain later in this article I have learned to honour its teachings as a gift to my human-ness.

Then, I ask them to share their favorite animal story describing some profound encounter with the animal world, and I often tell them the story of paddling alone off the coast of Cape Breton Island and being surrounded by a pod of whales. I was paddling back out to the main group of paddlers that I was co-guiding after safely bringing the less adventurous souls to shore. With my paddle about to enter the water, suddenly a whale breached right there where my paddle was to enter the water, a mere foot away from me. Astonishingly, it rose without creating a ripple,

the sleek nose, then finally the head appeared exposing the air hole, releasing the sound, a soft phouuuuff, with a quiet puff of escaping breath. My paddle halted in the air above my head, I looked down just as the whale rolled over to look me in the eye. I was awe-struck, it was an astonishing moment frozen in time, As I looked into the eye of this great creature and felt his gaze reaching deep into my soul it felt like I was looking into the eyes of a wise elder, a presence with a knowing of enormous breadth, deep and ancient. The whales penetrating gaze felt like it had gone through me, down into my stomach, right into the centre of me... and as I sat in my kayak, riding the lazy swell of the ocean, locked in the encounter I felt seen, truly seen. After what seemed a very long time, the whale rolled back slowly, and dove gracefully beneath the bow of my kayak, flicking its tail in a beautiful and elegant arch over the bow of my boat, in a final parting gesture before he disappeared into the depths.

This was one of those moments that Laurens Van Der Post (1978 a, b) called *samsara*, when a profoundly powerful animal allows itself be seen and encountered by a human being. I had many of these moments with bears, moose, a lynx, and now, sitting in my kayak, with a whale. I felt then as if I had gazed into an ancient landscape of being, a quite unique ecology of being. Thus, I invite my students to share one of their encounters with an animal. And when I look around the room, I always notice how cautious and contained people they were when they began the conversation. And then how they gradually appear to be fully involved, leaning toward one another. And now while telling their own animal stories they are making beautifully graceful gestures, their hands are quite eloquent, their faces are radiant, and their eyes filled with burning intensity. It's a very intimate dialogue that they are engaged in, while in their telling, they re-imagine and speak to the essence of their experience, all the while the other, the listener, lives deeply into their words, catching glimpses in their imaginations, and bearing witness to them. Thus, it is that by tracking and wayfinding through their lived curriculums, their experiences, they become aware of the places or spaces they are from, or as an Anishinaabe person would say the places they are of. They have woven themselves into the living web of all their relations within a particular place.

After this dialogue I invite them to draw, on a large piece of paper with soft pastels, to depict their place or space, and to quietly acknowledge the profound pedagogy of place that has been enacted through their lived experiences and lived curriculum in that place. This process is an enactment of an Indigenous pedagogy, tracking and acknowledging the dimensions of our experience, from the empirical participation in the gross phenomenology of those places (M. Meyer, 2008), to the pedagogical relationality that creates a particular sensibility and disposition through a subtle pedagogy of place. This process leaves a unique qualitative signature both in the instrument of knowing and in the understanding of the powerful meaning-making process that has been enacted through their own imaginations. Through the living inquiry process this has all been made manifest through the telling of their story.

Gregory Cajete (1994, 1996, 2005) acknowledges this connection to place as an honouring of the environmental ecologies that we are from, the land or nature, the family and community as the affective aspect that shapes us through our participation in the natural world and in culture. As I mentioned earlier, he also acknowledges the spiritual ecology of those places by exploring the stories, the myths, the aesthetic experiences or artistic practices as well as acts of creativity

that leads us to the imagining, and interpretation of our worldview. This vision of the world is what emerges from our unique environmental and spiritual ecologies.



#### THE PEDAGOGY OF THE IMAGINATION

In the following session, we explore more fully the cultural ecology or spiritual ecology of myth, art, and vision through a re-membering of our cultural experiences, family activities, food preparation, celebration, ceremony, rituals, cultural practices, and languages. We even explore the philosophical orientations one encountered, the revered books, and the personalities of importance; we acknowledge the teachers, and important people we have encountered who have deeply influenced us. All these experiences are woven into our imaginative landscape through the subtle pedagogy of imagination. I usually begin this session by continuing the Anishinaabe creation story with the tale of how Spirit Woman descended onto the Turtle's back and the creation of Turtle Island.

And so it is that I continue...

Sky Woman accepted the invitation, left her abode in the skies, and came down to rest on the back of the great turtle. When Sky Woman, had settled on the turtle, she asked the water animals to get some soil from the bottom of the sea.

Gladly all the animals tried to serve the spirit woman. The beaver was one of the first to plunge into the depths. He soon surfaced, out of breath and without the precious soil. The fisher tried, but he too failed. The marten went down, came up, empty handed, reporting that the water was too deep. The loon tried. Although he remained out of sight for a long time, he too emerged

gasping for air. He said that it was too dark. All tried to fulfill the spirit woman's request. All failed. All were ashamed.

Finally, the least of the water creatures, the muskrat, volunteer to dive. At his announcement, the other creatures laughed in scorn, because they doubted this little creature's strength and endurance. Had not they, who were strong, and able been unable to grasp soil from the bottom of the sea? How could he, a muskrat, the most humble among them succeed where they could not? Never the less, the little muskrat determined to dive. Undaunted he disappeared into the waves. The onlookers smiled. They waited for the muskrat to emerge as empty handed as they had done. Time passed. Smiles turned to worried frowns. The small hope that each had nurtured for the success of the muskrat turned into despair. When the waiting creatures had given up, the muskrat floated to the surface more dead than alive, but he clutched in his paws a small morsel of soil. Where the great had failed, the small succeeded.

While the muskrat was tended and restored to health, the Spirit Woman painted the rim of the turtle's back with the small amount of soil that had been brought to her. She breathed upon it and into it the breath of life. Immediately the soil grew, covered the turtle's back, and formed an island. The turtle had given his service, which was no longer required, and he swam away. The island formed in this way Mishee Mackinakong, the place of the great turtle's back. (Johnston, 11976, p. 14)

This story about how Turtle Island came into being is not only a story about how North America came into being but it also has within it the cultural teaching that each creature or part of creation has a gift to offer to the community of life on Mother Earth. Also, it says, the "littlest amongst us" often have the greatest contributions offer. Just like when Kitchi Manitou breathed a special essence and gift into each of the beings he created, so to we all have within us unique possibilities and gifts. So the exploration through dialogic inquiry continues by tracking these profound teaching moments in one's life, acknowledging where the spiritual or cultural ecology actively shapes ones psyche or imagination. Again I invite them to actively and livingly cultivate a wide-awake awareness of this subtle phenomenology. And again I invite them to draw or represent with paper and pastels this spiritual or cultural ecology. Through conversation and drawing they learn to dwell there, and to savor the qualitative signature of their own spiritual ecology of being.

Finally, I ask them to find words, metaphors and phrases to create a poetic or lyrical piece, which speaks to these places that they are from, and honour the environmental and spiritual ecology we are of. Through life writing they are invited to own their meaning making and wayfinding. For just as Wade Davis (2009) indicates, you never know where you are going until you know where you are from.

What is more astonishing is that the entire science of wayfinding is based on dead reckoning. You only know where you are by knowing precisely where you have been and how you got to where you are. One's position at any one time is determined solely on the basis of distance and direction since leaving the last known point. "You don't look up at the stars and know where you

are,” Nainoa told me, “you need to know where you have come from by memorizing from where you sailed. (Davis, 2009, p, 60-61)

#### IN THE SEARCH OF VISION

For the next step in the process, I ask them to examine their own ecological orientation or perspective, and their pedagogical approach to education as environmental educators. I ask them to inquire into whether or not their ecological orientation is informed by who they are and where they are from, or of. Can they see a natural congruency between what they have articulated within these dialogues and their own philosophies of education, curricular orientations, and pedagogical practices? I ask them to enter into a dialogic inquiry with another and to later create a lifewriting about this inquiry. Given all this I ask them, where are they going, or what is their vision of environmental education or ecological education? And over the next months they engage in numerous dialogues inquiring into the phenomenology of various moments in their lives, personally and professionally. They learn to discern how the patterns that are revealed in the phenomenology of their own lived curriculum, are further expressions of their unique qualitative signature or environmental and spiritual ecologies. During this time we engage with the work of: Wade Davis (2009) on wayfinding and why ancient wisdom matters in the modern world as well as Suzuki, (1992); Kawagley, (1999); Atleo, (2004); Littlebear, (2000); Peat, (1996). We engage with the ideas of Manulani Meyer (2003, 2008) reading her work on Hawaiian epistemology, the triangulation of meaning, and more recently holographic hermeneutics as well as Ermine, (1995). We document our process through lifewriting and the creation of a *métissage* (Chamber et al, 2002, 2008; Hasebe-Ludt et al. 2009; Donald, 2009, 2011) with drawings, photographs, lifewritings, and poetry. All the various threads are braided into strands or braids that reveal their ecology of being which honours their identity and their own wayfinding. These braids are woven together into an integrated expression of who they are and what matters to them, which acknowledges the core or heart of their own intentionality as educators. I invite to them acknowledge this tacit infrastructure and personal hermeneutic (Smith, (1991) and to understand how this acts as a compass for re-membering their deep intentionality or as Gregory Cajete their way of looking to the mountain and remembering to remember. They see how, through the creation of their *Métissage*, they find face, identity; find heart, passion; and find foundation, vocation (Cajete, 1994).

Finally at the end of the course I introduce to them the work of Linda Hogan (1995) and her piece called “waking up the rake”. I ask them as ecological educators: what are they raking together, as she has acknowledged taking up the task of gathering the broken pieces of our torn relationality to the circle of life, to mother earth and all our relations. I invite my students to explore their sense of ethical relationality (Donald, 2009) and what practices do they engage in to “wake up the rake” in their own lives.

This is the practice, the disciple of taking up the work. Yes, taking up the work, or taking up the rake in their lives as Hogan suggests:

One green morning an orphan owl perches nervously above me as I clean...Then fearing me ...it bolts off the perch ...landing by accident on the end of my rake...The word *rake* means to gather or heap up, to smooth the

broken ground. That's what this work is, all of it, the smoothing over of broken ground, the healing of severed trust humans hold with earth. We gather it back together again with great care, take broken pieces and fragments and return them to the sky. It is work at the borderland between species, at the boundary between injury and healing. There is an art to raking...raking is a labor round and complete, smooth and new as an egg, and the rounding of the seasons of the world revolving in time and space...watching the turning over of life, becomes a road into what is essential." (Hogan, 1995, p. 153-154)

What are we called to address? What practices can we take up to renew and reanimate the world? I ask them to inquire into how would they bring balance into their lives or what injury would they tend to with a deep ethic of care (Noddings, 2005), and what is their profound healing intentionality as educators. We acknowledge within the class that we all have experiences of profound turning points in our lives, points of resistance and vulnerability. We try to tenderly lift them or raise them in our caring hands and bestow them with a solemnity and dignity, honour that they are our creation, moments of profound teaching and meaning making. And by understanding these, the aesthetics of our own vulnerability, we come to recognize the profound dimensionality of our own quests or life journeys.

#### IN THE DISCIPLINE OF

It is a practice; it is a disciple, the taking up of the work within, and around us. Yes, taking up the work, taking up the rake, or to be 'in the disciple of' as Hogan suggests:

The next time I visited her it was a year later, and again we went through the same prayers, standing outside facing the early sun. On the last morning I was there, she left for her job in town. Before leaving, she said, "Our work is our altar." Those words have remained with me. Now I am a disciple of birds. The birds that I mean are eagle, owls, and hawks. I clean cages at the Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Foundation. It is the work I wanted to do, in order to spend time inside the gentle presence of birds... (Hogan, 1995, p. 148-9)

Ultimately, it is in this spirit that I ask them to honour what their learning spirit (Battiste, 1995, 2000, 2010) is searching for. In other words, what are they in the discipline of? As an example, I give examples from my own wayfinding and my coming to understanding through my native flute playing the recognition of it as an Indigenous knowledge practice. It is a practice, a waking up the rake in my own life, an honouring of the Indigenous traditions of ethical relationality between place or the environmental ecology, and the spiritual ecology. Through acknowledging the traditions of the wind, the breath of life, the oral traditions of language, and the need to infuse indigenous pedagogy with breath and wind, or as Gregory Cajete would say, with wind as a guide to ways of Indigenous knowing (Cajete, 1994)<sup>1</sup> I've come to understand my practice of native flute playing as "being in the discipline of wind", and this discipline of the wind plays an integral role in my wayfinding as a human being and in my research as an Indigenous scholar. Through the 'discipline of the wind' I am deeply committed to environmental ecological and spiritual ecological encounters. Since the practice of native flute playing is in place, as a practice within place, in natural landscapes, it is a way of

honouring the reciprocal ethical relationality of my relationship to place, as an ecological act, as a way of engendering ecological awareness. It is an ecological knowledge practice, a way of attending to the dialogical nature of this encounter, or way of deeply participating in the world, a kind of Indigenous activism. I've come to understand the question: What are you in the discipline of? This is a way of acknowledging in what presence are we longing to dwell, what parts of the sentient ecology of the world do we long to visit again and again; is it the presence of the wind, as it washes over the landscape and moves through my flute? Or is it in being suspended in the embrace of water? Or is it being in the quiet presence of birds or bears? In the seats of what philosophical orientation, cultural manifestations or ceremony, or simply what places within the cityscape do we visit and why do we dwell there in those places that call us to awareness, what is it we are to longing to learn? For as the Anishinaabe tradition teaches those totems or beings that we honour as teachers, we take them into the very heart of our being, for as Cajéte (1994) indicates, to track any being we must become like that being. He also says, we must be a hunter of good heart. By being 'in the discipline of' we are tracking or becoming like something in the world that extends, or augments deeply our way of being in the world.

Through these opportunities within the academy, I am asking my students to re-member-to-re-member their experiences through dialogic inquiry through exploring their narratives of lived experience and through lifewriting, I myself have learned to wander or wayfind through the living imagination of my own life. One learns a kind of 'looking from the mountain' perspective in order to look at experiences from afar, so that our own lived experiences become our teachers. By attending carefully and deeply to the aesthetic phenomenology of the experience and how that resounds within my own sensibilities and by seeing in my mind's eye the living imagination of my own experience, "what I walked though in life, through the practice of dialogue, lifewriting and re-membering, I lift up to the light, and the events of my lived curriculum with the world become my teacher. Then through the pedagogy of place and the pedagogy of the imagination these moments become transparent and luminous with meaning like the coloured patterns of a stained glass window (Kelly, 2006). Through deeply attending and contemplation we develop the capacity of in-sight and the light of knowing and understanding awakens in us. It is thus that we are able to make meaning through the triangulation of meaning the Manu Meyers (2008) speaks about. For the empirical phenomenology of lived experience that pedagogically acts on the soul to create soul sensibility and soul meaning, informs the learning spirit. In my own experience I am inspired or arrive at in-sights that help me to understand the profound intentionality or causality of my life. Thus, my life is my teacher.

By reading the causality of my own lived curriculum, my imaginative landscape becomes a story or a teaching through the act of re-telling, re-membering, and re-imagining. In a similar way, I have come to understand something that I previously didn't understand about the role of teachings in my Anishinaabe world. For in the Anishinaabe world, white pine tree and bear become teachers. Their living sentient essence is tracked, studied, deeply honoured through the profound participation of the hunter of good heart. Therefore, within the phenomenology of their being, their ecology of presence, teaches. Thus, by tracking Bear, I must become like Bear, know its ways, where it dwells, what it eats, all its qualities of being, and then perhaps I will ingest, be inspired, or come to know Bear within me and become a

knower of Bear. Thus, Bear becomes my teacher, and ultimately my medicine. By having a profound passion, love, deep reverence and respect, the Indigenous understanding is that the act of respect is fulfilled in reciprocity; by respecting, by revering, by having reverence for the essential gift of a particular being, be it bear or white pine tree, I am in turn gifted by Bear. And I have experienced that sometimes; unknowingly these lessons are the elegant sufficiency or the healing medicines that address both our psyche and our heart so in need of mending. By ‘waking up the rake’, or by taking up life long practices or knowledge practices we learn to become more whole or fully human. This has been my experience with the arts and my own journey of apprenticing within Northwest Coast Art. Art becomes a knowledge practice, a way of knowing and being.



#### THE PEDAGOGY OF PRESENCE

I remember when an elder told his granddaughter that she should become like a bear and eat more blueberries. He was telling her that she should take into her being the essence of Bear, and to live well within and through the spirit of Bear. This is a teaching that I am only beginning to understand. It reflects a deeply Indigenous way of being in the world, and it influences my understanding on how to live well in my place, and to ultimately honour the world as my teacher. This understanding lies at the heart of Indigenous pedagogy as I have come to imagine it, and the processes described above is my way of inviting others to come to understand indigeneity within the realm of their own environmental and spiritual ecologies. This is the mystery of being able to hear the songs of creation in my flute playing. It is the understanding that Indigenous people honour creation in songs, that life spoke, and that the mythologies, cosmologies, and ecologies taught. The language of these teachings is unique to each of us, although it may be coloured by our locations both in place as in land, and in culture. The mother

tongue that we grow up within is the vessel for our thinking, the stories teach us how to think, and the various worldviews gives us the windows through which we look. But always at the heart of the hermeneutical imagination is the uniqueness of the eyes, which see, the ears that hear and the heart, which understands, this is unique within each of us. To witness this in another through the dialogic inquiry, we also witness the act of hermeneutic imagination; we begin to see the circle of possible understanding that makes up the ethno-sphere that Davis describes (Davis, 2009). This is also an ecological act.

Thus, tracking, as I understand it is the heart of Indigenous pedagogy; we track presences through the sentient ecologies of our worlds, through ever widening circles of relationship. So too we track our own selves within these circles of relationship. Through wandering through the ever-widening circles of ethical relationality throughout our life journey. Just as a child ventures further and further from home, so do we in our lived curriculums venture further and further into the various ecologies of our lives. At the heart of Indigenous pedagogy, is the realization that the animating force that lies within us also lays within various manifestations within the sentient ecologies of the world. *We are all related. We are all related. We are all related.* And we share presence through participation in the living flux of creation. By reading the patterns that emerge out of this constant flux or by tracking the patterns that emerge from our own lived lives or curriculums we become knower's of ourselves and of what deeply matters to us, and to the place that embraces and sustains us, which is our home. For as Wade Davis (2009) acknowledges the ethnosphere or sum total of all human languages, cultures, and imaginations creativity is intimately interwoven with the biosphere. Thus the bio/cultural diversity of our planet requires a re-imagining of this ecological and ethical relationality. It asks that we re-imagine ourselves intimately woven into this bio/cultural diversity, and our responsibilities for its sustainability and renewal. Perhaps a way of understanding Indigenous ceremony is that it is not only a celebration of the integration of the human being within the ecology of Mother Earth and Father Sky but it is an act that offers back to that ecology of being the recognition and offering of renewal, we gift our presence to the circle of life. What are the practices that we will take up, like the awaking up of the rake that Linda Hogan speaks of? For as the elders have taught me when I gather cedar I must first offer tobacco. Honouring this ethical relationality based on reciprocal respect is the impetus behind all ceremonies of renewal within Anishinaabe culture.

Ultimately, this orientation leads back to the question: how does this perspective inform ecological education? What are the implications for understanding of an eco-curriculum and eco-pedagogy? Through dialogue and lifewriting as inquiry we take up the practice of being Indigenous or endogenous to our own ecologies. We learn by reading these patterns endogenous to ourselves and develop a sensibility for our own indigeneity that serves us in reading the patterns of others. It is a capacity that arises from a deep contemplation or what Goethe (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010), admonishes by contemplating well, you will develop the capacity to see and hear; as well as the capacity to understand. This is also acknowledged within the Indigenous traditions as truly seeing and hearing and being. This way of knowing is a capacity, when we become wide-awake to our own way of interpreting, our own hermeneutic, and the imaginative landscapes from which we look or see, we find ourselves within a community or a circle of understanding with others, who

are also carrying and embodying unique orientations or unique hermeneutical imaginations. Through this practice of the pedagogy of place, the pedagogy of imagination, the pedagogy of presence, and honouring the circle of understanding we recognize the unique, the specific, or subjective location or context of our lived experience, while simultaneously holding it juxtaposed with another human being's unique knowing being, doing, and creating in the world. Their way of interpreting or embodying their own hermeneutic imagination is ultimately not ours. In this tension, there is no need to come to a single uniform or universal understanding, but we can simultaneously acknowledge the diversity of understandings implicit within the circle. This is an act of hermeneutical imagination for as we stand together surrounding and embracing the tree of knowledge; we all have unique vistas, and visions of the tree that stands in our midst. So too, in the circle of life and the circle of understanding, we embrace the complexity or many-eyed ways of seeing and interpreting. And perhaps the first step to that is acknowledging where we began within the process thus described above, honouring the places we are from with an ecological sense of self.

I have come to acknowledge the weaving of the Western and Indigenous ways of seeing in my own life, or what I as a Métis person would acknowledge as two-eyed seeing (Iwama, et al, 2008), and the weaving of my living métissage or Métis sash. Two-eyed seeing is seeing well with the strengths of the western eye and seeing well with the strengths of the Indigenous eye to the end that we see more fully, more wholistically. By inviting the students into an exploration of their own lives with an Indigenous eye, they learn to understand themselves as endogenous or indigenous to earth, and to be bearers of unique gifts and perspectives. In métissage, we acknowledge the many threads of identity as emerging from many understandings of roles within our cultures, and from the various places or locations around the world. One of the interesting things in this inquiry process is the recognition that people come simultaneously from multiple places and environmental ecologies, as well as multiple environmental, spiritual or cultural identities. Through this process of re-membering we come to acknowledge our own selves, our own mythologies and cosmologies within our specific ecologies of being.

Recently, I had the honour of witnessing these same students during their final presentations in their Master's of Environmental Education program, I came to understand that through the pedagogy of place and the pedagogy of the imagination we find face, heart and foundation, and the pedagogy of presence. Ultimately, we find our way home through an ecological sense of self and by honouring the places we are from. Standing well in that place we can powerfully enact the visions we carry into the world for the next seven generations.

*All my relations.*

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<sup>i</sup> Cajete in Look to the Mountain cites the Navajo tradition of recognizing the wind or breath of inspiration in the qualities of thought, and the five kinds of wind or thought.

Note: the author took all photographs in this article.