OF SELF, PLACE, AND PRACTICE: AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR'S EXPLORATION OF ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

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OF SELF, PLACE, AND PRACTICE: AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR'S EXPLORATION OF ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration into the formation and development of my ecological identity as an environmental educator seeking awareness of my sense of self, of place, and of my personal and professional practice. Ecological identity, defined by Thomashow as "all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self," is best understood by engaging in ecological identity work which encourages inquiry into many areas of life. Through narrative inquiry self-study, I explore my lived experience in nature over the past 4 decades and identify stories that hold meaning and offer insight into my relationship with nature. By storying and restorying these narratives as I cross time and situation, I create *landmarks* on my personal and professional landscape that help me navigate my way forward as an educator and as an individual working towards praxis in life and work. This study invites environmental educators, through concrete demonstration, to consider performing their own acts of inquiry that may provide insight into their identity and how they conduct their teaching practice.

Acknowledgments

When I decided to embark on this doctoral research I did not anticipate the number of people that would accompany me on the journey. In so many ways, this work is our collective work, and I am honoured to have them represented within these pages. To my dissertation supervisor, mentor, and friend, Dr. Carmen Shields, my appreciation of your guidance and support throughout my graduate years and this inquiry cannot be expressed in words. I will spend the next 20 years paying it forward. To my supervisory committee members, Dr. Pauline Sameshima, Dr. Carole Richardson, and Dr. M. J. Barrett, I thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this work and your valuable input. To Dr. David Booth, my external examiner, and Dr. Heather Rintoul, my internal examiner, I thank you for the time and attention you have given this research.

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To my friends – new ones made through conversation and art, and seasoned ones I will always cherish for cottage weekend fun, movie/taco nights, and unlimited texts and emails when I was in the weeds. Thank you for coming with me on this exploration.

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PROLOGUE

On the Practice of Landmarking

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all exploration

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time

(T. S. Eliot as quoted in Borden, 2014, p. 3)

Long before I could read and write I could landmark. Growing up as a child in rural Manitoba, I would navigate the woods and the fields through sight and sound, turning right at the end of the long row of poplars to visit my best friend, or listening for the chorus of frogs which would lead me to the wetlands. Before I held a map, a compass, and later on a GPS unit, the land held markers that guided me through nature and, when necessary, helped me find my way when lost.

Through landmarks I began to know the land, how it marked significant periods in its history with dramatic changes to its landscape. Every field mark—a boulder, a misshapen tree, a split creek, told a story of how it came to be—a remnant of a flood, a response to a prairie storm, or a reminder of a particularly harsh winter with record-breaking snowfall. These marks lay upon the land like tattoos accumulated over time, some faded and hard to see while others remained vivid with colour and definition. Whether they existed in celebration of an event or marked a time of great resiliency, they were key features that helped to tell the narrative of the land and, in many cases, the people who shared its space.

First Nations followed nature's lead in regard to landmarking, purposefully bending trees to mark trails in the woods to guide travellers to water, shortest routes, and, on occasion,

away from danger (O'Hara, 2011). These induced landmarks still stand today within the forest, a human symbol on the natural landscape to denote a time of adaptation instead of domination. As I walk the campus trails of the college where I teach, I pass these historic markers and am reminded how I instinctively brought forward this old technique of landmarking into the college field courses I teach. With a GPS in hand I often proclaim to the students that "when this technology fails, the method of landmarking will not fail you."

The practical meaning of these words shifts to a more metaphorical representation for me when I consider that I have been marking moments of my life in nature with story and imagery for over 30 years without ever understanding why. I knew the significance of the narratives I wrote went well beyond the relaying of an occurrence or the documentation of an event, but I never understood how to navigate their meaning until I engaged in this doctoral work. Now, I see that I have dotted the landscape that is my life with many personal landmarks in an attempt to guide myself back to a place of meaning when I was ready to return.

The title of this work did not come easily to me. What I was to name myself in the study and how I was to label what I was doing presented itself as my biggest challenge. In my mind, the intent of the research was clear. I wished to gain a greater understanding of how nature may have influenced my life and identity. I wanted to know if having this awareness would promote my understanding of my role as an educator and if this act of inquiry would foster discourse in environmental education circles. It was the concept of naming however, the concrete act of defining myself and my actions without ambiguity that continued to be a stumbling block for me.

I feel it necessary to reveal this quandary so it can be understood that much of what will be read within this work is organic and revolves around my attempt to define what is currently

undefined in my own self, the places I occupy, and my daily practice as an educator. I seek clarity in naming myself, not only for my own personal and professional development, but also as encouragement for others who work in the out-of-doors who search to find their authentic place and name within the current educational system.

Now, as a middle-aged woman, I see I have always struggled with this desire to be clearly identified, both personally (with mixed blood origin) and professionally (with inclinations towards both science and art). I see the impact that this *unnaming* has had on my practice and my sense of belonging in the environmental field, where I have often felt lost. This research is an exploration into that naming process, an attempt to name that which in the past had no name.

For this exploration I want to go beyond a single research question, to dwell in the phenomenon of an environmentally influenced life. I wish to enter the realm of inquiry where emergent knowledge is the priority and the appearance of unexpected data is welcomed. I want to mine the underlying layers of a professional and personal existence to reveal how nature has had a hand in forging the landscape of my life and has influenced my identity, sense of place, and professional practice.

This work landmarks my current place in this journey of self-study as an educator and as an individual. It's important that I represent myself as honestly and openly as possible and reject limitations (those perceived as societal but many of my own making as well) on the act of naming. To *name* something is to permanently landmark a place in space and time. As a researcher, I consider my personal landmarks to be created in two main ways. First, they are created through the stories I write of my past lived experience, narratives that describe my initial interaction with nature, people, places, and things that evoked for me a memory

meaningful enough for me to want to record it, even if I didn't fully understand why it was important. Second, landmarks are created through my reconstruction of those memories, narratives that restory the experience to create new meaning for me that allows me to feel comfortable traveling in new territory while being grounded in a familiar landscape.

Looking for landmarks in this context allows new information to become available that may have been previously misunderstood or hidden from view. I am reminded of Graeme Gibson's wonderful 2007 Appreciation he penned for *The John A. Livingston Reader* where he reveals how he finally "succumb[ed]" to the birds of Toronto's downtown core who had been singing to him for more than 30 years (p. IX). Like Gibson, I have become aware that many signs may have been speaking to me for quite some time, but I have been unaware or unprepared to listen.

Within this inquiry work into how nature has influenced my life, landmarks perform four essential functions for me:

1. They help me establish my concept of place in the past and the present. They allow me to *mark home* by creating an understanding of my original place, where roots ran deep in their attachment to family and the earth itself.
2. They indicate when a change in direction has occurred or needs to occur. I keep these markers as queries within my sightlines while *venturing out* to visit unfamiliar places in the hopes they may become familiar.
3. They guide me from the past. Historic landmarks left behind by those who have gone before are always present, and I only need to *seek the signs* of the past to be supported by ancestral ways of knowing.

4. They help me navigate the present and future. Through their guidance I see which routes present opportunity and which offer relief in the form of resiliency. As I venture into new territories I am focused on *revisiting* familiar landmarks to orient myself so new landmarks may be *founded*.

Prior to this work I saw the naming of myself and what I do as an obstacle to be overcome instead of a freeing exercise. I am not an ecologist, a biologist, a naturalist, a botanist, or an engineer. I am not a woman of science, though this distinction I would have embraced wholeheartedly over the past two decades because I felt the pursuit of science was valued above all else in my schooling, workplace, and indeed in society itself. In my 20s and early 30s, I considered science to be *the* valid field of study, the noble pursuit of absolute values or truths. I felt if I wanted to be taken seriously as a professional in the environmental field, the only pathway to recognition was through science. Today, I am not as confident in the role of science to solve environmental problems as I once was, or in the validity of many scientific approaches.

When I reflect on my orientation honestly, I see that I am rooted in the emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical relationships that connect me to the natural world. I do not see numbers, formulas, and scientific names but rather interactions, behaviours, and connections. I educate about the environment and nature from these touch points, mingling them with science where appropriate, and inviting alternate ways of knowing as a way of expanding thought. Mine is the outdoor classroom and it is within nature's wall-less space that I often teach from a curriculum of her own making. I am an environmental educator.

The acceptance of what I was to call myself for the purposes of this study was only one part of my struggle. In 2013, I wrote the following about my challenges with narrative inquiry self-study as a chosen methodology during a writing exercise in my PhD residency:

I don't know what I'm doing and it's starting to frustrate me. I want someone to give me the question, to tell me what to research, and how. I welcome a prescriptive plan, a list of things that need addressing that I might check off with satisfaction at the end of the day. That would be much more comforting on my part. Instead, what I have is a question layered with another question layered with another. Like rocks under pressure I know little about the true composition of the layer until I begin mining at the surface. This is exhausting work, and sometimes I feel like abandoning the endeavour upon discovering yet another layer.

Often, I suspend my efforts and send in the canary to see if it's safe to proceed. Sometimes I wait a long time for the song to be audible, but each and every time the little bird emerges to say "keep going." And so I do. Each layer for me is a new place within a familiar one, and I spend a long time within its depths investigating it with all my senses. Sometimes I emerge into the sunlight and brush off my hands in satisfaction at a good day's work that will yield much profit. Other times I lose my way within the dark tunnels that I have already built and anger myself for not remembering which way is out and which way is in. These are the hardest days. The layers appeared endless to me in the beginning of this journey, but now I can say with certainty, they most definitely are.

Much has changed for me since this writing, and I present it now without censorship. I am ready to name that which I couldn't name before and ready to silence the doubts I carried about the legitimacy of alternate ways of knowing in educational research. I am ready to explore new ways of thinking about nature and identity, and ready to go before others who are not yet ready.

A Note to the Sojourner

"When I'm solitary and reflective I work away at coming to terms with this and that, and through this silent, interior work I achieve endless little epiphanies."

(Butala, 1994/2004, p. 5)

Sharon Butala, author of the 1994 insightful work *The Perfection of the Morning*, is no stranger to the profound impact landmarks can have on one's life and direction. For years she walked the prairie that surrounded her ranch home near Eastend, Saskatchewan and found herself, as Gibson did, succumbing to the land's voice and its story. This physical interaction between human and nature, as Butala confirms in her many writings about the western Canadian landscape, is only the first step in the complex search for place and meaning. After encounters in the field (both purposeful and accidental) with animals, plants, rocks, landscapes, and elements, Butala would reflect deeply on the experiences and "[grab] at clues" wherever they could be found to help her make sense of why the experience held meaning for her (Butala, 1994/2004, p. 78). She would find herself within the book stacks of her local library or bookstore seeking answers to questions she had yet to formulate. She recalls how "certain books began to jump off the shelf," insisting they be taken home and read with full attention (p. 78).

If you believe, as I do, that our search for sense of place works this way, that we are likely guided by variables presently outside our current understanding of how things work, then your interaction with this research may be no accident. Why have you decided to read these pages and what were you hoping to find when you picked up this work? What was my intention when writing the stories found within these chapters, and who did I imagine would be reading these words? Together, we are sojourners (Guiney Yallop & Shields, 2016; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) traveling this landscape of identity and sense of place, temporary

visitors resting in this space and time with nature as our universal guide. What may be of value in this search for identity and meaning, within the context of a relationship with nature may be hard to recognize at first, and so many methods of investigation into what makes an ecological self is encouraged. For me, the use of landmarks has been a concrete way of navigating this complex arena of nature/human relationships, and I present this method here. The landmarks I identify as important for me within this work (and their accompanying narratives) may resonate with you, as I have so frequently seen myself in the storied journeys of others. Or perhaps you have already identified landmarks that hold significance for you but have yet to story them.

My focus with this work is to create a space where I can return to landmarks of meaning, restory them from their original narratives, and construct new meaning which I can carry into the present and future. These stories become my point of reference in my exploration of identity and place, my navigational tool that leads me forward after dwelling in the past. Within this study I use four *types* of landmarks to evoke initial inquiry:

1. Natural and built landmarks (things I can touch, hear, see and feel).
2. Historical landmarks (both literal and figurative markers left from the past).
3. Collective landmarks (symbols we build and value together as a community).
4. Human landmarks (unique encounters with people who impact my goals of landmarking).

To help further my understanding of why these landmarks may be of importance in connecting with my identity (as influenced by nature), I sought to expand the usual toolkit that I use to interpret experiences (namely life writing and photography). I was of the opinion that in order to truly dwell in a place where emergent research is the focus, as it is within this dissertation, I must create opportunities to allow data to organically form and become known. I

decided to incorporate arts-based research into the project's design to explore other means of interpretation that might shed light on identity recognition (Sameshima, 2007) and "open spaces" to encounter the liminal in the hopes that it became curriculum (Sameshima & Irwin, 2008, p. 2). Arts-based research is defined as:

> the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies. (McNiff, 2008, p. 29)

The use of art was a risk for me, as I have no formal training of any kind and indeed lack even the most fundamental art skills most children have mastered by middle school.

However, I considered that emergent research is likely best supported by visiting places we have not ventured into before, to demonstrate a willingness to embrace organic data creation and consider alternate ways of knowing. I decided to consider the above landmark groupings as visual representations, hoping that by considering them in this way they may shed light on details previously overlooked through the act of writing. The answer as to how I would do this came to me one day via my daughter, who produced a zentangle art piece for her art class at school. Zentangles, a form of art designed to facilitate meditation and the clearing of the mind, was an ideal art form for someone with my goals and art skills. With this art form no mistakes are possible. Each design lacks a master blueprint or true form, and the art emerges from the mind of the artist during considerable meditation.

Landmarks

To facilitate interpretation of this dissertation work, I designed an original symbol for each of the four landmark categories named above – natural/built, historic, collective, and human (see Figure 1).

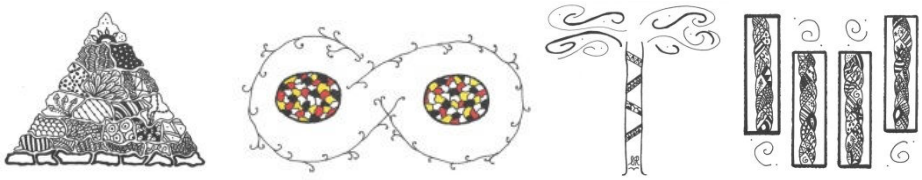


Figure 1. My representations of the cairn, infinity, lobstick, and tree blaze landmarks.

These symbols appear throughout this dissertation and mark stories connected to each respective type of landmark. For example, a story originating from an experience in the physical senses will bear the mark associated with the natural/built environment. In this way, data become manageable and meaningful for both the reader and the writer, and primary connections can be revealed throughout the writing that will later support deeper analysis. Each category of landmark is briefly explored below.

1. **Natural and built landmarks: Given by nature or given by nature in partnership with humans**

These landmarks I can touch, hear, see, and feel. They represent the concrete interactions at play between humans and the natural world utilizing the somatic senses and physical environment. My symbol for these types of landmarks is a cairn, or pile of rocks collected by humans and often assembled in the shape of a triangle (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Photo of a cairn. © 2015 Kelton, used with permission.

Traditionally, they mark trails on barren landscapes or indicate where a junction exists that is confusing to the traveller (National Park Service [NPS], n.d.). They can also have multiple purposes, both warning of danger like a cliff drop while calling attention to the beautiful vista on the trail (NPS, n.d.). For me (see Figure 3), these landmarks are reminders that when humans interact with the earth on a physical level, we are guided through times of confusion and gain direction in our journey.

Figure 3. My representation of the cairn landmark. © 2015 Schlamb.

2. Historical landmarks: Gifted by all our relations past

Landmarks in this category connect the past to the present and represent both the physical markers left on earth by our ancestors but also the intangible markers we carry with us through inherited ways of knowing. My visual representation for these landmarks is the two-

circle Métis infinity symbol that "illustrates the joining of two cultures and the unending existence of a people" (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation [OSSTF], 2012, p. 3; see Figure 4).

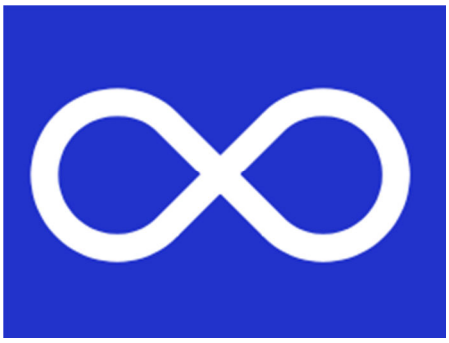


Figure 4. Image of the Métis flag. Wikipedia, Public Domain (2006).

In my rendition (see Figure 5), the circles are comprised of a growing vine around the colours of the medicine wheel. The vines locked in infinity highlights for me the importance of ancestral knowledge in understanding my place in nature and helps me to approach life and practice from a holistic perspective. I believe this grouping of landmarks indicates that we are all on the same journey in our attempt to find identity and sense of place, though at different periods of time and in different spaces. I am reminded of the *100 year sleep*[1] (Manitoba Métis Federation, 2016) of the Métis people, which I interpret to mean the long silence Louis Riel predicted his people would endure before rising up again to claim back their heritage. During their dormancy I believe they left clues for people like me—travellers on the same route they once travelled who eventually come to ask the same question, *who is my teacher?* (Bouchard, 2008).

[1] On July 4, 1885 Louis Riel was quoted as saying, "My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back." This statement was made just prior to his hanging death on November 16, 1885 for treason against the Canadian government. (Manitoba Métis Federation, 2016).

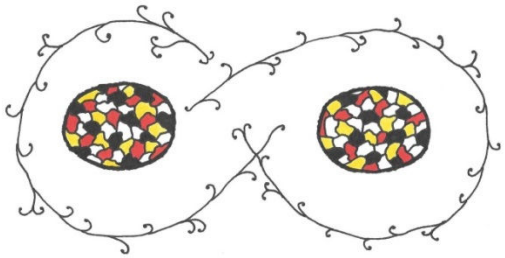


Figure 5. My representation of the infinity landmark. © 2015 Schlamb.

3. Collective landmarks: Created together purposefully through common direction

Often landmarks are built and valued as a group to mark a moment in time when people choose to go beyond individual interest and establish community. These markers illustrate that often collective journeys (of a physical, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual nature) are taking place within or alongside individual ones and can stand out in significance when both the group and the individual are affected by the interaction. My symbol for this landmark grouping is the historic *lobstick*, a tamarack, pine, or spruce tree of great height modified (delimbed and debarked) by the Métis voyageurs to serve as a landmark "above and against the tree line" (Dorion, 2013. p. 2; see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Archives of Manitoba, A. V. Thomas fonds, Photo 134. "Lobstick: Indians tracking on Hayes River." 1910, C19. Public Domain.

Some lobsticks noted the presence of water on the trail, dangerous drops to avoid, or directional changes for dog sled teams (Dorion, 2013). Others were erected to celebrate the accomplishments of local people or to mark significant community events and were inscribed with important symbols, names, and dates (Dorion, 2013). These vertical representations stand for me (see Figure 7) as a reminder that our identity is never solely our own and that through interaction with others we create new landmarks of meaning that may have never surfaced without community.

Figure 7. My representation of the lobstick landmark. © 2015 Schlamb.

4. Human landmarks: People that affect and possibly change our direction

I have always considered people as landmarks on my personal landscape. Organic and dynamic, they are markers with temporal properties that come (sometimes briefly and sometimes lingering) in and out of my personal space and time to affect my direction and possibly alter it. I see unique encounters with people as the basis of these landmark memories that affect the aims of landmarking itself such as finding place, changing direction, seeking guidance, and navigating challenges and opportunities. My symbol for this grouping is a directional tree blaze, a painted mark on a tree that informs the hiker to make a left turn, a right turn, or continue straight ahead (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Tree blaze indicating the trail turns right. © 2016 Schlamb.

In my version of this navigational sign (see Figure 9), the direction of the trail is informed by the stories of those who have travelled the trail before me. Their narratives become *braided* with mine (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009), and my direction is influenced by my understanding of this new story we have created together.

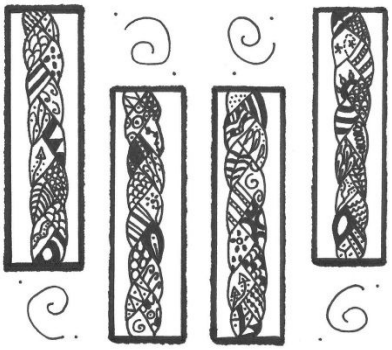


Figure 9. My representation of the tree blaze landmark. © 2015 Schlamb.

These landmark symbols will actively mark my stories of lived experience within these pages and will help guide my research into exploring the formation and development of my ecological identity. I turn now to investigate the phenomenon of an environmentally influenced life and the role nature has played in helping to form my identity.

CHAPTER ONE: INQUIRING INTO AN ENVIRONMENTALLY INFLUENCED LIFE

> *To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward sense are still truly adjusted to each other, who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood . . . In the woods, is perpetual youth.* (Emerson, 1836/2009, p.3)

I knew I had a relationship with the natural world from a very young age. As a child of the Canadian prairies growing up amidst forests, fields, and rivers, my relationship with the environment was as natural to me as my relationships with family and friends. Similar to my human connections, nature provided critical life lessons for me in what it meant to be resilient, resourceful, emotionally invested, and eternally committed. My environment, or *place*, was much more than where I lived geographically; for me, it was who I was, where I had come from, what dictated my life's work, and what I would carry with me upon my travels.

I wasn't aware while growing up that the landscape may affect the way I saw things, how I considered matters, and reacted to circumstances. I didn't see the land as an influence, an external force *separate* from myself like I considered people and their actions to be. As a child, the land and I were one, and we communicated with each other in ways that lay outside the realm of human language. With people, however, I had little interest in communication. My mother likes to tell the story of me as a preschooler, hiding under her skirt and hugging her leg, refusing to speak to anyone outside the family until the age of 5. I was anything but silent though, she reflects, on our 5-acre rural property in southern Manitoba, where the land was more than my environment, it was my friend. I remember the endless days playing within the woods,

sometimes with my sisters, sometimes alone, my day's activities planned from the moment I woke up to include exploring the out-of-doors along with the dog.

It was only when I left the land and entered the community through school that I began to understand that the town's kids saw things differently than I did. For me, the school yard was an extension of *my land* at home, and I was involved in many fights over the years on behalf of nature, who I felt could not defend herself. I would often challenge children, several grades above me, to a fight in protest of the annual spring frog toss against the school's brick façade or the mutilation of the trees in the playing fields by those who were tall enough to reach the upper branches. In addition to this division in ideology, there also existed physical divisions within the small town of 1,000 people where I lived. There were those that lived within the dyked walls that protected the town when the river flooded in the spring, and those like us who lived outside the walls within the floodplain. I remember as a child taking pride in our family living outside the security of the dykes. As rural dwellers I considered us robust and tough, and our ability to live alongside nature in all her glory, as well as all her anger, made us special.

That feeling of connection with the land did not leave me as I ventured out of rural living into urban living to attend university, travel, and live in other provinces. I was always aware that my connection with nature was strong, but I was not aware that that connection might be something more than mere interest, that it might be an actual driving force in my decisions about education, work, family, and community. I had read many books about people who had dedicated their lives to the preservation of nature—Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, David Suzuki, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau, and Rachel Carson. These people were my idols, my untouchables, whom I greatly admired but who I knew I could never emulate. Their lives in nature seemed as unreachable to me as a stargazer who marvels at the wonders of space

but who knows she will never be an astronaut. In my younger life I attempted to measure my life in nature by their measuring sticks and always felt I came up short. I resigned myself to the fact that mine was a practical life, and thoughts of an existence influenced on a daily basis by nature were both impractical and impossible to achieve if one wanted security. What was not apparent to me at this time was how much nature had imprinted on me from childhood and how our close relationship had morphed into one of intense and everlasting influence, even when I was no longer on the rural landscape to hear her speak. I was not aware of how strong this influence was in my own life until my Master's research into children who lack connection with nature and who exhibit deficits in their daily lives from that disconnection.

The concept that personal connections to the environment (whether weak or strong) might influence life choices and promote particular points of view in regards to social, political, and economic discourses has been studied with increasing interest over the past three decades (Butala, 1994/2004; Clayton & Opotow, 2003; Doerr, 2004; Hawken, 2008; Kals & Ittner, 2003; Mabey, 2008; Thomashow, 1996). Similar investigations carried out in the field of child development have revealed a profound connection between children's contact with nature and the ability to develop full emotional, intellectual, and spiritual lives (Gebhard, Nevers, & Billmann-Mahecha, 2003; Louv, 2005/2008, 2012). Additional studies have demonstrated that contact with nature may improve a child's ability to be resilient and further support the development of restorative skills (Louv, 2005/2008; Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001, 2002; Wells & Evans, 2003).

Defining Nature and Environment

The words "nature" and "environment" are contested terms and can be defined in many ways. John Muir (1901) referred to nature as home, a *place* that existed for him only in the

mountains, Emerson defined nature as moving through humans as the "symbol of spirit" and in some cases "a metaphor of the human mind" (Emerson as cited in Vickery, 1986/1994, p. 23), and poet Gary Snyder (2007) focused on the Latin word *natura*, which means "birth, constitution, character, course of things – initially from *nasci*, to be born" (p. 34). Synder also described *"wild nature"* as that "part of the physical world that is largely free of human agency" (p. 35). Louv (2005/2008) makes note that in its broadest interpretation, "nature includes the material world and all of its objects and phenomena" (p. 8), and that definitions of this kind that include *everything* can also be restrictive in another sense (p. 8).

Greider and Garkovich (1994) theorize that a definition should be based in social constructionism and that a "broader interpretive framework" is needed that "links people's changing conceptions of nature and the environment with people's changing conceptions of themselves" (p. 9). D. Harvey (1993) proposes that a "contemporary battle over words like 'nature' and 'environment'" exists largely because the words themselves "convey a commonality and universality of concern that is, precisely because of their ambiguity, open to a great diversity of interpretation" (p. 2).

In addition to discourses involving how to use the words "nature" and "environment" are debates about the role power plays within those definitions and who or what should be included when considering power within a relationship (Greider & Garkovich, 1994; D. Harvey, 1993). Bill McKibben (1989/2006) in his book *The End of Nature*, examines how only a fundamental shift in the way humans relate to nature will save the planet and alter the current power structure that exists of human over nature. Other scholars like Freire (1998), Greene (1978), hooks (1989), and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1997), focus on the power that rests in voice and shed light on issues involving social justice and lack of representation for

marginalized groups which is so intertwined with environmental issues like fair trade and environmental justice. Much more can be explored in this very provocative field of inquiry as it pertains to environmental relationships and the use of defining words.

For the purposes of this research, I see nature as Louv (2005/2008) does, as "natural wilderness: biodiversity, abundance – related loose parts in a backyard or a rugged mountain ridge" and all that is "reflected in our capacity for wonder" (p. 8). This does not mean this definition is static for me and will not change in the future. Like Greider and Garkovich (1994), I anticipate that my definitions will change as I change and evolve as a researcher and as a citizen of the environment. Within these pages, *nature* represents for me my *intimate* connection with the biotic and abiotic elements of the natural world, and *environment* refers to the same connection but on a larger more *formal* scale. As a narrative inquirer, power lies in my telling of tales where I construct a present-day view of myself in my present-day work, where the bringing together of theory and practice in praxis becomes my source of power moving forward.

It can be difficult to know where to start exploring personal connections within the larger environment. A good place to begin is to understand what is meant by a personal connection with nature and how an ecological identity can be defined and described. Ecological identity work (described in detail in Chapter Three) can help bring clarity to this complex concept, along with exploration into various theoretical perspectives that may speak to how one sees the world and the way in which it works. For me, investigation into systems thinking and the deep ecology perspective helped clarify my thinking upon embarking on this research.

Ecological Identity

The phenomenon of an environmentally influenced life can be viewed within the concept that each individual possesses an ecological or environmental identity, defined by Clayton

(2003) as a form of "self-concept" and a "sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman natural environment. . . . that affects the ways in which we perceive and act toward the world" (p. 46). As an environmental educator, I am conscious of the fact that when teaching my college classes in ecology, sustainability, and field practices, I not only interpret environmental information through the filters created by my own life experiences but I also ask students to pass the same information through the lenses of their life experiences.

The terms ecological identity, environmental identity, ecological self, and environmental self have been used interchangeably in identity literature and appear to have a similar focus in wanting to understand how human and nature relationships affect identity (Clayton & Opotow, 2003; Utsler, 2014). As Clayton and Opotow (2003) state, "it is difficult – and not necessarily desirable – to construct a rigid definition of environmental identity" because alternate definitions reflect a "growing interest in the intersection" between identity and the environment, including its applications to real life, and room should be made for additional disciplinary and theoretical perspectives (p. 8).

For the purposes of this research, I lead with the term *ecological identity* and adhere to Thomashow's (1996) definition of the concept as: "how people perceive themselves in reference to nature, as living and breathing beings connected to the rhythms of the earth, the biogeochemical cycles, the grand and complex diversity of ecological systems" (p. xiii). I do this purposefully, to indicate my belief that before we have environmental identities, or lives affected by our built and social environments, we first develop ecological ones that are intrinsically connected with the planet on a cellular level and through which we develop our sense of fundamental existence. I believe our primary connection with nature is formed upon birth, and by the sheer act of breathing the air, drinking the water, and eating food grown in the soil we

have engaged with our ecological selves. This primary connection is not dependent upon an individual spending time in nature. It is an inherent connection that I believe plays a role in all of our identities, whether we are aware of it or not. To illustrate this view of primary connection in another way, I might say that because we are all born of a woman, we all share this commonality in our identities (for some it's an integral and obvious piece of their identity; for others it may appear to play a less prominent role). The point is we cannot deny the importance of the *mother* with whom we were once in physical contact during pregnancy and upon birth. I am in tune here with E. O. Wilson's theoretical position regarding biophilia or the tendency of people to affiliate with nature and other living things due to a "hard-wir[ing]" of human genetics (Clayton & Opotow, 2003, p. 7).

I believe that an *awareness* of the ecological self is often, though not always, precipitated by direct interaction with nature; however, it can also be acquired later in our development. By direct interaction I mean the physical connection with elements of nature supported by the primary senses (smell, touch, taste, hearing, and sight). This does not exclude other ways of knowing about nature through additional forms of senses. For some people immersed in nature from a young age, identification with the natural world may be strong and play a significant role in self-identity. For others, an awareness of a connection with nature may come much later in life, or perhaps not at all.

For Thomashow (1996), ecological identity "refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self," and that "each person's path to ecological identity reflects his or her cognitive, intuitive, and affective perceptions of ecological relationships" (p. 3). Ecological identity formation and development, therefore, can be very personal. Methodologies, like narrative

inquiry self-study (explored further in Chapter Three), that focus on an individual's personal narratives of lived experience can be very valuable in supporting ecological identity work, one of many ways in which ecological identity can be explored.

Deep Ecology

For some ecological identity inquirers, it may be necessary to visit the fundamentals of ecological perspectives and thought to gain a foothold on the massive vertical climb of understanding that is environmental ethics and environmental paradigms or worldviews. I am often reminded of how significant a task this is when I see the surprised look on my students' faces each semester when they are introduced to the concept of human-centred versus nature-centred belief systems and I ask them to consider which one they fall under. I believe this is a critical step in recognizing a starting point for ecological identity inquiry. An environmental worldview encompasses a person's view or belief around how the world operates, their role within that world, and what they consider to be right or wrong in regards to the environment which conveys itself as an environmental ethic (Miller & Hackett, 2013). There is a substantial continuum in this regard between worldviews that are more "holistic" in their thinking and those that are more "atomistic" (Miller & Hackett, 2013, p. 686).

For me, I subscribe to an *environmental wisdom* worldview that dictates that we are not in charge of nature and that resources should be a shared common good among all species on the planet (Miller & Hackett, 2013). Within this perspective is a belief that sustainability will be realized through earth-protecting practices (not earth-degrading ones), and our ability to learn nature's lessons that involves system thinking (Miller & Hackett, 2013). This viewpoint has at its centre a belief that nature has intrinsic value, or value that cannot be assigned or even often

understood by humans (Miller & Hackett, 2013). This core belief is of utmost importance when considering a starting point in ecological identity research.

Under the umbrella of environmental wisdom lies my theoretical environmental perspective known as deep ecology, based on "the relationships of the three great movements - peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability" (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. viii). At the core of the deep ecology movement is Norwegian philosopher, professor, and mountaineer Arne Naess (1912–2009), who coined the phrase *deep ecology* at the 1972 Third World Future Research Conference held in Bucharest. Naess, who explored the world throughout his life and who wrote about his experiences living through depressions and wars (including the occupation by Germany in World War II), felt the world needed an alternative to what he called the "shallow" environmental movement supported by "forms of knowledge in specialized conventional Western disciplines" (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. 25).

His deep ecology approach embraced the principles of "diversity, cooperation, and beautiful actions" with a dedication to pursuing a "joyful life based on nonviolence and low consumption" (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. viii). Supporters of the deep ecology movement are open about their personal connections to the planet and express "sorrow for the widespread suffering caused by destructive practices" (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. 25). Their ethic includes a belief that all beings have inherent value and that diversity is critical to conversations taking place in environmental and educational research, for "no single philosophy can solve all of these problems" (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. 3). In this way, Naess states that the platform of deep ecology is not final but requires personal modifications in the form of an individual's *ecosophy*, a personal philosophy of life based on the study of relationships and personal wisdom (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. vii). Naess emphasises the importance of *place* in building an

ecosophy, along with the importance of daily personal inquiry to help us "know ourselves deeply" (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. viii).

Naess encouraged what he called a "total view" represented by four levels of "questioning and articulation" that involve discourses around philosophies, principles, policies, and action (Drengson & Devall, 2008, p. 33). The total view is a dynamic exercise that requires consideration and modification in accordance with an individual's ecosophy, as well as engagement with diverse groups (Drengson & Devall, 2008).

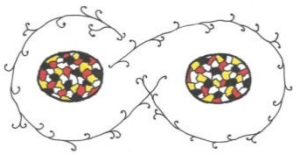
This focus on individual meaning-making is what connects my ecological identity research to this concept of deep ecology and educational sustainability. Many scholars like ethnobotanist Wade Davis (1953–), naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club John Muir (1838–1914), forester and ecologist Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), poet and activist Gary Snyder (1930–), author and naturalist Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), and poet and lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) have inspired my research into place and identity as a means of pursuing self-actualization as a pathway leading to a personal ontology and way of living theory (Drengson & Devall, 2008).

The principles of deep ecology are reflected in other disciplines as well. Rachel Carson, in her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, effectively questioned the scientific use of pesticides and their effect on nature's systems when she wrote: "This sudden silencing of the song of birds, this obliteration of the color and beauty and interest they lend to our world have come about swiftly, insidiously, and unnoticed by those whose communities are as yet unaffected" (p. 103). Carson was one of the first ecologists to present systems thinking in layman terms the public could understand. Sandra Steingraber (1998), ecologist, cancer survivor, and author of "Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment," is

considered a modern-day Carson who plainly explains the relationship between synthetic chemicals and human cancer.

Systems Thinking

Systems, or the interrelation or interaction of two or more parts to serve a function as a whole (Kauffman, 1980; Magolis, n.d.; Meadows, 2008; Pidwirny, 2006), are the main focus of interest in systems theory, a "transdisciplinary study of the abstract organization of phenomena" (University of Twente, n.d., para. 2). A system is said to have four things that make it a system including multiple parts, properties, internal relationships between parts, and an existence within an environment (para. 2). Succinctly put, a system "is a set of things that affect one another within an environment and form a larger pattern that is different from any of the parts" (para. 2). Henderson and Kesson (2004) represent this diverse and connected thinking in their representation of inquiry as a hologram whose pieces store information about the image as a whole "but from its own unique angle" (p. 41). Systems theory is an effective way of thinking about large issues that don't fit into predetermined disciplines (Kauffman, 1980). Systems thinking is the application of systems theory to help people see systems from a macro viewpoint including repeating cycles and patterns (Meadows, 2008; McNamara, 2006). This definition is an effective way to consider complex environmental issues that have cascading effects across the disciplines. It also supports educational sustainability research by promoting understanding of the world's interconnectedness. Interdisciplinary thinking and the inclusion of alternate ways of knowing also serve to provide inquirers with direction when starting out in ecological identity research.



Find Your Place

I was more than a little frustrated last summer when I drove up to the family cottage located on the shores of Shadow Lake in the Kawartha Lakes. I was attempting to escape the doubt that was slowly creeping into my research and the feeling that, despite more than seven years of graduate work under my belt, I had no concrete grounding in the research field and no comfortable space in the methodology I had chosen. I was lost as to my direction moving forward and even contemplated walking away from the process altogether. I turned to the natural environment for relief, as I have always done in times of distress, and watched from the dock as the water flowed back and forth. It appeared to me then that even this element of nature lacked a clear direction. Sleep that evening brought little rest as dreams permeated my thoughts and blurred the lines between the conscious and subconscious. In the early morning hours when the dream images reached their zenith, a voice broke through the chaos and announced to me in my dream-like state: "find your place." An image of an Aboriginal man appeared, causing other visions to fall away and he spoke the sentence again—- "find your place." I awoke with a calmness I hadn't felt in a long while and walked down to the water. Standing where the land meets the water I knew my place was here on the edge, between ancestral callings and the present voice, nature and the world we build, the study of science and the art of living life, and the act of being and the act of evolving. It became clear on that morning that my sense of identity, my sense of place, and my life's work could all be defined by these spaces in between. (Personal Journal, 2014).

CHAPTER TWO: SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

Focus of Research

It has been a relatively short period of time since I embarked on this doctoral journey and committed to what Shields (2005) calls "building a personal framework that is whole and sustaining" (p. 179). Like her, I see life's experiences as a "grounding force in my life choices and directions" (p. 179), and I see curriculum comprised of these many experiences instead of being external to them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). In my secondary and early postsecondary school years, I viewed education as a product to be bought and sold (Smith, 2000) and believed that environmental problems could be solved with the appropriate level of science applied. Even though I had grown up immersed in nature, I believed in the positivist perspective of objectivity and quantifiable science as the truly valid forms of research.

This dissertation work is about reclaiming and renaming my connection with nature to shed light on how it has influenced my life, teaching practice, and research. I look to identify alternate ways of knowing about nature, to discover approaches and methods that might facilitate exploration into identity and sense of place. Specifically, I take an in-depth look at how stories of personal experience can be a rich source of data and how the process of métissage, or the braiding of narratives and other forms of inquiry, may lead to praxis in life and work (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). In a practical sense, this study is positioned to model and demonstrate for environmental educators like me how narrative inquiry might be a viable tool in helping to understand self, place, and practice within the context of a relationship with nature. Likewise, I hope that the study will stand as a way to encourage conversations around the value of narrative inquiry when considering both environmental and sustainability curriculum development and design.

Justification for Research

Terms and Movement of Inquiry Defined

Educational sustainability, with its focus on worldwide perspectives of education (Nipissing University, 2014) assumes that, as in nature, diversity leads to a robust and thriving environment where resiliency is possible. Similarly, environmental sustainability relies on multiple perspectives to help decode complex environmental issues (Orr, 2004) and requires an understanding of numerous contexts (social, political, economic, ecological) to achieve the ultimate planetary sustainability goal of "enough for everyone forever" (original author unknown). Environmental sustainability, too, depends on achieving a better understanding of the self and the role we play in the greater environmental system both as individuals and as a collective (Thomashow, 1996).

In this way, educational and environmental research mirror each other, both in their historic reliance on the positivist paradigm to solve problems as well as their newfound interest in the constructivist viewpoint to try to *understand* issues (Orr, 2004). This "narrative turn" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7) away from a positivist viewpoint towards a postmodern perspective with a focus on multiple realities (Shapiro, 2011) has opened the door for more conversations to occur and has allowed new methodologies and methods to emerge that might otherwise have had trouble receiving attention or respect. As an environmental educator, I care deeply about the conversations taking place in both educational and environmental circles, and see how one area of study informs the other.

How I move within this framework to build identity, and specifically how I go about gathering information, becomes critical so that valuable data are not overlooked or ignored. Data collection, or the compilation of field text in this context, rests with the notion that information

must first be gathered that can later be interpreted in meaningful ways as research text and then transformed into useable material that can be applied in practice in a reflective and meaningful way.

An approach to data collection in the context of human/environmental relationships lies with the "emerging field" of environmental hermeneutics, or the "interpretation of experience in the world" (Utsler, Clingerman, Drenthen, & Treanor, 2014, p. 7). Hermeneutics, or the act of coming to understand information, focuses on the interpretation of texts but also seeks to "understand what is happening in the very act of interpreting itself" (Palmer, 1969 as cited in Utsler, 2014, p. 124). Environmental hermeneutics includes, directly or indirectly, "self-interpretation in relation to environments" and helps support disciplines with similar emphasis, such as environmental psychology, which is concerned with "self-understanding in relation to environments and the ways in which such a relation shapes the psyche" (p. 124).

Environmental psychology, ecopsychology, and human ecology are all focused on the space where humans interact with the environment. Environmental psychology, a recognized branch of formal psychology, differs from ecopsychology, whose roots "arose as a response to the environmental crisis, not out of a psychological science later applied to such a crisis" (Utsler, 2014, p. 134). Human ecology, or the study of human/natural interactions, approaches the space of inquiry from a viewpoint of "reorientation" (Borden, 2014, p. 8) or a belief that in order to truly understand human/environment relations we need to broaden the scope of study beyond the agendas of "environmentalism," "sustainability," and "environmental studies" and look upon systems thinking in a broad, open sense that includes psychology among other disciplines (p. 8). All three perspectives offer opportunities in ecological identity exploration.

Personal Justification

I believe my sense of place, or consciousness of my roots and connection to the land (Northwest Earth Institute, 2007, 1A), informs not only my professional life but also my personal life. By knowing where I came from, I am able to navigate where I am going, which allows me to focus less on "making a living" and more on "finding a way to be alive" (Barbara Kingsolver 2002, as quoted in Leggo, 2009, p. 164). As Baldwin (2011) eloquently states, "all narratives are essentially incomplete" (p. 106), and by working through personal narratives we gain validation within the context of community, allowing us to share commonalities and feel more connected (Atkinson, 1995). In this connected way, our stories are always "co-authored," either directly or indirectly, and our discourses transformed and changed because of that (Mishler, 1995, p. 117).

The revisiting of our stories with others can also help validate our feelings about what we identify with and potentially explain why. In this way, stories may leave clues behind as to how we receive and interpret our information and how that information may be recalled for future investigation and consideration. Below is a story I wrote during my PhD residency that I titled "On Memory: An Infant's Tale." It's a story of my earliest memory, triggered for me by the sense of touch, validated for me through conversation with my mother, and formulated into meaning by me 16 years later. Stories like this cause me to pause when considering where to look for stories and meaning and to consider investigating other ways of knowing about the past that may provide me with information about how I sense and interpret the world.

On Memory: An Infant's Tale

My father named me Carmen and I was brought home in the spring of 1972 to a small bungalow on the outskirts of St. Vital, an up and coming suburb of the larger city of Winnipeg. My mother and I had both spent the previous week in hospital recovering from a very difficult delivery that, for my mother, would be her last. The bungalow, that still stands on the same city lot today, holds no personal significance for me, due to the fact that I was just 6 months of age when we moved to a five-acre property located 30 minutes out of the city. That rural property would be my home for the next 20 years.

The bungalow has a place in my overall story, however, as it remains for me a reminder of the awesome power of memory to construct and reconstruct the past, and to do so with surprising accuracy. My realization of the mind's ability to recall past events came to me in the form of a shopping trip with my mother 25 years after my birth. We were in the tile section of a popular home renovation store trying to narrow our choice for the new bathroom floor—would we go with a rough or smooth design? I browsed the tiles with my hand, touching each one in turn, their textures translated instantly through millions of sensory live wires within my central nervous system to inform the brain of my pleasure or pain—rough or smooth?

My hand stopped instinctively on one particular design of yellow paisley on white, my fingers tracing the raised flowers, reading the tile, much like braille upon a page. The tile had been deemed "retro" by the designers who created it, and I called my mother's attention to it asking her, "why do I know this pattern?" She scrutinized the tile carefully and replied

instantly, "you couldn't!" She reviewed it again closer, and with a spark of disbelief she told me the tile had lined the floor of the old bungalow we lived in until our move when I was 6 months old.

There were few photographs of the old house (which might initially seem strange but isn't really when I reveal my parents were not avid photographers), and no spare tiles had been used in the new house where I may have come in contact with them. We both stared at the tile, not sure what to make of our discovery, and eventually chalked it up to chance.

Now, 16 years later, I've come to believe in anything but chance. I consider the tile as a tangible symbol, proof if you like for those who require physical evidence, of a life's ability to remember that which it logically couldn't, or shouldn't, at only 6 months of age. In those early days of life, when I sat, rolled, and lay upon the yellow paisley tiles, their essence was communicated to me through texture, temperature, hardness, and sight, a single box of physical impulses stored within the warehouse of the mind. I became imprinted with their presence, and they became part of my early story.

Now, at the age of 41, when memories of the prairies flood my mind on days when I feel most disconnected in life, I do not question anymore how I can possibly be connected to a land I have long left behind. As a child, the land upon which I sat, rolled in, skipped across, and lay upon with arms outstretched to the big sky, communicated to me through texture, temperature, softness, and sight. The landscape's imprint on my soul is undeniable, and today she calls to me 2,200 kms away to remember I once felt the strong drumbeat of her heart and once touched the rough curves of her beautiful face. (July, 2013, Doctoral Work)

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, which advocates that meaningful education stems from both the continuity of personal experience (the past is influential in the future) and the

recognition of experience as teacher, encouraged me to venture outside my previously fortified modernistic frameworks and redefine my epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical approaches to make room for my own new realities.

When considering how to conduct research into the phenomenon of ecological identity, particularly sense of place and its influence on a life's path, I considered the hallmarks of qualitative research as posed by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Glesne (2006) and contemplated that a study on identity would generate stories with rich descriptions, would seek out patterns and complexity, and would never produce generalizations but rather create contexts.

In this qualitative paradigm I find comfort as researcher, because the approach matches my "personal view of seeing and understanding the world" (Glesne, 2006, p. 5) and provides me with a foundation from which to gain a "greater understanding of [my] perceptions, attitudes, and processes" (p. 29). As Firestone (1987) points out, "one's decision often expresses values about what the world is like, how one ought to understand it, and what the most important threats to that understanding are" (p. 20).

With this qualitative direction in sight, I felt I had two choices regarding how I would execute this research. My first option was to research the stories of my students using the method of *currere* that focuses on the "relationship between the temporal and conceptual" to generate a point of view that is both self-conscious and developmental in hopes of revealing a connection between the "Self and its evolution and education" (Pinar, 1994, p. 19). This method is based in four steps: *regressive* (a return to past context and situation), *progressive* (a look to the future that "is present in the same sense that the past is present" (p. 24), *analytical* (interpretation though lived experience), and *synthetical* (the integration of parts to create a comprehensive whole "through which the Self and the world are accessible to themselves" (p.

27)). My second option was to research myself using the process of métissage to advance praxis in my own life and work (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). This option indicated an opportunity to know myself first before I came to know others. For my thesis, I have chosen to conduct a narrative inquiry self-study into my ecological identity utilizing métissage as a "practical tool" with which I will blend genres of inquiry and braid narratives of understanding about nature (Hasebe-Ludt et a. 2009, p. 8). This will be my first step on what I imagine will be a long road towards better awareness of identity in relation to nature as both an individual and an educator.

Social and Historical Justification

While engaging in ecological identity work with students over the past decade, I have noticed a marked difference between their stories and mine. The stories I share with them are primary experiences, full of direct contact with nature, whereas many of their stories lie in the secondary experience, expressed through interactions with media, online petitions, and occasional school field trips. I do not discount, however, that their primary relationship with the environment already exists, the one that nourishes them in biological, physical, spiritual, and emotional ways even without their direct knowledge. For many students I teach, I believe it is their lack of revisiting their original primary connection with the earth that causes them to feel deficient in their relationship with nature. This lack of direct contact with nature, or what Louv (2005/2008) calls *nature deficit disorder*, may interrupt further development of an ecological identity and may exacerbate physical and emotional illness, attention issues, sensory deprivation, mental illness, and ability to cope (Louv, 2005/2008, 2012; Taylor et al., 2001, 2002; Thomashow, 1996; Wells & Evans, 2003; Wells & Lekies, 2006). The idea that contact with nature can assist in reaching self-actualization is well documented (Bass, 2008; Butala, 1994/2004; Clayton, 2003; Kals & Ittner, 2003; Shermer, 2008; Thomashow, 1996), and further

research has revealed the benefits of contact in regards to building sense of place, both local and global (Austin & Kaplan, 2003; Opotow & Brooke, 2003; Stegner, 2002; Weisman, 2008).

In my experience, environmental educators tell stories. We can't help ourselves. When nature provides teachable moments in the field, happenings unscripted by the popular curriculum, my colleagues and I revert to a time when our own love of nature was heightened by new knowledge and we were so profoundly transformed by the experience that it became curriculum itself. We often discuss how we do not expect students to relate to the same experiences we have had. Opportunity and access often dictate what students can and cannot experience. But the content of the stories is not as important as the telling of the story, the enthusiastic sharing of one heart with another. These stories drive our love of teaching, and in turn, I feel they drive students to consider how they may connect with nature in their own context and circumstances. In our current teaching world, where standardization is believed to lead to accountability, room for stories is dwindling, and many of my colleagues may wonder what place they occupy as environmental educators in the larger educational conversation.

I once believed that what I did in the field as an educator could never be defined or supported by theory because it was so personalized and that any attempt to label and compartmentalize my processes was futile. Now, as I walk the line between the field and theory in my graduate work, I see how much can be learned by both practitioners and theorists if we bridge this gap. A good place to begin building this connection is to start with respecting the place of narrative inquiry in environmental curriculum and honouring alternate ways of knowing about the environment. My contribution to this bridging process will be to tell my story, as openly and honestly as I can as an environmental educator, researcher, woman, mother, Métis, and transplant from the prairies to the east, in the hopes that it provides a place for others to

share their stories. Like Hart (2002), I hope that practitioners may "find support for their sometimes lonely struggle to engage in environmental education in the shared stories of their colleagues" (p. 159).

I believe that narrative inquiry self-study might hold significant value for reflective educators and may subsequently influence the way they conduct their practice. I posit that through narrative inquiry we can begin to address what David Orr (1991) calls "foundations of modern education. . . . enshrined in myths we have come to accept without question" (p. 2). Through examination of six myths, Orr asks the question: "What is education for?" (p. 1), and proceeds to replace those myths with six principles for a new pedagogy that includes: seeing all education as environmental education; mastery of the self; education as responsibility to others; education as direct experience; the power of examples; and a greater focus on the way we learn instead of what we learn (Orr, 1991).

This approach to education, particularly postsecondary education, is actively being discussed by such groups as the Context Institute, The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (ASSHE), Second Nature, and the Northwest Earth Institute, who believe in a systems approach to teaching sustainability. Orr (2004), who focuses on the "problem of education" instead of the "lack of it" (p. 5) in his book *Earth in Mind*, calls on educators to become "students of the ecologically proficient mind" whose job it is to "foster such minds" when "nothing less than the redesign of education itself" will become necessary (p. 3). As Sumara, Davis, and Laidlaw (2001) state: "postmodern discourses provide support for ecological discourses," creating awareness which in turn should broaden the ways that learning and schooling are discussed (p. 150).

All these forms of environmental inquiry help to investigate how "our understanding of the self affects how we understand (and behave toward) nature and how the experience of nature also shapes and develops who we are" (Utsler, 2014, p. 135). Because of this important connection, environmental identity matters for both personal identity and social identity and will also "entail social consequences" (p. 135).

The Story in the Middle: Then and Now

In the fall of 2014, while preparing a lesson for my environmental science students on the value of considering natural capital when planning urban spaces, it occurred to me that the same idea could be extended to ecological identity research. If I view narrative inquiry as generating capital, a kind of richness that informs spaces that may have been previously void of its value—economics, engineering, education, health—then stories could be seen as narrative capital, a currency that buys us new understanding and the ability to make connections that were previously inconceivable. With this concept in mind, I returned to narratives I had written about past times, moments that seemed significant enough to write about but whose true purpose remained hidden to me. I then turned to narratives I had written of a more recent and present time and searched for themes that were present in both collections in the hope that I might shed light on why the themes had reoccurred naturally across time, almost holistically and without prescription.

The result of this exercise is what represents my position in this thesis work. I am writing not the story of the past, nor attempting to predict the story that is to come. Ecological identity research, while valuable in its ability to assist in the understanding of why we make decisions the way we do, cannot forecast our future. What I am writing is the story in the middle, the narrative that lies between who I was and who I am becoming. Because I am a parent, I see how

my children's narratives are influencing my own. Because I am a child, the story of my aging parents directs mine to walk in places I never intended. Because I am a teacher, I am the keeper of each and every student narrative entrusted to me, and I carry them along with the weight of my own stories. Because I am a student, I continually seek opportunities to learn from the stories of others to better understand my own personal pedagogy. This is a fitting place for me to be as a researcher who has already identified that, in most aspects of my life, I occupy the middle ground.

This identity study is focused on facilitating emergent design and welcoming the unexpected and unplanned. To do this, I am required to venture into new territories of inquiry and carry tools that may be unfamiliar and awkward in my hand. My first step in this exploration is to prepare to embark on this developing journey of inquiry. My next steps are to cross time and space by first *marking home* (to investigate my early years on the land), before *venturing out* (in search of roots of transformation), to eventually dedicate myself to *seeking signs* (of an ecological identity in evolution), to finally focus on *founding new landmarks* (for those who will come after me in search of signs). I turn now to the process of preparing to perform an inquiry study into ecological identity.

Scholars of Influence: Landmark Scholars

I have been influenced by many scholars in the field of narrative research. Yet, none have affected me as strongly, or as profoundly, as the writers I highlight in this study and refer to as my landmark scholars, or those who have dramatically changed the direction of my inquiry. These scholars have created narratives of vulnerability, passion, sadness, joy, loss, and gain. Beyond their accolades and contributions to the literary world, to me, they model what it means to take risks, in research as well as in life itself. Choosing unconventional, and often

times misunderstood approaches to the act of inquiry, they demonstrate that their priority rests in the act of discovery itself, for a better understanding of the self and society as a whole. It is their work that inspires the direction of my thesis research. I will mark the end of each chapter within this dissertation with a landmark scholar who has profoundly changed the way I view research, education, or the environment.

Sharon Butala: Landmark Scholar

I came to Sharon Butala's work through my PhD supervisor, Dr. Carmen Shields, who handed me a copy of *The Perfection of the Morning* and said "you must read about her life on the prairie." Interestingly, I had assigned a Butala reading to my students years before but did not personally connect with the writing until this doctoral work. That dissonance remains, for me, a very interesting characteristic of narrative inquiry work–the inability to guess at the significance of everyday actions and encounters with people or works until you are ready to seek meaning. In that book, and subsequent writings after that initial exposure, I came to see Butala as a guide through this hazy world of inquiry and to see her as a friend with common landmarks and sense of place. Her dedication to the act of writing and honest inquiry, along with her honouring of her own truth, was both refreshing and shocking to me as a beginning writer.

Because of Butala's work I began to consider alternate ways of knowing about the environment and reconsider the validity of experiences I had long dismissed. I began to consider all experiences as potential data and gathered information from sources I had not considered rational or logical before. Because of Butala, I include now the following story from my

personal journal in 2013, less than a year after I began my doctoral work. This excerpt is focused on dreams as a possible source of information when considering identity, and recounts a dream within a dream and the possible interpretation of that story.

Brooke tells me she dreamt of birds last night, many species on the line outside. We open the back door and a large white owl flies in. It perches on the back of the couch and turns its head to look at us. She calls it a snowy owl, and I give her the proper name in Latin.

The presence of my daughter in the dream may indicate her importance in helping me to navigate the scene within the dream, her guidance appreciated to help me discover something I may not have found on my own. Birds traditionally mean the freeing of the spirit, and the owl is an indication of wisdom and a connection to the intuitive. The white colour of the owl, as Butala would point out, is of great significance, for it may indicate a spirit animal has visited. The dream does not hold direct meaning for me but rather opens a door to consider that valid information may come to me from sources I previously ignored or couldn't imagine, and that act of opening the door may support my inquiry process.

CHAPTER THREE: PREPARING TO EXPLORE USING NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

"I am writing my way back to places where I felt whole, and I am writing my way forward reclaiming my whole self, with my whole range of experiences."

(Shields, Novak, Marshall, & Guiney Yallop, 2011, p. 73).

Identity Research Grounded

I wasn't aware that I had been performing ecological identity work for decades. If I look back through my life experiences connected to nature (and I could argue that indeed all my experiences have been connected in this way), then I see that I have always collected memories and filed them away to be used in my everyday life and work. I was never without a story, whether it was with friends, family, or students. I saw, interpreted, and explained my world through stories, and storytelling was my way of communicating meaning.

I contemplated deeply on the act of seeing the world this way when I read *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* by Aboriginal author Thomas King (2003). In that work, King states, "the truth about stories is, that's all we are" (p. 2) and repeatedly utilizes an Aboriginal creation story that describes the earth's movement through space on the back of a turtle. The turtle, we discover in each telling, is not alone, for below him is another turtle that helps carry the burden, and below him, another. King is careful to mention that the story changes each time it is told, the storyteller creating a new and meaningful rendition while keeping to the promise of "turtles all the way down" (p. 122).

Steve Denning, author of award-winning leadership and management books such as *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative* (2005), and *The Leader's Guide to Radical Management: Reinventing the Workplace for the 21st*

Century (2010), also sees stories as the foundation of who we are and states that "stories fill our lives in the way that water fills the lives of fish. Stories are so all-pervasive that we practically cease to be aware of them" (Denning, 2016, para. 7). These points of view held so much relevance for me personally that, at an educational conference in 2015, I stated the following:

My truth about stories began long before I was an educator and researcher. Whenever I attempted to relay meaning in many aspects of my life it usually came out as a story. Some said I was a storyteller because I was from the Canadian prairies and that farmers were naturals at telling tall tales. Others thought perhaps it was because I had Aboriginal genes and the oral tradition of storytelling was transferred to me in what David Bouchard calls ancestral memories. And while I'm sure these factors contributed to my overall viewpoint, I think Denning is correct in that storytelling was so pervasive and intertwined with my day-to-day living, I was unaware of when stories started and when they ended. But why is this important to me as an environmental educator, and why might it be important to you?

This chapter focuses on preparing to conduct ecological identity research and takes an in-depth look at the methodology and methods by which ecological identity work can be conducted.

Life Started Qualitatively

When considering how best to conduct an ecological identity self-study, I was drawn to the idea of using stories as data, though there are numerous other ways of conducting ecological identity research such as literature review (Holmes, 2003), empirical methods (Kalof, 2003; Opotow & Brooke, 2003; Willett & Holland, 2013) or heuristic methods (Gebhard et al., 2003; Kals & Ittner, 2003; Kahn, 2003; Myers & Russell, 2003). Particularly, it was the vivid and descriptive stories of my early childhood in nature that made me pause when considering how

best to capture deep meaning in a research study. I considered that in the beginning, all of life for me was qualitative, from my fascination of the ant hill in the back woods to the way I would watch the starlings at sunset move as one organism across the fall sky. I wasn't able to say how many of these encounters I had growing up, nor was I able to rank their importance to my life today. What I did know was that the encounters that were meaningful and had an impact on me then continued to have an impact on me now**,** several decades later.

I also needed a methodology that would allow me to connect my personal life with my professional life of teaching in the hopes of stepping closer to praxis. I wished to imitate Palmer (1997/2007) and his desire to not focus on subject mastery but to begin research on my self in the form of inquiry. I wanted to hold a "mirror to [my] soul," be willing to take a good look, and understand that "knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject" (p. 3). Research based in the qualitative paradigm, with a narrative inquiry approach, therefore, seemed to be a natural fit for an ecological identity self-study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, or inquiry focused on quality as opposed to quantity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), can best be understood by considering the type of research one aims to collect and also the purpose of that research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Holistic and naturalistic in its design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), qualitative research embraces a phenomenological approach to inquiry believing in the existence of "multiple realities that are socially defined" either individually or collectively (Firestone, 1987, p. 16). In an attempt to reach understanding instead of explanation (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), qualitative researchers actively participate in the research, seeking unique, rich descriptions of experiences to gain a view of the "world in action" to which they can embed their findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10). With a focus on

building relationships, qualitative researchers are careful to avoid declaring universal applications in their findings (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The hallmark of qualitative research is the understanding that "there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25).

I believe my interest in qualitative research is no accident. As Firestone (1987) points out, "one's decision often expresses values about what the world is like" (p. 20). Even though I was well versed in quantitative methods and had comfort in a positivist viewpoint, further self-examination revealed I was lacking authenticity and voice (Cole & Knowles, 1999) which I wished to carry into this research project.

This revelation revealed to me the need to expand my definitions of teaching and learning to include alternate ways of understanding and knowing about not only myself but also my students, instead of the pronouncement of a single absolute truth (Doll, 1993; Edwards & Usher, 2001; Greene, 1994; Kilgore, 2004; Packwood & Sikes, 1996; Pinar, 1994; Schwab, 1978; Slattery, 1995a, 1995b, 1997). I began to see that the "interplay" (Shapiro, 2011, p. 173) between me as the teacher and them as the learners is what creates "meaning-making" (Ültanir, 2012, p. 1308) and highlights how knowledge is individually constructed through this collective interaction (Dewey, 1938; von Glasersfeld, 1989; Hein, 1991; Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008; Kumar, 2006; Savery & Duffy, 2001; Terwel, 1999;).

Narrative Inquiry as Methodology and Method

I chose narrative inquiry as both my methodology and my method for this ecological identity self-study. Narrative as "a distinct form of discourse" has inherent in its function "the shaping and ordering of experience" as a way of organizing and understanding the actions of an individual or a group in a meaningful way (Chase, 2011, p. 421). As noted by Pinnegar and

Daynes (2006), narrative inquiry "embraces narrative" as a means by which story can be understood as a method of receiving data, but also as a methodology for understanding a phenomenon (p. 5). Narrative inquiry adopts narrative as both method and methodology (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and finds grounding in the translation of experience "as expressed in lived and told stories" (p. 5). Narrative inquiry, by its nature, is experiential (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and stories, both relayed and lived, are mechanisms through which we become whole and from where new meanings can be born (Atkinson, 1995).

I believe, as Baldwin (2011) does, that "all narratives are essentially incomplete" (para. 29), and that as humans we are in a stage of constant development (Polkinghorne, 1991). With this belief comes an assumption that "experience is a storied phenomenon" and that the "*living, telling, retelling, and reliving*" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34) of stories are the engine that drives the narrative inquiry process. As we transition from a state of living a story to the telling of a story, to the retelling of the story within a new context, we create a space in which a new dynamic story of change can be told (Clandinin, 2013). In our act of inquiring, we move within the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, namely temporality (lives, events, places, and things in constant transition), sociality (cultural, personal, and institutional narratives), and place (physical boundaries of topography linked with events); (Clandinin & Huber, 2012). According to Trahar (2009), "narrative inquirers strive to attend to the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon" (para. 3).

Narrative inquiry as a phenomenon sees movement of the inquiring individuals inward towards their internal dialogue and emotions, outward towards the environment and its stimuli, backward to regain a historical context, and forward to utilize their present understanding to help affect their future views (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To research an experience narratively is

to experience it in real time in these four ways and to follow Dewey's (1938) thoughts of experience as curriculum that focuses on "situation, continuity, and interaction" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

Self-Study

When I made the conscious choice in this thesis work to become both the researcher and the participant of the inquiry, where I would "represent the story of the research project" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 418), I understood that I would no longer adhere to the role of "[bystander] of the process but [become an active participant] who will be affected, whether short or long term, by the outcome" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5).

To be affected is a welcome result of this study, as I seek "improvement on both personal and professional levels" (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 5). By definition, self-study is a "teacher's systemic and critical examination of their actions and their context" (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 11), in hopes that to seek out a better understanding of the self will lead to a better understanding of education (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Pinar, 1994).

In design, self-study is less focused on the self as an individual as it is on the gap between the individual and the practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). It facilitates an "emergent understanding" of a teacher's work, relationships, and possibilities for the future (Shields et al., 2011, p. 63).

The methodological framework of self-study, as refined by self-study scholars such as LaBoskey (2004), Loughran and Northfield (1998), and Samaras and Freese (2009) indicates a need for both a personal and collaborative interactive inquiry, utilization of multiple methods, and a systematic and forthcoming research process that offers insight to the educational field outside the methodology.

This self-study is not focused on a single question or even a group of research questions. It is focused on phenomena where emergent stories of experience act as the data source, and only through data analysis of that source will I find meaning. Self-study supports praxis and encourages open-ended investigation into how I perceive and construct the notion of identity itself. By braiding the narrative writings of others in the environmental and educational fields with my own understanding of identity and how it relates to my practice, I hope to extend investigation beyond myself to explore more deeply the phenomenon of ecological identity and its impact on practice while revealing more about the process of the inquiry itself. Within this study, narrative inquiry, self-study will be performed within the framework of métissage.

Métissage as Framework

Narrative inquiry as a methodology is a natural fit with métissage, a "practical tool or strategy" that encourages researchers to "locate [themselves] in a rapidly growing network of contexts, including family, neighbourhood, community, profession, school and society" in order to begin to know their place and its "connection with the past, the future, and others," as well as gain a sense of unfolding self-identity (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 4).

Métissage supports my study of spaces in between, as it attempts to find harmonious ground "between alternative and mainstream curriculum discourses" and seeks "genuine exchange" between the researcher and other inquirers (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 9). Through the braiding of narratives of place, memory, ancestry, language and familiarity, métissage exists in the "interval" between "cultures and languages," "genres, texts and identities" (p. 9), and blends different components including "visual" and "aural" (p. 7).

By writing and creating autobiographical representations of myself, I contribute to a line of inquiry that intersects with the writings of others, and through my engagement with the

stories of others (whether directly or indirectly), a "new text" is created "that is stronger and more complex than any of our individual stories" (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 7). The act of braiding or intertwining narratives "becomes an interpretation of the narrative as well as a form of representation and reporting of the research, individual and collective" (p. 9). The effect of métissage "is unknown until it occurs" (p. 10), making it a natural addition to this research focused on exploration and emergent data. The goal of the researcher when using métissage is to "observe more clearly and closely and with less distortion" (p. 9).

Ecological Identity Work

Ecological identity work refers to the conscious investigation of identity through inquiry related to human/nature relationships. Ecological identity work can be performed in many ways and with a focus on working with individuals, groups, or sometimes both (Hayes-Conroya & Vanderbeck, 2005). Gooch (2002) utilized phenomenography, an empirical research method that seeks out variation in perceptions of phenomena (Yates, Partridge, & Bruce, 2012) to examine people's motivation for volunteering in their local watersheds. Doerr (2004) modified *currere,* a method of inquiry based in conceptualization (Pinar, 1994) for a project she conducted with her high school ecology class called the Environmental Autobiography (EA), where she researched how ecology is taught in secondary school. Kempton and Holland (2003) conducted extensive interviews with 10 types of environmental groups plus environmental scientists and members of the public to correlate identity with environmental action. Regardless of the approach to ecological identity work, at the core likely is reflection, either group or individual reflection.

Ecological identity work involves "reflective processes" to discover an individual's ecological worldview or "emerging philosophy" based on their cognitive and intuitive understanding of the natural world and their interpretation of that world which informs their

choices both personally and publicly (Thomashow, 1996, p. 5). Ecological identity work requires, as part of this process, a telling of life stories, in particular the significance of childhood memories about place (Thomashow, 1996).

Ecological identity work can be extremely valuable in educational research, particularly in regards to the field of educational sustainability, defined by Nipissing University's (2014) graduate program as "the commitment to global perspectives of education which encourage development of the self and the relationships that promote understanding of the world's interconnectedness." Because ecological identity work also facilitates inquiry into the self, and oftentimes, development of the self in relation to environments both social and physical, there appears to be a natural pairing between this type of work and educational sustainability research.

According to Thomashow (1996), ecological identity work attempts to facilitate investigation into "how people learn about ecology, how people perceive themselves in relationship to ecosystems, how an understanding of ecology changes the way people learn about themselves, and how an ecological worldview promotes personal change" (p.5). In this way, ecological identity work through narrative inquiry, or the inquiring into a phenomenon through story, helps us to understand how we think about education and draws educational research close to ourselves instead of holding it at arm's length. The idea of nonbiased research has no place in this truly personal space where the focus entails the biases, perceptions, and beliefs of the researcher. I find narrative inquiry to be an accessible and practical form of inquiry that helps me derive direct relevance and meaning from my research.

Ecological identity work allows me to create a "language and context" around which I can begin to interpret how my personal life choices connect with my view of the ecological world (Thomashow, 1996, p. 6). This new *language,* born of narrative inquiry methods like

storytelling, the use of images or symbols to encourage reflection, and the welcoming of discourse with others who are also reflecting on their ecological identities, becomes a guide by which I "transition to a new way of seeing [myself] in the world" (p. 6). This guide performs many functions for the inquirer including the ability to construct and coordinate meaning that arises from self-reflective work and the ability to navigate and understand the importance of contact with nature in the past, present, and future (p. 7). As Thomashow indicates, people are often motivated to perform ecological identity work and examine their connection with nature because of their need to express "joy and happiness" as well as their desire to "heal themselves" (p. 7).

Thomashow's (1996) focus on "childhood memories of special places" (p. 7) is for me the most critical category of inquiry in my own ecological identity research. Like Butala (1994/2004), Louv (2005/ 2008), and Dillard (1974/1999), childhood memories create for me what David Sobel calls "the touchstone memories" to which I return when in need of identity recognition (Sobel, 1993 as quoted in Thomashow, 1996, p. 10). For the purposes of this research into my ecological identity, I have renamed these critical memories as *landmarks* by which I navigate my journey through this identity topography. These landmarks dot the landscape that is my ecological self, and in some cases, my landmarks create for others a landmark that weaves its way into their own identity fabric. By tracking these landmarks, I have been able to delineate my life into the following categories: early years (birth to 12 years of age), the transformative years (12 to 33 years of age), and the redefining years (33 years to present). I perform and customize this research purposefully because I believe that an in-depth understanding of my personal identity is necessary before I may understand where my collective identity (attached to family and both local and global communities) begins and ends. In regards

to this extension of the personal into the collective realm, I see ecological identity work as Thomashow (1996) does, as a tool that uses "the direct experience of nature as a framework" for personal, professional, political, and spiritual inquiries (p. xiii).

The Journey to This *Place*: Recognizing the Presence of Landmarks

Ecological identity research has been conducted in a number of ways. Kals and Ittner (2003) used empirical surveys to try to understand emotional and cognitive indicators of childhood environmental identity. Clayton (2003) chose a mixed methods approach utilizing scale and intervention in her creation of the Environmental Identity (EID) Scale. Thomashow (1996) opted for a qualitative approach utilizing experiential and narrative exercises within his graduate classes in environmental studies.

In order to understand my methodological choice of narrative inquiry self-study for my research into ecological identity, it's important for me to disclose my "narrative turn" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006, p. 7), or the ways in which I have moved from a positivist and realist paradigm to one that is postmodern (discussed in detail in Chapter Four) and based in constructivism (discussed in detail in Chapter Five). Like many researchers, my views changed over time from objectivity to interpretation, from numbers to a reliance on words, from generalizations to a search for uniqueness, and from one way of learning to an appreciation of multiple ways of knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006).

I came to this turn through my Master of Education work and wanted to continue on this path of qualitative inquiry in my doctoral study. I wished for this research to generate the kind of "unique" data that emphasizes "relationships" and a "connection between the life and the work" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5) which helps support my focus in educational sustainability. I saw that I had only scratched the surface of what it meant to be an educator with my initial study,

and that instead of arriving at a final destination in educational research I found instead the endless process of *becoming* and made that my goal (Clandinin, 2013). I felt that by gaining more experience with my own story (the living, the telling, and retelling), I would then be prepared to "attend to the experiences of research participants" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36), and indeed stories of my own students as I attempt to engage them in the narrative inquiry process in environmental curriculum. This narrative turn represents for me a significant landmark on my teaching landscape.

Approaches to Research

This study utilizes two main approaches to ecological identity research: the human ecological perspective and reflective practice.

Human Ecological Perspective

> Subjective introspection is often viewed as complementary to – or a reversal of – objective, scientific methods. The apparent incompatibility of these approaches has produced a long-standing tradition of keeping them relatively independent of one another. Yet we know – irrespective of how firmly we seek to draw a dividing line – they are intimately intertwined. (Borden, 2014, p. xvii).

Human ecology is a broadly based perspective of human and environment interactions that utilizes comprehensive approaches that are transdisciplinary, integrative, and imaginative to gain knowledge of "a complex living world" (Borden, 2014, p. 146). The scope of the perspective is "nearly boundless," crossing space and time to help shed light on human/planet relationships from our species' humble beginnings, to our present experiences, to a future that can only be imagined (Borden, 2014, p. 113). Because of its wide reach, human ecology cannot be categorized according to traditional academic foundations, and instead "demands a multiplicity

of perspectives in search of connections among otherwise segregated ways of knowing" (Borden, 2014, p. 113).

Human ecology is based in inclusion, inviting input from specialized academic knowledge while providing room at the table for "new relations" that were previously absent (Borden, 2014, p. 146). This diversity is necessary for many people whose "authentic understanding of the world requires a larger foundation" (Borden, 2014, p. 146). What is key to a human ecological perspective is the "important reorientation" away from interdisciplinary study towards a more transdisciplinary approach (Borden, 2014, p. 147). This shift would require disciplines to not simply contribute bits of traditional academic knowledge to the conversation, but to engage and be affected by new disciplines and their ways of knowing.

Human ecology supports the position that "bits of knowledge, by themselves, are inert" and that "education with inert ideas is not only useless: it is, above all things, harmful" (Whitehead as quoted in Borden, 2014, p. 150). Human ecology seeks to go beyond the foundations of traditional ideas generation to incite "the know-how of nonspecialists," to utilize "the creative contributions of open collaboration" and to not forget the powerful "role of imagination" (p. 147).

A human ecological perspective is valuable in ecological identity research to act as a "powerful and practical lens for addressing complexity that is acquired by experiential learning, transdisciplinary thinking, a self-designed curriculum, and a well-developed sense of purpose" (Collins, 2014, p. xv).

Reflective Practice

Out of the narrative inquiry process stem conversations about the need for reflective practice as a means of both nearing praxis and healing the self (Amulya, 2003; Branson, 2010;

Brookfield, 1995b; Kincheloe, 2004; Palmer, 1997/2007; Schön, 1987). For the purposes of this ecological identity study, I use Amulya's (2003) definition of reflective practice as "a habit, structure or routine around examining experience" (p. 1), as a way of seeking primary experiences that allow for life to become curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). This is constructivism at work, where my personal self meets my professional self to help realize an authentic life (Cole & Knowles, 1999). Through reflective practice, I hope to be a better educator but also a better person, citizen, mother, wife, and friend.

Reflective practice allows me to learn about myself, my practice, and how I relate to the wider world (Bolton, 2001/2010). Reflective practice never really begins or ends but rather is a continual "state of mind" that looks at the common or regular in new ways to generate new questions previously unconsidered (Bolton, 2001/2010, p. 3). At the core of reflective practice is the exploration and expression of experiences that may "otherwise be difficult to communicate" (p. 3). Like a human ecological perspective, reflective practice looks at "whole scenarios from as many angles as possible: people, relationships, situation, place, timing, chronology, causality, connections, and so on, to make situations and people more comprehensible" (Bolton, 2001/2010, p. 13). This is done through the examining, and re-examining, of experiences to note details that may have been previously ignored in original recounts. Reflective practice calls into question behaviours or actions that may carry biases (both social and cultural) and questions the presence, or lack of presence, of voice for both the practitioner and the learners (Bolton, 2001/2010).

According to Brookfield (1995a), students will teach the teacher what he or she needs to know to teach them better in the future. The teacher needs to only listen. He states further that "adults possess a self-conscious awareness of how it is they come to know what they know; an

awareness of the reasoning, assumptions, evidence and justifications that underlie our beliefs that something is true" (p. 4). Like Brookfield, I believe that in order to understand how I learn as an adult, I "need to know of its connections to learning in childhood and adolescence and to the formation during these periods of interpretive filters, cognitive frames and cultural rules" (p. 6).

The danger in this practice is we may become our own regulator, or rely on the people Brookfield (1995b) calls our "mirrors," the ones that "share our assumptions" and contribute to the "unproductive loop in which the same prejudices and stereotypes are constantly reaffirmed" (p. 29). It is noteworthy that reflective practice does not always lead to insight.

An extension to reflective practice is reflexive inquiry, or a "thinking from within experiences" that involves a "deep questioning" of how personal thoughts, emotions, actions, and values effect "others, situations, and professional and social structures" (Bolton, 2001/2010, p. 14). It requires the inquirer to stand outside him/herself to achieve a view inwards. It is focused on how the researcher may be viewed by others as well as by the self, and is grounded in the ability to maintain "personal uncertainty" and "critically informed curiosity" about "deeply held ways of being" (Bolton, 2001/2010, p. 14).

The key difference between reflective practice and reflexive inquiry is when it is performed. The reflexive inquirer views his or her interactions as they occur, through deep "introspection," and reflective inquirers reflect on experiences after they occur through the analysis of such cues as "verbal, nonverbal, feeling, and thoughts" (Ryan, 2005, p. 2).

The scope of this exploratory ecological identity research includes reflective practice to bring to light all the experiences that were previously veiled from my view up to this point in time. I wish to first gather these experiences, like ingredients in a recipe, with the anticipation

that I will soon return to the kitchen to combine them in a pot where their various aromas and flavours will produce a homemade stew of surprising warmth. For the purposes of exploration into identity, reflection assists me greatly in opening the doors to what it means to be an individual connected to nature as well as an educator.

As Cole and Knowles (1999) note, "as educators, we must know who we are – our story" (p. 14), and I would add that as citizens, we must also know our place. Annie Dillard, in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, reflects in detail about her explorations of home and her discovery of "another kind of seeing that involves a letting go" (Dillard, 1974/1999, p.33). This act of release is the first step in reflective practice. From reflective practice inquiry emerges a kind of capacity to react, a resiliency and evolution, a "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1987, p. 5) that is so imperative to ecological and educational issues that surface often without warning. This ability to adapt adds to our "professional knowledge landscape," revealing dilemmas that live in our "secret, sacred, and cover stories," and contextualizes "research-based understandings of teachers' personal practical knowledge" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4). Reflective practice drives ecological identity work and it, in turn, drives more reflective practice. This cycle is what supports educational sustainability.

Methods

The methods I have chosen to conduct this study are primarily experiential and involve a holistic approach to research which includes the physical (the body and all the senses), the intellectual (the mind), and the spiritual (intuition and emotion). Through the act of deep reflection on physical journeys, conversations, and cultural engagement, I collect data which hold clues to the importance of these factors in the development of my ecological identity.

Reflections

On visiting places of meaning. Over the course of my lifetime, and more so recently in my graduate work, I have physically visited and revisited places that hold meaning for me. These environments, both built and natural, are the landscapes that I believe have shaped my ecological identity. These visits assist me in restorying my past and provide critical time for reflection in regard to my living story. I find these physical journeys very necessary to allow my senses to reawaken the body to what it once experienced (smells, sights, touches) and to experience what ecomusicologists call the connecting of the "human and non-human soundworlds" in order to broadly interpret relationships (Ecomusicology, n.d., para. 9). Through this active world of the senses, the mind and body meet on middle ground. This is where I feel sure that greater possibilities exist for interpretation and new meaning-making if attention is given.

Places of meaning in this study included personal, cultural, environmental and historical landscapes that help me piece together not only how I achieved my direct contact with nature, but also how the past has informed my present. My childhood home on the prairies, Government Street on Vancouver Island, and my tiny cottage on the shores of Shadow Lake in Ontario are all places of significance. Through descriptive writing about these places, I create field texts (or data collected in the field) that I later analyze as research texts to detect meaning in regard to sense of place.

On conversations. I often don't remember exactly what someone has shared with me in conversation, even when taking copious notes, but I always remember how I felt after the exchange. Words themselves seem to be less important to me than the feeling the interaction conveyed. I have had numerous conversations with people concerning their relationship with the

land or their memories of time spent in nature. In this study, I defined *conversations* as including both verbal and nonverbal exchanges through physical encounters or through written communication. I have revisited dialogues from the past and engaged in new conversations through both verbal exchanges and personal writing. These engagements helped guide my understanding of the importance of this type of data collection and moved me towards a place where analysis occurred that shed light on my perceptions of the landscape and my identity within that landscape. Within these dialogues I look for the unfamiliar within the familiar, the hidden dialogue that lives between me and close relations. This grouping includes my parents, my siblings, my grandmothers, my friends, and mentors. I also looked to the familiar within the unfamiliar (mirrored fragments of my life story) found within the published work of an author or artist. I reflected on these conversations in writing to create field texts that later were analyzed as research texts to help reveal how my concept of self in nature was formed in relation to community. Ng-A-Fook (2011) describes how research texts allowed him to "re-enter the present" with greater understanding after journeying through past experiences and assumptions with the aid of field texts (p. 5).

On ancestral influences. A recent discovery for me was the power of *ancestral memories* (Bouchard, 2008) and the ability of culture to tune in to what Abram (1996) calls the "landscape of language" from an "expressive earth" (p. 139). Following First Nations beliefs of earth as teacher, I have connected with local Métis communities to seek their guidance in helping me connect to traditions that were once mine. I reflected on these teachings in writing and utilized my dreams as an alternate way of knowing to access what Plotkin (2003) calls an "altered consciousness" (p. 144). In addition to these writings I accessed historical data in the form of published works about my great-grandfather, Joseph Augustin Vermette (1891–1986),

and my grandmother Augustine Abraham (nee Vermette); (1918–2015), both of historic Métis heritage. Through *braiding* these ancestral narratives (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, & Sinner, 2012; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009) with the other methods presented here, I produce a holistic picture of my life in transition as it moves "toward completeness" (Kelly, 2012, p. 364).

Review of Personal Writings

I had written reflections, academic papers, journals, poems, and letters over my lifetime that I believed held clues to my connections with the planet. I collected these accounts and used them to help me story my past, to create a "literary métissage," a merging and blurring of identities, genres, and text (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 38). I have utilized my graduate work where much of my reflection took place over the past 7 years, particularly my Master's Independent Study titled "Nature Deficit Disorder: A Narrative Inquiry into a New Phenomenon," and my PhD Independent Study, "'The Story Before the Story': A Narrative Inquiry Into the Roots of an Ecological Identity."

Collection of Meaningful Images and Symbols

Like my personal writings, my photographs speak much about my feelings towards the earth and our human place within it. I have collected both my original works of art and historic family photographs as field texts and used "my photography to create surfaces of understanding" with which to consider my life, my story, and my memories (Suominen-Guyas, 2008, p. 32). For me, photographs are, as King (2003) declares, "not records of moments, but rather imaginative acts" (p. 43). I have always been connected visually to the planet and collected symbols and objects of importance across time in my life that, with new reflection, have shone a light on elements of my identity and sense of place.

Strength of Study and Considerations

A study's strength can be determined by how well it answers the questions posed by the researcher himself/herself but also by the community the researcher hopes to address. The following section reviews questions around validity, rigor, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis as they pertain to an ecological identity narrative inquiry self-study.

Validity

Questions of "validity, reliability, and generalizability" come up regularly in the research community when considering self-study methodology (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 7). The questions can be internal, generated from the researchers themselves who may struggle with feelings of narcissism and a right to publish story as authority (Shields et al., 2011), as well as external, when self-study research is scrutinized for the hallmarks of positivist research—validity, authority, replication. According to Connelly & Clandinin (1990), narrative study should not be "[squeezed] . . . into a language created for other forms of research" (p. 7).

A new language must accompany self-study research that is based in postmodern theory and the belief of the existence of multiple realities. The design of self-study research, and indeed many other qualitative forms of inquiry, is based in the *uniqueness* of results and so cannot be duplicated and validated in the modern sense (Polkinghorne, 2007). Instead, representation must be highlighted over truth and context over generalization (Daniels, 2008).

A new vocabulary must therefore be used that embraces the multiplicity of views and instead turns towards the "social world" for validation, a world driven by discourse that leads to action (Mishler, 1990, p. 420). A question of absolute truth must be replaced with a question of "trustworthiness" (Mishler, 1990, p. 420), and validation proven when "recognition and

connection" are achieved (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16) among practitioners who begin to rely on concepts in their own practice (Mishler, 1990).

Transparency of methodological choices (which texts are used and which are not) is another means by which self-study research becomes valid (Clandinin & Huber, 2012). Transparency leads to trustworthiness and a continued belief in the research as authority. Self-study researchers, even though governed by postmodern principles of embracing multiple ways of knowing, are not free from scrutiny when it comes to their methodological choices. Polkinghorne (2007) believes validation in narrative research involves not a "mechanical process" but an "argumentative practice" (p. 476).

For me, the validity of this research rests in its significance to two groupings of people. The first are the practitioners, the individual environmental educators in the field who may reflect on this study's relevance in their own journey towards discovering their ecological identity and how that may improve their practice. The second is the larger environmental and educational communities who make room for methods and approaches that seek to elevate and expand discourse in environmental and educational sustainability fields.

Rigor

Proof of rigor remains one of the most contentious issues with research (Carter & Little, 2007). The necessary process of checking self-study research for breadth and depth is achieved through the self-study research community itself in mainly two ways. One is in the development of a relationship with a "critical friend," a person interested in the research topic who questions the researcher's practices and thinking (Samaras, 2011, p. 5), and the second is in the form of a larger community inquiry such as the Castle Conference, supported by the Special Interest Group, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP-SIG). This forum, and

peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Teacher Education* and *Educational Researcher*, act as excellent measures for what stands as rigor in self-study and what stands for "idiosyncraticy" (Lassonde, Galman, & Kosnik, 2009, p. xii). Discussion about what constitutes rigor in the qualitative research community creates continuous tensions that filter research through many perspectives (Angen, 2000) and applies pressure to self-study research to keep it grounded.

According to Polkinghorne (2007), rigor in narrative research can be achieved by openly addressing issues like the "disjunction between a person's actual experienced meaning and his or her storied description" (p. 480). By attending to things such as the limits of language and reflection, the resistance of full disclosure, and the complex nature of researcher and participant relationships, we create confidence in research texts and display rigor in the methodology (Polkinghorne, 2007).

It's important to emphasize, that if self-study research can demonstrate attention to conventions, and is open to public scrutiny and questioning (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), then it has the right to assert its findings as authority. Additionally, self-study research plays a critical role in the research community by prompting traditional researchers to review their own practices (including what they take for truths); (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991) and consider how they can highlight previously neglected areas of human interest (Gamelin, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007).

According to Samaras (2011), the field of self-study research has rigorous standards for evaluating itself, demonstrated in almost two decades of proven scholarly works from researchers like Barnes (1998), LaBoskey (2004), Loughran and Northfield (1998), and Samaras

and Freese (2009). Critiques of the methodology should be welcomed for the rigor they offer the study and challenges to frameworks that may lead to emergent designs and considerations. Self-study is more than self-reflection. As Crites (1971) notes, "remembering is not yet knowing" and "experience is illuminated only by the more subtle processes of recollection" (p. 300). Due to its complexity, self-study may rely on numerous methods to collect data for analysis (Samaras & Freese, 2009) and always benefits from collaboration with critical friends to help authors of self-study expose bias and reframe their initial interpretations (LaBoskey, 2004).

Data Collection and Analysis

I believe that the notion of stories as valuable data is imperative to ecological identity research. The collection of stories, both oral and written, has been used by many scholars to try to understand the role landscapes have played in people's lives (Abram, 1996; Butala, 1994/2004; Chambers et al., 2012; Plotkin, 2003; Thomashow, 1996). Data collection in this study includes the collection of written and verbal stories, journal entries, photographs, field notes, and dream text, as mentioned above, to encompass what Clandinin and Connelly (1994) call *field texts*.

What constitutes a field text and what doesn't can create a point of confusion for researchers starting out in narrative inquiry self-study. It is critical to point out that narrative inquiry self-study, with its probing nature, sees all life and experience as educative where we make meaning "through the shaping or ordering of experience" in order to understand our actions and the actions of others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 421). Because field texts should be "descriptive," with an almost "recording quality to them" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 423), data mining should be wide and deep in hopes of providing enough context for meaningful data

analysis to occur. According to Dewey (1938), meaning is generated from particular events, experiences, and situations, and it is the act of reflective searching that is necessary for reinterpretation of the experience in the present day. Because of this objective, data collection cannot follow prescribed pathways or be replicated, and the researcher must accept that "all field texts are constructed representations of experience" instead of absolute truths (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422).

The collection of stories is not enough to be able to draw the lines necessary to explain how a life is affected by the environment. According to Polkinghorne (2007), research involves two performances: the collection of evidence and the interpretation of that evidence. How narrative inquiry is unique as a methodology is in its movement between these two performances to gather further evidence based on "needs derived from interpretations of the already gathered evidence" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 478).

Of critical importance is for self-study researchers to understand that "storied texts" reflect personal meanings and do not necessarily relay factual information (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479). Rather, it's the job of the researcher to uncover and clarify meanings found in field texts to help deepen the understanding of the reader (Polkinghorne, 2007). Narrative field texts are analyzed in a holistic fashion rather than in parts, allowing the researcher to weave a story with broad familiarity and relevance (Moen, 2006). When field texts become research texts through skilled analysis, they expose the "complex and multi-layered storied nature of experience" (Clandinin & Huber, 2012, p. 13).

The biggest consideration for self-study researchers is the need to continually "think narratively" when engaging in this process of data analysis and to revisit the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place for grounding (Clandinin & Huber, 2012, p. 12).

Ethical Considerations

Self-study research, though primarily focused on the researcher, is still governed by a series of ethical considerations applied to all research projects. This study was reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. Self-study is guided by the framework of narrative inquiry research that speaks of responsibilities between participants and researchers conducting narrative research, both in the context of active data collection and also in the aftermath of the research itself (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2012). A self-study researcher should extend all the considerations given to a research participant in a narrative inquiry study to herself as both researcher and participant and consider issues around anonymity, confidentiality, ensuring an environment of care, and creating "a space where . . . narrative authority is honored" (Clandinin & Huber, 2012, p. 15). It is important that the benefit of the self-study outweigh the risks to the researcher of using herself as the participant in a public forum. Because our personal stories overlap and intertwine with the stories of others, people connected to these stories also have to be considered.

Secondary data in the form of photographs, letters, published and nonpublished works, and conversations are part of this study's design. The study's focus is on the recontextualization and reconstruction of data from the researcher's perspective through the telling and retelling of stories using secondary data sources as launch points for those stories (e.g., photographs).
For the purposes of this study, permission was sought from all recognizable people within the study either through facial recognition in photographs or through recognition of relationships described through the author's stories. Where direct conversations with published authors or artists are highlighted, permission has been sought from that individual.

The study turns now to an investigation of my early childhood years in nature and how those experiences defined for me the concept of what it means to be *home*.

Dr. F. Michael Connelly & Dr. D. Jean Clandinin: Landmark Scholars

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Introduced to me by my supervisor, Dr. Carmen Shields (who studied under Michael Connelly), the contributions of these scholars to my overall thinking about education and curriculum cannot be overstated. The idea that life itself could be considered curriculum, comprised of experiences held by the learner instead of external to the learner (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), changed for me over 30 years of preconceived notions of what constituted good education. Their support of the notion of researcher as participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) is largely the reason for the direction of this self-study research into ecological identity. Through careful review and participation in their inquiry process of inward, outward, backward, and forward reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), I was able to better define my "professional knowledge landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4). In short, thanks to their contributions, I now learn about education from life and life from education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991).

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR MARKING HOME AND RESTORYING MY EARLY YEARS ON THE LAND

This chapter marks the first stage of a three-part chronological exploration of my life in nature for the purposes of shedding light on the formation and development of my ecological identity. In this first chapter, I focus on my early years, from birth to age 12, during which time I lived on a 5-acre rural property my family owned outside a small town in Manitoba. It was there where my relationship with the environment was first formed and where I formulated my initial sense of the world. Stories that I have written from that time period, while potentially interesting and entertaining for some readers, lack the capacity on their own to fully inform this research into identity. I believe they require instead the accompaniment of theory to enhance my ability to draw connections between my stories of experience and the meaning they hold for me in the present. In this chapter, I draw on theory related to environmental consciousness, children's early contact with nature, and postmodernism to help understand narratives of my early years on the land involving nature's teachings, my ancestry, and my relationship with animals.

The Stump Story

"You can't eat me if I'm touching home!" My sister is not playing fair in our game of predator/prey. She circles again the large stump that I have marked as home, and while I perch on top of its shelf she holds out her hands to almost touch me while hissing like a bobcat. "The moment you step off little rabbit I'm going to get you!" My heart races as our game takes on an almost surreal quality. I imagine what it must be like to be a rabbit, to live in the woods behind

our house, and to be afraid of the large bobcat we found living in dad's shop last year. The stump is one of my favourite landmarks on the 5-acre property that is my whole world. I have many landmarks on this land, ones that are permanent and ones that are perpetual in their nature to disappear and reappear. The prairie sunset is one such landmark. Even now, over 35 years later, it is still unlike any other setting I have seen in another province or country. The prairie sunset is firm in its ownership of the unique colours and patterns it must have claimed as its own at the beginning of time. While it occasionally lends a brush stroke to the east, or casts a loving shadow on the west, it is still pure prairie, and unapologetic in its demand that to know this place is to know it. (A 1979 restory, 2016)

For most of my career as an environmental educator I saw little connection between theory and my practice. I didn't consider theory to be influential in how or what I taught students while in the woods, and I didn't see the relevance of theory in regards to my views on education. This chapter landmarks a significant shift in my thinking about theory and its ability to support inquiry into my ecological identity to help produce a more comprehensive and meaningful interpretation of my life influenced by nature. I begin that interpretation now through investigation of environmental consciousness.

Environmental Consciousness

Environmental thought and how we go about perceiving our place in nature is critical to the study of ecological identity. Environmental psychology and ecopsychology are forms of inquiry that help in understanding our relationship with the planet and also our identity in relation to our social groups when considering the environment (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Environmental psychology is focused on the "interaction between humans and their environments" (Utsler, 2014, p. 133) and attempts to shed light on "self-understanding in

relation to environments and the ways in which such a relation shapes the psyche" (p. 124). This branch of study is concerned with the reciprocal effects of humans on environments and environments on humans and pays particular attention to human behaviour in relation to the environment (Utsler, 2014). To environmental psychologists, environments are defined broadly (natural, cultural, built) and provide "relevant data" that help us to understand "how and why humans act" (p. 133). Environmental psychology has assisted discipline areas such as urban planning and architecture and relies mostly on the principles of traditional psychology research and data collection (Scull, 2008). Environmental psychology is a well-developed field of inquiry with roots in academia (Utsler, 2014).

Ecopsychology, in contrast, is driven by a more urgent agenda than environmental psychology and has grown in "response to environmental crisis" (Utsler, 2014, p. 134). According to Roszak (2001/1992 as cited in Utsler, 2014), the person and the planet share the same needs and are on a "continuum" (p. 133). This view promotes a therapeutic approach to inquiry and advocates a "self-transformative practice" driven by "a dialogue with psychology" (p. 134). John Scull, a PhD whose career was spent in clinical psychology and teaching, explains ecopsychology in this way:

> Ecopsychology explores connections between [the] ecological crisis and the spiritual or psychological crises resulting from our increasing experience of separation from the more-than-human world. Ecopsychology looks for the roots of environmental problems in human psychology and society and for the roots of some personal and social problems in our dysfunctional relationship to the natural world. (2008, p. 68)

Ecopyschology operates in the space of "philosophy, spirituality, and psychotherapy" and seeks ways in which humans can connect with nature that is both sustainable and healthy (Scull, 2008, p. 68).

In summary, while both environmental psychology and ecopsychology involve inquiry into the relationship between humans and their environment, each approach differs greatly in both "subject matter" and "methodological commitments" (Scull, 2008, p. 69). Debates continue on both sides of the psychology spectrum regarding the value of one methodology over the other, but some scholars prefer to focus on the question—what does one approach *offer* the other? (Reser, 1995, emphasis added). This engaging debate is beyond the scope of this present work, but it provides an important consideration of how people may consider and connect with nature and how this may help inform their ecological identity work. The knowledge that these forms of study exist may be useful for ecological identity researchers as another support in the process of self-study research. When working with students they are a great reminder for me the number of different ways they may see and interpret environmental curriculum.

The Turtle

"Why would she lay eggs in the middle of the parking lot?' My daughters are transfixed at the sight of the snapping turtle that is busy covering the egg mass she has deposited in a shallow indentation on the grassy boulevard. Cars continue to pass the area, unware of the event. "The parking lot used to be a wetland" I explain to the girls "and she is coming up from the stream to leave her eggs on higher ground." The little ones contemplate this statement and after some time they ask, "Do we really need another parking lot?" (A 2010 restory, 2016, an observation on my daughters' early awareness of self and the environment).

I turn now to briefly review how children's contact with nature may influence their early development of an ecological identity.

Nature Deficit Disorder

I became interested in self-study research when engaged in my Master of Education with Nipissing University in 2009, specifically through an independent study I conducted into the phenomenon known as *nature deficit disorder*. The term was coined by Richard Louv, author of the 2005 (revised 2008) book *Last Child in the Woods*, to call attention to the increased separation of children from nature. Through this research, I came to learn how contact with nature may impact identity and may either support or inhibit child development. For the study, I wrote stories of my own childhood experiences in nature and pointed to exposures I had had to help create a roadmap of a life unaffected by the disorder. I then circled around to the childhood of my daughters, who were only 4 and 6 years of age at the time, and wrote stories as inquiry to try to determine if they were lacking the same experiences I had growing up and were indeed more separate from nature than I was. I used photography, like the image below (see Figure 10) of my youngest daughter inside looking out, to illustrate how her childhood in the suburbs is very different from the one I remember in the countryside.

Figure 10. Separation of children from nature. © 2009 Schlamb.

Through that research I learned that evidence had emerged to suggest that the recent separation of children from natural surroundings may result in emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental conditions that were not prevalent in the past, and that a causal link between conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and a lack of children's direct contact with nature was being investigated (Louv, 2005/2008). Defined as the "eighth intelligence" or being "nature smart," Louv (2005/2008, p. 72) states that contact with nature is a necessary piece in child development. It is worth reiterating again here that Taylor et al., (2001, 2002) and Wells and Evans (2003) have produced revealing research about contact with nature and a child's ability to be resilient.

The Blue Jay

The laughter that had permeated the air all morning came suddenly to an end. My girls, who had been playing in the backyard, were suddenly quiet, and like all mothers I wondered what mischief they had gotten into. I came out of the back door to find them standing together, heads turned downward, to study a large blue jay that lay at their feet. "Why isn't it moving mama?" Gently with a stick I tap the bird's body, and its stiffness reveals it has passed. It is the first time they are faced with death, and I wait for their reaction. "So it will never fly again?" "No love, it won't" And together we lift the blue jay with the garden shovel and give it a proper burial in the ravine. After the burial they are still pensive. "Does everything die?" I kneel on the ground so I am facing them directly, "Yes love, everything dies one day." (A 2009 restory, 2016, a reflection on contact with nature and its ability to teach life lessons.).

My master's self-study research caused me to consider that perhaps nature had a role to play not only in my development as a child, but perhaps continues to play a role in my daily life, even today 40 years later. In order to fully explore this notion, I made the conscious decision to

change the way I thought about curriculum, research, and data. I considered that my old ways of viewing education, which I have stated previously were based in the positivist framework, were not producing the kind of transformative learning I was hoping for through my work as a college instructor. I became aware at this time that my life and practice may be linked, that one may indeed inform the other. Through this realization I moved towards postmodernism as the theoretical foundation upon which I would build this self-study research.

Postmodernism and Ecological Identity Work

Long before the modern world and positivist paradigm, there were alternate ways of knowing (Abram, 1996; Bouchard, 2010; Butala, 1994/2004, 2000; Caduto & Bruchac, 1997; Davis, 2011; Plotkin, 2003). From the métissage of Aboriginal people whose stories speak of "two-eyed seeing" as a pathway to "many-eyed seeing" (Kelly, 2012, p. 365), to the language of the birds who tell of a "storied earth" and the "sensuous life-world" (Abram, 1996, p. 154), many ways of knowing have informed the human race for over 100,000 years. Postmodernism marks an opportunity to return to a place where these ways of knowing are both increasingly valid and valued.

When first considering how to conduct ecological identity work, I was attracted by this notion of inclusivity and diversity. As previously stated, I felt I had lacked clarity around my identity in the past, and postmodernism presented itself to me as another way to consider my identity where "learning and understanding came through dialogue and reflection" with others and where who and what I was could be considered negotiable between myself, others, and my texts (Doll, 1993, p. 156). In this way, I began to see the importance of self-organization, what Doll (1993) calls the critical distinction between the modern and postmodern paradigms.

I started to reflect on my past interpretations regarding identity. For much of my life I had thought of identity like a funnel, where many variables were collected and mixed but where only the most concentrated elements settle out in the end. Slattery (1995b) provided me with another way to see identity through his conceptualization of postmodernism as a kaleidoscope, where designs constantly change and become something new but always remain interrelated. In this way, postmodern curriculum reflects "a kaleidoscope phenomenon that is the result of a vast, interrelated web of ideas, texts, personalities, architectural structures, stories, and much more" (p. 244).

The postmodern theoretical perspective, according to Hargreaves (1994), rejects the "existence of foundational knowledge," arguing that there is "no knowable social reality [that] exists beyond the signs of language, image and discourse" (p. 39). Richardson (1994) adds to this definition by stating that at the "core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the . . . privileged form of authoritative knowledge**"** (p. 517). Postmodernists do not discriminate in their sweeping rejections of all "modern ways of knowing . . . that rest on some set of transcendental truths about being and knowing," but instead embrace the notion that knowledge is multi-layered with many ways to interpret it and know it (Kilgore, 2004, p. 46). The absence of a "grand narrative" in curriculum theory and teaching practice is the hallmark of the postmodern movement (Kilgore, 2004; Kvale, 1995; Packwood & Sikes, 1996; Pishghadam & Meidsni, 2012; Slattery, 1995b; Sumara et al., 2001).

The old adage, "knowledge is power," reflects the modern notion that curriculum is "a body of knowledge to be transmitted" (Smith, 2000, p. 2), and purveyors of that knowledge are gatekeepers to the benefits that knowledge brings. For postmodernists, power does not rest with

a group or individual because power is in the relationships people hold (Kilgore, 2004). Power is exercised rather than possessed, and through the "production of meaning" comes "the production of power" (Kilgore, 2004, p. 48). This perspective generates much discussion about who controls the learning process, and what constitutes curriculum and appropriate learning text (Edwards & Usher, 2001; Peters, 1995; Slattery, 1995b; Slattery, 2000). Slattery (1995a), highlights the opportunity postmodernism presents in classrooms and society everywhere by encouraging "chaos" and "zones of uncertainty" where "critical thinking, reflective intuition, and global problem-solving will flourish" (p. 620).

Some scholars (Freire, 1970; Greene, 1988, 1994; hooks, 2003; Kvale, 1995; Pishghadam & Meidani, 2012) attest to postmodernism's ability to reject the "idea of language as a medium expressing or representing what pre-exists," and instead embrace a space where voices that were once silenced can now be heard, and where traditions are made sense of "against the backgrounds of lived experience and location in the world" (Greene, 1994, p. 208). Slattery (2000) proposes "a new way of seeing the world" (p. 135), where deconstruction of data and texts reveals the power structures that lie beneath the surface and celebrates that "there is no text that contains the whole truth and nothing but the truth" (p. 134).

At the centre of postmodern theory is the learner (Aoki, 1990; Doll, 1993; Kilgore, 2004; Slattery, 1995b). The learner is "becoming," constantly in the process of learning, within a "context that also is always becoming" (Kilgore, 2004, p. 47). Aoki (1990) believes we have to rethink what it means to "excel" and suggests that to reach excellence might mean "coming to a deeper understanding of who we are" and then "surpassing our present being" (p. 111). Doll (1993) sees this happening through "the art of curriculum" that encourages the learner's creativity and organization (p. 117).

The ability to construct a personal reality and gain knowledge beyond a grand narrative relies heavily on securing opportunities that provide for direct experience and experiential learning. Nature educators Joseph Cornell (1989, 1994) and Steve Van Matre (1990) have dedicated their lives to designing experiential curriculum from a postmodern perspective that invites personal inquiry and provides guidelines on how to connect with nature with or without formal instruction.

Sumara et al. (2001), in their article "Canadian Identity and Curriculum Theory: An Ecological, Postmodern Perspective," state "postmodern discourses provide support for ecological discourses," and though it can be argued that not all ecologists and postmodernists see eye to eye, I believe it can be agreed that any discourse is favourable and can create "an awareness which in turn should broaden the ways that learning and schooling are discussed" (p. 150).

For me, postmodernism has opened the doors for alternate ways of knowing to become known and considered by me as they pertain to my life theory and work practice. Alternate ways of interpreting and relaying information include the use of energy fields for healing (A. McLeod, 2005), art for healing (Winterson, 1996), dreamworks or the interpretation of dreams for guidance (Plotkin, 2003), hypertext and multimedia to examine other-than-human communication (Barrett, 2009), imagination as a driving force for global understanding (Hayes, Sameshima, & Watson, 2015), *friluftsliv*, or the act of travelling and dwelling in the natural world to develop personal and spiritual joy (Steele, 2010), and the notion of cellular memory to promote system resiliency (Hendry & McGlade, 1995). The creation of art (visual and narrative) as a way of knowing has been as critical in educational research (Chambers et al., 2012; Dillard, 1974/1999; Dunlop, 2000; Palmer, 1997/2007; Richardson, 1994; Winterson, 1996) as it has

been in ecological identity research (Abram, 1996; Bateman, 2009; Butala, 1994/2004, 2000; Thomashow, 1996).

In this research, my understanding of identity is unfolding, and I resist the temptation to declare a singular definition of identity to avoid limiting possibilities within this research. For me, by embracing the "pragmatic doubt" of postmodernism instead of "positivist certainty" about who or what I am, my ecological identity work can be based "not on metanarrative themes but on human experience and local history" (Doll, 1993, p. 61).

The Meeting

I am surprised they want me to join in to the roundtable discussion because I haven't been in the outdoor field very long and I feel I have little to contribute in comparison to the long-time members at the table. The president begins the meeting with a welcome to those at the table and an overview of the agenda, which reveals a time for sharing stories in small groups and a walk planned through the woods for the larger group to end the meeting. Many of the members are successful business people with high-profile jobs. But here, they are just nature enthusiasts sitting equally amongst each other looking for community. (A 2002 restory, 2016, a reflection on seeing postmodernism in operation).

With postmodernism as my theoretical foundation, and knowledge of my journey to this place in time informed by both research and personal ecological consciousness, I turn now to the gathered field texts and present-day reflections upon them of my early years on the land, to perform Clandinin and Connelly's (1994) process of inward, outward, backward, and forward motion of storytelling, to shed light on the early stages of my ecological identity development.

> *When you know a place so well that it becomes a place, it has acquired its own identifiable character; you can call it up at will when elsewhere, know it like nowhere else on earth, sense it instantly the moment you come home.*
>
> (Butala, 1995, p. 22).

Braiding in the Story Before the Story

Often childhood memories come to me not as complete stories with a beginning, middle, and end, but rather as incomplete thoughts, single words, feelings, and emotions delivered as a series of dangling threads or tangents in memory (a flash of remembrance, a familiar sight, smell, or sound I cannot immediately place, or a physical gesture or movement I've seen before).

In contrast to many sharp and vivid memories of some of my specific childhood events, these thin *threads* are often missed when I consider my past or are often dismissed by me as insignificant altogether. Recently, I have discovered that these threads reveal an important pattern or persistent theme in regards to my relationship with the environment when I take the time to weave them together. They expose clues that potentially explain why I see nature the way I do and shine a light of understanding on some of my current thinking and practices when it comes to nature and ways of knowing about the environment.

In 2013 during my second PhD residency, I wrote a collection of these threads and gathered them together into a work I named "The Story Before the Story": A Narrative Inquiry Into the Roots of an Ecological Identity." It was my PhD supervisor who had challenged me to consider moving forward with narrative after my Master's work into nature deficit disorder. I had told her I felt my story had been told and that I didn't feel like there was much left to say. She asked the question, "what came before the story?" which led me to this collection of unexpected writings. During that residency, I wrote that the purpose of the writing exercise was to "delve deeper into narrative inquiry practices in an attempt to further connect the roots of my

stories to my pursuit of a life and career connected to the environment. Recent investigation using reflective practice has revealed further layers beneath those initial stories that I now believe are worth mining." The mining of those layers led me to new and unfamiliar places in my research and guided me to write in my personal journal of February 16, 2013: *"I thought the story had been written, I didn't expect there to be more."*

Now, I refer to my Master's work of 2009 as being my *first story*, the first time I used narrative inquiry as both method and methodology. My doctoral journey has done much to move me forward towards my stated goal of deeper inquiry and further connections. I feel of most benefit is my increased ability and comfort in naming that which I could not previously identify. The act of naming has in turn helped convince me of the value of narrative research to support personal transformation as well as shed light on the possibility of supporting others in their quest to do the same.

The following threads, categorized here into three key themes of inquiry, represent important emergent data when I consider the phenomenon of my environmentally influenced life. Each collection reveals a series of childhood events initially described, but then used as a springboard to move my data from field texts connected to the past to research texts connected to the present and future. It is through the analysis of the data that I begin to retheorize the ways in which I work and live as a woman, teacher, mother, wife, and citizen.

I considered that while many factors contributed to my sense of my ecological identity, I appeared to gravitate continuously to three key areas of inquiry that seemed to underline the initial creation of that identity. These key areas include my early lessons regarding nature as teacher, my original perceptions of my Aboriginal history, and my relationships with more-than-humans.

Nature As Teacher Threads: Stories From Where The Land Meets The Water

Now slowly, I began to conceive of the field in an entirely new way; I began to understand it as layers of presence gradually disclosing themselves to me. And I couldn't help but wonder, if I had the patience, the curiosity, and a quiet sense of the holy, what more the field might still have to reveal. (Butala, 2000, p. 37)

Figures 11 and 12. The Red River flood of 1979. © 1979 Family photo archives.

The Floods

Weather always played a significant role in everyday life and was greatly respected. I could read the weather by the age of 4 and knew when it was time to head home amidst blackening clouds, much like city children knew it was time to go home when the street lights

came on. The power of weather earned my respect at a very early age, particularly in my seventh year when I was lost in a snowstorm walking from my friend's house to mine, and when our family huddled in the cold cellar as a tornado approached. Known for its electrical storms, Manitoba is unrivalled in brilliant displays of nature's power, and we would watch these events through the large picture window overlooking the fields like many families would watch TV. As beautiful as I remember these displays, I also remember the floods and the sheer devastation they left behind in their wake. A reminder to humans—or so I believed—that we are nothing in comparison to nature's power. I remember watching the townspeople move from house to house to help build up the dykes, and I remember dad staying up in the night to keep watch on the wall. By the time I was 10, I had lived through two major floods and several smaller ones. I knew how to boil water to purify it, conserve what water you did have, recycle it for other purposes, and how to discard wastewater safely to protect health. I practiced sustainability long before I knew what to call it. (A 1979 restory, Master of Education writing, 2009, further restoried, 2016, see Figures 11 & 12).

There isn't a semester that goes by that I don't mention the floods in my environmental science lectures and ask students if they have ever been without water. For me, it is one of the most telling markers of a student's current ability to grasp environmental sustainability issues. If they have lived where water is limited, they have already begun to pay attention to one of the largest issues facing the planet. My daughters do not intuitively know what it means to be without water. They appear to mimic my monitoring of the resource, ensuring that taps are shut off when not in use and toilets flushed only when necessary, but the concern of the presence or absence of water does not factor into their childhood. How much then do I impact the

development of their ecological identity through my secondary teachings? Nature was my primary teacher, but for them, I am the substitute.

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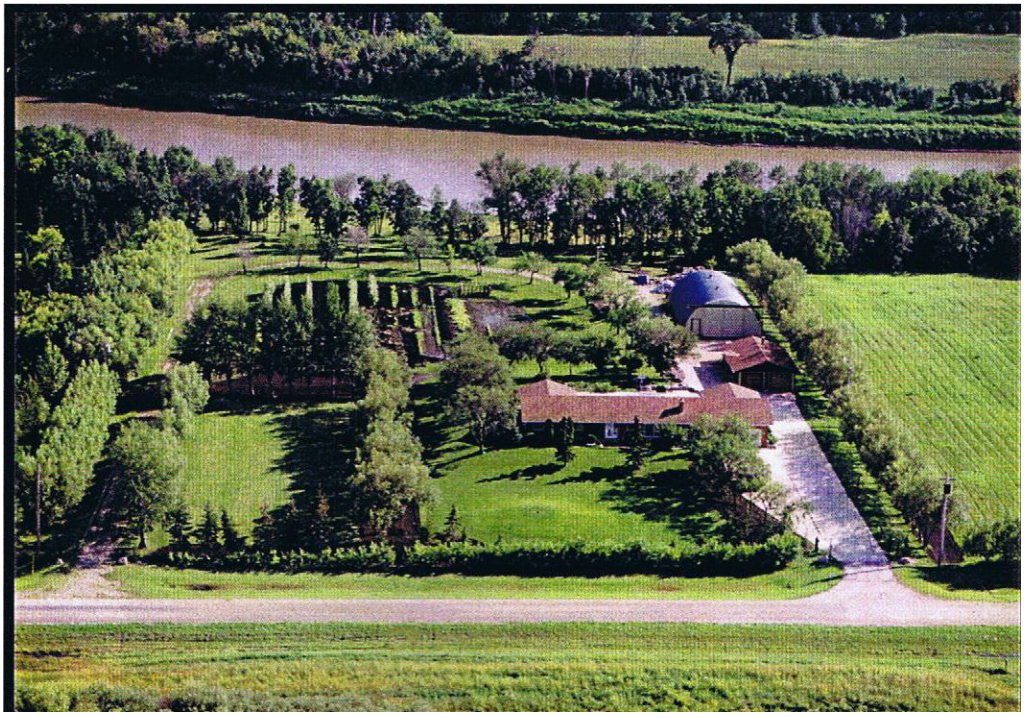


Figure 13. My childhood home along the Red River, Manitoba. © Family photo archives.

Sustainability

My parents grew an enormous garden, more than we could eat, and my sisters and I were tasked with the job of weeding it. We learned the difference between a weed and a plant, how to sow seeds, and how to water without overwatering so you get root rot. After several hours of weeding one day, we complained to my father that this was "stupid" and asked "why

do we need such a big garden?" My father was very serious in his reply and said if war ever broke out we would always have enough to feed ourselves. This struck me as very odd at the time, but today I know the comment as a remnant of growing up in Europe during unrest. Today, I have a garden in my much smaller backyard and grow it for sustainability efforts. But truthfully, deep down inside, I believe what he said is true and that my family will always have enough to eat if we can grow our own food (Master of Education writing, 2009, see Figure13).

I think it's fair to say my father's love of growing things didn't initially begin with him but was passed down to him from my grandmother who resides in Denmark. As a child we would often visit the small southern village of Maribo on the island of Lolland, and without fail we would find grandma on her knees in the garden, digging up her *kartofler* (potatoes; see Figure 14).

Figure 14. My *farmor* or "father's mother" in her garden, Denmark. © Family photo archives.

My grandmother and I have never had a verbal conversation. Today at the age of 103, she speaks Danish and Polish, and the few Danish words that I have gleaned while visiting over the years have been lost to me. While she was always special to me in the ways that grandmothers are special to their granddaughters (e.g., special meals, sweet treats, and bedtime

rituals), I always found she was special in another way. The way she worked with food and created it with her own hands from the sowing of the seeds to the delivery at the table, she was connected to the flow of it all, the movement of the essence of life from the soil to the table and back again to the soil. She never wasted anything, and what pride she displayed as a very humble woman came from her ability to work with the *Good Earth* (Buck, 1931/2004) and produce something of substance.

Figure 15. Me and my grandmother at the age of 102, Denmark, 2015. © 2015 Schlamb.

In 2015, I visited my grandmother for the first time in 20 years (see Figure 15). I was hoping to ascertain if her connection with the earth was still strong, even at the age of 102, and if her passion for the environment was what sustained her in her very old age. My father translated that what she loved about her living arrangements was the easy access to the garden, and when the weather was not favourable there were large picture windows that overlooked the garden. Her wishes were simple—a view of the greenery as a constant reminder of the lifelong friendship and teaching that had sustained her for over a century.

Today, my daughters spot their *morfar* (mother's father) in the garden of my parents' suburban bungalow, his head visible above his raised containers calling the girls to pick a carrot or come see the size of his tomatoes! With only a fraction of the original space he once had on

the big Red River property, my father has turned what was urban into native soil again. From the soil he brings the essence of life to the table and then returns it back again in his compost bins.

How much of his connection with the earth is naturally inherited from my grandmother? And how much of it is learned behaviour? How much have they influenced my ecological identity and the way I see the growing of things? Narrative inquiry has allowed me not to answer these questions but to open the door to possibilities of connection and influence previously unseen, disregarded, or misunderstood.

The following is a modified excerpt of a poem I wrote in 2013 about my original perceptions of nature as a child on the prairie, and my perceptions now as an adult living in the east. It demonstrates how in my adult life I seem to have replicated elements that brought me great joy while evolving my notions of what it means to share nature with others.

My Nature

the earth feels warm

as I scoop dirt into a pot

rocks on the bottom

before you can plant the seed

light on in the workshop as the day turns to dusk

prairie moon

casting shadows of the dog against the brick

people are coming over to visit

hurry, slip out the back

go deep into the forest

balance on the branch

call the coyote's call

my world

my experience

no one else's

the prairie wind blows east

distinct like sweetgrass

the thermometer falls

no one notices

it's going to rain

Holly on the ground

scooping dirt into a pot

rocks on the bottom

like mama showed her

light on in the cottage as the day turns to dusk

moon lake

casting shadows of the dog against the deck

people are here

holding hands with me in the hammock

The "I" Word Threads: Reflections From the Middle of the Bus

"The old people of the earth

Tell stories

An old woman

Of the old ways

She said -

"I recall my joy

In better days".....

The earth ones

They said "Our religion

Is in these lands & skies

Sweet Mother

Our land's gone

To modern worlds

Modern lies

The earthways

And the new ecology

You know we were the first

Believe me

We will be the last

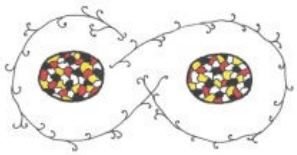
To keep the light

For the Earth..."

Broken Rainbow, Laura Nyro (1985)

My ancestral roots are not a mystery to me; in fact they are well documented. I am the great great great niece of Louis Riel and the great great great great granddaughter of Louis Riel Senior. My grandmother, Augustine Abraham (nee Vermette, 1918–2015), was a "Manitoba Métis Elder and one-time President of the Union Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba (Métis National Union St. Joseph of Manitoba)" (Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, n.d., para. 4), considered "the oldest Métis organization in Canada" (Union Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba, 2016, para. 1). She was a voice for the Manitoba Métis community and was featured in numerous interviews including the short documentary "CBC 8th Fire Dispatch: Louis Riel's Great Niece" by Franco-Métis filmmaker and television reporter Janelle Wookey that asked the question "What was childhood and school like for young Métis children in Manitoba in the 1920s?" (CBC, 2011, para. 1). My great grandfather, Auguste Vermette (1891–1986), was the subject of a multiyear study of the Red River Métis by Marcel Ferland, university professor, composer of classical music, and amateur historian who wrote the book *Au temps de la Prairie: L'histoire des metis de l'ouest canadien racontee par Auguste Vermette, neveu de Louis Riel* (*At the Time of the Prairie: The History of the Métis in Western Canada told by Auguste Vermette, nephew of Louis Riel;* Ferland, 2000).

I did not grow up Métis and in fact knew little about the culture and ways of knowing except what I overheard at large family gatherings when heated voices could be heard arguing about the government and their treatment of the Métis. I see now in the published literature that my line represents a history of people, both men and women, who were fighters, and who always seemed to be on the outskirts of society looking in. The following passages represent loose threads in my memory, single scenes recalled from the mind of a child growing up in Manitoba in the 70s.



The Old Man

"Viens ici petit poulet." Quietly, at the age of 5, I peer out from behind the doorframe that leads to the front room of the old house located in the French part of the city. My great-grandfather, a spirited 96-year-old "half-breed," is the centre of all activity in the little house.

Switching from English to French to Michif, he hollers for my grandmother to bring him his moccasins, his pipe, his spittoon, to turn his music on, and to make it snappy. He shifts his attention back to me and begins to sing an old Métis song. He motions for me to come forward and hands me a rattle, which we shake together. My mother he welcomes into the room, his brown teeth grinning upon her presence. He points at me and in French says to her, "she is you." Someone else appears at the door with a question, and he appears angry because his attention has been shifted. He dismisses the request with a wave of his hand and returns again to sing for me.

My grandfather of European descent enters the room and speaks directly to the old man. They exchange words and once again my great-grandfather calls for my grandmother in Michif. I get a sense that my grandfather is annoyed with the language. (A 1977 restory, 2013).

***

The Middle

The Indians are already at the back of the bus when I get picked up at my rural stop. I steal glances their way as I quickly find a seat in the middle. I turn inwards towards the aisle, back to the window, always inwards to avoid an unexpected approach from behind. This is learned behaviour and while I, myself, have not been their target I have seen the outcome for those who don't pay attention.

The older girl is particularly agitated this morning, and she moves from seat to seat. I freeze as I note her approach toward the middle of the bus and I look in horror at the open seat next to me. She drops down heavily beside me; her large frame takes up over half the space. She violently rattles the seat in front of us and turns to shout at her younger brother in the back. An exchange occurs between them filled with profanities, and she turns with wild eyes towards me. "What are you looking at?" Filled with terror I mutter "nothing," and cast my eyes down to my book and pretend to read.

She doesn't sit long and begins to move again to the back of the bus. I can see the bus driver's eyes in the rear view mirror. He is watching her movements more than he is watching the road. She approaches her brother and a fight breaks out. The bus driver swerves to the side of the road and slams the bus in park. He quickly moves to the back of the bus and with threatening gestures he pulls the younger brother to the front to be near his seat. I can tell he is afraid of the older girl and warns her he will put them both out in the cold and they will have to walk to school. He quickly returns to his seat and I can hear him mutter under his breath,

"bloody Indians" as he pulls the bus again onto the road. The girl begins to sing loudly Patty Smyth's I Am the Warrior. (A 1981 restory, 2013)

***

Going Steady

He has kind eyes when he looks at me and even though he is not a favourite among most of the teachers, I like him. He talks often of his dad coming to get him to go hunting, but he rarely speaks of his mother with whom he lives in a tiny side-by-side house in the village. He is what the kids call "full blown Indian." With black hair, a stocky build, and wild eyes, he invites many fights in the school yard, daring others to call him "boggin" once again. Larger than the rest of the kids, likely due to being held back a grade or two, he is a frightening opponent and very few kids take him up on his offer.

He takes me by surprise one day when he rides his bike all the way from town to my family's property. We walk the road together, which is how country kids date, and we decide to go steady. The relationship is short lived, but I remember the shock of the other kids at school to find out I was dating an Indian. (A 1984 restory, 2013)

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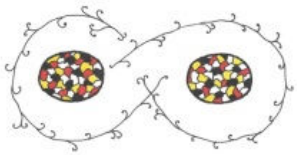


The Heritage Project

My grade 7 family heritage project for social studies is coming along nicely. I'm including great detail of my father's journey from Denmark to Canada as a new immigrant, my grandmother's escape from Poland during the war, and my grandfather's work as a farmhand. My mother suggests I add something about our Aboriginal history in Manitoba and our connection to Louis Riel. I politely decline, adding "I'm really more European". (A 1985 restory, 2013)

***

I had never named these original perceptions of my Aboriginal heritage prior to embarking on this narrative inquiry self-study research. Growing up it was more of an unspoken understanding among family, friends, and society in general that it was better to be non-Aboriginal than Aboriginal. Traditional ways of knowing about nature and the environment were not passed on to me, and knowledge that was once part of my heritage slipped quietly into oblivion. Much time has passed since then, and only in my 40th year was I able to write the following passage as part of a narrative inquiry writing exercise I designed for an ecological identity workshop focused on family and culture:

Growing up in the '70s in Manitoba it was not advised to declare yourself a person of Aboriginal descent. Those of us who were "halfbreeds" (otherwise known as Métis) would quickly choose to identify with our European heritage and simply call ourselves "Danish," "Irish," or "British." We were no more these things than we were "warriors," but it was a safer

path to travel and we ignored all things First Nations— the herbal remedies, the creation stories, the celebratory foods, and the language." (2012, The Earth & I Workshop).

The More-Than-Human Threads: Learning From Teachers of Another Kind

> *Having suppressed our totemic imagination, we . . . have lost critical elements of language and imagination with which to make sense of the rest of the natural world, and of ourselves in it. We manifest a poverty of discourse related to nature, to other animals, to human–animal relations.* (Sabloff, 2001, p. 11)

Figure 16. Me and my older sister with Nancy, the family dog. © 1977 Family photo archives.

Nancy

There was never a time when we didn't have a family pet. Animals became very important to me at an early age due to my shyness. I would talk endlessly to the family dog and tell secrets to the kittens the stray cat had out in the back garage. Our dogs especially had a

sensibility to them that always made them look like they understood our conversations. Our dogs were not small, but large breeds that we rode in the backyard and wrestled with, even though we were outweighed by at least 50 pounds. While "Toby" was our first dog, "Nancy" was the one that changed things for me as a child. She loved us unconditionally and always had the time and desire to sit with me in the backyard and listen to my thoughts. She came to us as a farm dog nobody wanted, and to us, she was the best gift we could have received. (Master of Education writing, 2009; see Figure 16).

The idea of a "listening" dog was not a strange one to me as a child, nor is it a strange one to me now as an adult. In my early years I would have told you without reservation that the dog had stories of her own and that it was easy to communicate with her if you took the time. I am often reminded of the quote by George Washington Carver who said, "If you love it enough, anything will talk to you." For me though, it wasn't just about love but about respect. Playing in the woods as a child I would often see the remains of an animal encounter from the night before, a kill site littered with feathers, fur, and blood that stained the snow, and remember the sound of the kill cry I heard in the darkness through the open bedroom window. The circle of life had been shown to me, without censorship and reservation, and I developed a deep respect for its purpose and function.

The area of more-than-human communication has being studied with increasing interest over the past few decades (Abram, 1996; Barrett, 2009; G. Harvey, 2006). The intersection where humans and the earth meet, studied and written about extensively by notables such as Thomas Berry and Gary Snyder, continues to intrigue and entice new discourses about who or what is capable of communication and supports "an animist ontology" where "plants, animals, and spirits exist in communicative relationship with humans" (Barrett & Wuetherick, 2012, p.

4). As Barrett notes in her 2009 research about Animate EARTH, new ways of thinking, seeing and interpreting are necessary to connect with the more-than-human (Barrett, 2009).

New ways of being, as suggested by progressive educational research circles, often appear familiar to me, and I wonder if it's because they are reflections of what were once my *original ways* of being in those formative years from birth to 12, before I unlearned what I had learned. I was aware then of multiple realities because I spent much of my time observing nature, quietly and from a distance, so as to not disturb. I did not think to question at that time that what the beaver did was anything but movement and purpose within its own reality, or that the trees knew when to go dormant because they had an unspoken language between themselves and the seasons which notified them of the coming change. And I believed that everything functioned under the realm of nature and the perpetuation of cycles and systems that were never under control, never predictable, and always in motion.

The Death of Nancy

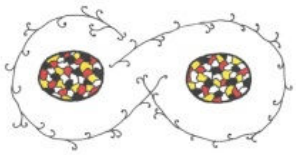
I remember the day when elderly Nancy was put to rest by my father in the far corner of the river bank when she was too ill to go on anymore. I wonder to this day on his selfless ability to grant her peace. How hard it must have been for him to be the one to let go such a beloved pet. He never talked about it and I remember him returning to the house without her, only saying that "it is nature's way." (Master of Education writing, 2009)

I had seen subscribed death a few years earlier. It was during a local barbeque when the young kids were challenged with catching Arnold the pig in his pen, with the winner receiving $5. We had a great time chasing the poor creature from corner to corner, and when someone

caught him we all cheered. Unbeknownst to me at the time was that Arnold was destined for the spit that lay waiting in the corner of the yard. That I had unknowingly contributed to his death placed a mark on my life that remains there today. It would be incorrect to assume, for example, that the event had a cause and effect relationship on my life today and as a result I now practice veganism (though for some people this type of event may contribute to such an outcome in their ecological identity). In fact, I am not a vegetarian, but I do seek out the most humane raising and handling of meat possible whenever I buy it. Why this story persists in my mind over the years is still somewhat of a mystery to me. Was it the fact that I acted without knowing the true nature of the event that bothered me, even at the age of 5? Was it that I felt deceived by the adults who knew the purpose of the game when all I ever felt from animals was their authentic wild selves? Was it because I felt like an outsider with my own species, and more of a companion of nature? Like many stories unearthed through the narrative inquiry process, this deceivingly simple story continues to provide clues as to why I think and act the way I do today.

People continued to baffle me throughout these early years. I remember never being afraid of animals, but I was afraid of people. Trips to the city were always accompanied by much anxiety and preparation on my part. As a child, I considered myself a citizen of the natural environment, my place defined by open spaces with only the sky as the ceiling. In the city I felt small and separate. I was without landmarks in this place of extreme sights and sounds, and it wasn't long before I felt trapped within the concrete and steel of the urban landscape. I continued to feel this way about urban environments growing up and even into my adulthood, often declining promising career positions over the years due solely to their location within the city.

I continued receiving lessons regarding human–animal interaction in my early years. Though my family didn't own a farm, our acreage always had the presence of many animals, and that is where I learned what humans value and don't value. Today, I see those animal–human interactions of the past as reflections of the identities and paradigms of the people who visited the property.



Garbage

My pet rabbit believed himself to be a dog, coming when called and even sitting on command. So friendly was his nature, he could be seen greeting anyone who entered my father's shop. My father employed workers during certain times of the year, and one morning when I went out to feed the rabbit he did not come when called. I entered the shop to discover the workmen had dropped a pipe on him and had swept him into the corner with the rest of the "garbage" at the end of the day. (A 1980 restory, Master of Education writing, 2009)

***

Poisoned

I found our dog Max one morning, stiff like a board beside the outdoor barbeque pit. He had been poisoned by a neighbour who was tired of the dog wandering into his yard. As a result of his baiting our dog, he also killed his own. (A 1984 restory, Master of Education writing, 2009)

It was only towards the end of this stage in life when my thoughts began to change about how I saw humans and their ability to control or manage nature. Through school I had been taught how ingenious humans could be in their manipulation of the environment and how the

application of science could solve many problems. I began investigating careers in animal behaviour and medicine, and it became my plan to become a veterinarian. While other children wanted to be vets in a fleeting kind of way where one thinks it will be cute or fun, I had a deep-down dedication to the plight of all animals. I wanted desperately to relate with them, to understand them, and become a voice for them. I believed that science was the key to this understanding.

Figure 17. Mugs, the family dog. © 1985 Family photo archives.

Science

Mugs was the last dog we ever owned as a family. At the age of 13, Mugs and I had a special bond. He never left the yard and always waited for me every day next to place where the bus stopped. One Saturday afternoon a gas meter reader, in a hurry to get his weekend started, struck Mugs in our own driveway and the dog went down. My mom and I gathered him up and drove him to the vet to see what could be done. I held him in my arms in the back seat and

whispered it would be fine because he was going to a doctor. I believed he would not see the same fate as Nancy because he was so young and that science would save him. The vet said his back half had been crushed and the only humane thing to do was to put him down. We drove home that night without Mugs, and I sat in the back seat devastated. My newly found belief that science could fix things had been shattered and I was confused about my place in a world that seemed to lack a clear authority. (A 1985 restory, Master of Education writing, 2009, further restoried, 2016; see Figure 17).

The end of this period of time in nature marks the foundation upon which my ecological identity is built. This foundation can never be shaken or rebuilt and stands as a permanent landmark in time that I return to regularly to help navigate my place in the present. Through investigation of seemingly uneventful stories, with the support of theoretical perspectives involving environmental consciousness, child development, and postmodern thought, I am able to weave together the threads that make up the pattern of my identity in nature. As I venture out from this place and time in search of roots of transformation that make up the next critical time period in my history, I am reminded that this place will always exist and still has many more stories to tell if I'm interested in listening.

David Bouchard: Landmark Scholar

If you're not from the prairie, you can't know my soul,

You don't know our blizzards, you've not fought our cold.

You can't know my mind, nor ever my heart,

Unless deep within you, there's somehow a part . . .

A part of these things that I've said that I know,

The wind, sky and earth, the storms and the snow. (Bouchard, 1993, p. 28)

Sometimes we find direction in the most unlikely of places. The above passage is one of my favourite from David Bouchard's "If You're Not From The Prairie." With stunning illustrations from Henry Ripplinger, it tells the tale of "bittersweet experiences with this diverse land" (Bouchard, 1993, dust cover) through descriptive prose of an environment that is unmistakably prairie. David Bouchard is a Métis writer and best-selling author of over 50 books who combines visual arts and poetry to explore the love of reading and Canada's Aboriginal communities (Bouchard, 2016). This book led me to Bouchard's writings of discovering his Métis heritage, long buried in secret. Because of Bouchard's courage in discovering his story publicly, I found the courage to discover mine within this research. What I found was a rich history of Métis culture and story that will likely take me the second half of my life to fully understand. Of greatest importance for me, was the discovery of community, people like Bouchard who are willing and eager to share their stories and weave them with mine so that our collective story stands stronger for the generation following us.

CHAPTER FIVE: PACKING THEORY AND VENTURING OUT—A SEARCH FOR ROOTS OF TRANSFORMATION

This chapter continues the exploration of my ecological identity and extends my inquiry into my second critical stage of life, or what I call my transformative years, represented here by ages 13 to 33. This period of time marks movement away from my home base to new and unfamiliar places (both literal and figurative) and denotes significant shifts in my dominant paradigm of the time. The influence of these paradigm shifts on the development of my ecological identity are noted and further analyzed with the support of theory based in constructivism, hermeneutics, and voice. Through story, the chapter investigates the influence of the current educational system, the value of experiential learning, the important role of teaching, and the expansion of voice as they pertain to the expansion of my understanding of ecological identity.

The Grades Are Posted

"*The grades are posted!" Our friend can't wait to deliver the news and is out of breath by the time he reaches the group's hangout, a group of tables tucked away in the basement of the university's science building. My boyfriend is more anxious than I am to gather our things and make the long climb to the building's second floor. By the time we arrive some students are celebrating with cheers while others are silently walking away. With a shaking finger, I trace the many columns of student numbers posted on the hallway's white walls. It's not long before I pause on my own six-digit number and my fears are confirmed. I have failed my science*

program. There will be no advancement to semester two, no co-op opportunities, and no future in the natural sciences. (A 1990 restory, 2016)

Looking back over this story, I can remember vividly that precarious period of time that existed between the end of secondary school and what I believed would be the start of an education and life dedicated to nature achievable through the valid study of science. I can see clearly now the rigid world I had constructed for myself then (with the active support of school and society) where success at school meant access to opportunities that would help me realize a life's passion and failure meant access to this world would be denied. I never questioned the knowledge that had been imparted to me in the teachings of the science program or the way in which the information had been presented. My acceptance of my own failure was complete and I was left *placeless* after two decades of believing that my life and work would be committed to the environment.

I find it helpful to view this story through a theoretical lens focused on the notion of knowledge creation and how we come to know the information we hold as truths. In this chapter, I not only look at this transformational period of young adulthood but return to pertinent memories from adolescence to maturity that contribute to my knowledge of how I constructed my sense of the world and my place in it. I also consider interpretation and voice as promising vehicles through which I might better understand my ecological identity development during this period.

Constructing A New Reality

Constructivism can be a difficult concept to define and is currently represented widely in educational theory as a "philosophical position, an epistemology, a form of research, a learning theory, and even a model of learning" (Shapiro, 2011, p. 174). The root of the word to *construct*

reveals the main thrust of the viewpoint which is that all of knowledge is constructed (individually and collectively), either as experience or social assumptions, and truths and meaning are developed through the processes of observation and interpretation (Fisher, 1991 as cited in Shapiro, 2011; Savery & Duffy, 2001; Shapiro, 2011; Ültanir, 2012).

For the purposes of this work, constructivism refers to an epistemological approach focused on how we learn "by actively and self-consciously bringing our past experiences and understandings" forward to create new meanings where knowledge is not found but constructed and educational facilitators are not providers of data but rather providers of opportunities that allow for more engagement (Ültanir, 2012, p. 196). This stance supports the goals of métissage in its quest for open engagement of inquirers whose stories become braided with one another to create a new collective meaning.

Of critical importance to the constructivist viewpoint is that a possible solution to a problem is not as important as the engagement of the learner to create new "ways of thinking about phenomena" (Shapiro, 2011, p. 173). The value of a constructivist approach to ecological identity research lies in its ability to include social, political, and cultural contexts. As a researcher embarking on an identity study, I see how I have constructed my worldview looking through these lenses at my experiences.

Many scholars (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991; Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008; Kemp, 2012; Kumar, 2006; Moen, 2006; Phillips, 1995; Savery & Duffy, 2001; Terwel, 1999; Ültanir, 2012) have reviewed the contributions of thinkers who have built the constructivist tradition, such as notables John Dewey (1859–1952), Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), Jean Piaget (1896–1980), Jerome Bruner (1915–), and Ernst von Glasersfeld (1917–2010). While these foundational scholars in constructivist theory agree on the main principles of constructivism as

noted above, it is worth mentioning that they differ on the "mechanisms they see at work" (Phillips, 1995, p. 7).

Dewey's theory of experience calls for active learning as a continuous process of reconstruction, placing emphasis on a democratic learning environment and the learner's motivations for taking part (Dewey, 1916/2005, 1938)**.** Vygotsky sees social learning as necessary before individual development can occur, with language as the conduit between the environment and the self (Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008; Moen, 2006). Piaget believes growth precedes learning, with progressive stages of development contributing to self-organizing schemas (Singer & Revenson, 1978). Bruner sees autonomous learning as the result of activating three modes of representation in development (action, imagery, and language; S. A. McLeod, 2008). von Glasersfeld occupies a more radical space, suggesting that knowledge "serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality" (von Glasersfeld, 1989, p. 162).

Collectively, I believe it can be said that all constructivists agree that "we cannot talk about what is learned separately from how it is learned" (Savery & Duffy, 2001, p. 1). From an ontological perspective, I concur with Clandinin and Connelly's (1991) summation that learning about education comes "from thinking about life," and we learn about life from "thinking about education" (p. 261).

The Ball

My worst class by far is physics. Not only is math the cornerstone to the discipline, but it also involves spatial reasoning, something I have a lot of difficulty grasping on the flat chalkboard. The teacher erases the board to begin a new scenario and draws a square box and a stick figure with an arc. "If you throw a ball over a 20-foot building, how high and how fast

would you have to throw it for it to land clearly on the other side?" The rest of the class begins working feverishly on their equations while I stare down at my blank page. Why exactly do I want to throw the ball over the building? (A 1989 restory, 2016, a reflection on the value of considering a constructivist perspective in education and research).

I turn now to review how the study of interpretation itself can support self-study and ecological identity research.

Interpreting A New Reality: Environmental Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is broadly defined as reflection focused on the science and art of interpretation of both written texts and of thought itself (Utsler et al., 2014). It is concerned with seeking valid forms of interpretation that aim at "opening all possible worlds" for inquiry while recognizing that interpretation "is a structurally open project that never comes to final closure" (Utsler et al., 2014, p. 3).

Environmental hermeneutics, or the act of connecting interpretation with the environment, is defined by Utsler et al. (2014) as having five possibilities:

1. The extension of broad interpretation to environments of any kind (built, natural, cultural) and can involve the person who works on the land to the person viewing the environment out of a window.
2. Interpretation of actual encounters within environments designed to deepen connections, such as interpretative signs on a trail or the development of a walking trail.
3. Nature writing that features writing as "an interpretation of nature by the author . . . as well as the interpretative action of the reader of the text concerning nature" (p. 3).

4. Interdisciplinary interpretation such as the collective counsel of scientists, economists, and sociologists where interpretation acts as mediator between "different disciplinary interpretations so as to suggest a fuller and more robust understanding of environments" (p. 4).
5. Interpretation as ontology and the movement beyond "techniques to interpret landscapes" to build an "ontological framework that necessitates such interpretation" (p. 4).

Simply put, "people interpret themselves in relationship to their environments and the way they do so is relevant" (Utsler, 2014, p. 139). Environmental hermeneutics can be a way by which ecological identity is better understood within frameworks like environmental psychology, ecopsychology, and deep ecology which may be supported by "an environmental hermeneutics of the self" that offers "an environmentally relevant interpretation of human behaviour in relation to and in response to environments" (Utsler, 2014, p. 140).

The Country Kids

I'm excited when the first edition of the school's newspaper comes out. On the front page is my article, a story about us rural kids coming to the city high school. Written tongue-in-cheek, the first-person narrative exclaims "yes, city slickers we have toilets that flush, and no, we don't all have cows as pets!" During the break the rural kids pass me in the hall and give me the "thumbs up," while the city kids poke me in the ribs and joke "but do you have a telephone or do you use a can and string?" (A 1988 restory, 2016, a reflection on individual and collective interpretations of sense of place)

In the following section I explore the value of adding voice to the study of ecological identity.

Voicing A New Reality

I was first introduced to the concept of *voice* within my MEd program where I declared in a 2010 writing: *"I wasn't aware I was missing voice within my teaching practice and life until my Master of Education courses. I suppose it's hard to miss something that you never knew you had."* By that time in the program I had been reading about what Johnson (2007) calls the "gap between cognition and emotions," where a person's inner voice is defining them as one thing, but the evidence they are receiving externally defines them in other ways (p. 180). It was during my PhD second residency, however, that I began to truly comprehend the depth and complexity associated with voice and the act of representation. During that time period I moved beyond the idea of voice as a simple concept of either being heard or not being heard, to discover it as one of the most complex concepts in postmodern thought.

As Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) point out, schools reflect the culture in which they exist, "but they are also a prime instrument for shaping and developing that culture" (p. 192). In this way, a positive feedback loop exists where learners are educated to be one way and they in turn support the intent and design of that same educational system. Political and religious organizations as well as government institutions may also be considered examples of this process in play. For many marginalized individuals, to have voice means to "lift the veil of silence" and believe that what you have to say is worthy of hearing, and worthy of dialogue (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 424). For me as an educator, to teach means to find your own voice within the educational system with the added weight of helping students find theirs.

As Pinar (1994) would suggest, "we work from within" (p. 10), and too often this critical piece of human development is lost as we focus on "the objective, the observable, elements and [ignore] the subjective, invisible, elements" (Branson, 2010, p. 110). The discovery of voice

caused a fundamental shift in my practice as I began to see myself not just as a receiver of instructions and a transmitter of knowledge but as a catalyst for change. I began to change the way I did things in the classroom and in faculty meetings, and I began to challenge myself to step forward and stand in uncomfortable spaces instead of retreating to the background to suffer in silence when my personal and professional theory did not correlate within my practice. And my practice, as I knew it, did not come to an end! In fact, I began to experience what Bruner calls the "spiral curriculum"; the more I stepped outside my comfort zone, the more voice I seemed to gain (Doll, 1993, p. 124).

I began introducing students to their own voice in my classroom and provided them with an "opportunity to use their own reality as a basis of literacy" and use their "own language . . . to reconstruct their history and their culture" (Freire as cited in Nemiroff, 1992, p. 67). We began talking in class—not case study discourse or debate quid pro quo, but actual discussions that encouraged reflection and the sharing of stories "that make meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417). These stories came to light organically through our conversations, without active prompts or solicitation, and the curriculum transformed from a "vehicle for transmitting knowledge" to a "vehicle for creating and re-creating ourselves and our culture" (Doll, 1993, p. 131). It was through this conversation "with our fellow humans [as] our only source of guidance" that knowledge became understood and relevant (Doll, 1993, p. 389). I began to see that "learning from others" became our curriculum and represented one of the most "important and unique human [abilities]" (Bruner as cited in Doll, 1993, p. 119).

No Stories

"I have no stories!" She is angry with me as we move out into the hall and away from the other students. I hadn't anticipated this strong reaction to my narrative assignment, one

where I ask students to tell me two stories of time spent in nature with family or friends. She shifts from one foot to the other and I can see she is visibly upset. "Why do I have to talk about myself, I don't have anything to say. Can I talk about someone else?" The encounter leaves me heavy-hearted as I realize she has likely never been asked to share her story or voice before. (A 2008 restory, 2016, a reflection on the importance of voice in self-study).

Schemas

According to Polkinghorne (2015), there exist "cognitive structures or general patterns of knowledge" known as *schemas* that "operate in the background and serve as a knowledge base for making sense of everyday experiences" (Polkinghorne, 2015, p. 157). These schemas are responsible for providing a person context when encountering new situations that are similar to previous experiences (Polkinghorne, 2015), and in **a** narrative sense, they provide a "blueprint of the way [people] interact with their interpersonal, personal, and physical environments" (Polkinghorne, 2015, p. 157).

The following threads focus on the transformative years in my ecological identity development and demonstrate the function of narrative schemas within my stories involving my search for a new place, my inevitable return to nature, and my expansion of voice.

Searching For Place Threads: Stories That Drive West

Ages 13-21

"Where, then?"

"Further west. To the Coast."

"Chrissake, why?"

She doesn't know. Maybe it only ever occurs to prairie people, when they light out, to go yet further west. This is idiotic.

"I can't say. I don't know." (The Diviners, Margaret Lawrence, 1974, p. 226).

Figure 18 (Left). The University's Animal Science building. © 1987 Personal archives.
Figure 19 (Right). Me at the age of 15 assisting in the sheep barn. © 1987 Personal archives.

Figure 20 (Left). Me at the age of 15 in the scientist's office. © 1987 Personal archives.
Figure 21 (Right). Me at the age of 37 returning to the university to reflect 22 years later. © 2009 Personal archives.

The Doctor

In grade 9 I had the opportunity to participate in a week of real hands-on learning through the co-op option at school. I had been waiting for this opportunity since the beginning

of the year, and I signed up to shadow a doctor from the University of Manitoba's animal science department. By this time, I had come to terms with the loss of my dog Mugs and my realization that humans were fallible creatures. I turned my attention to wildlife and began to focus on a future in zoology, particularly animal behaviour. It cannot be overstated how important that week was to me as a 15-year-old girl. The doctor, a man in his late 50s, didn't see my presence at the university as a chore but as a real opportunity to expose a young person to what he did. He took me everywhere he went and encouraged me to try everything. When I dissected diseased chickens, he gave me a "thumbs up." When I put my hand in Rita, the ruminating lab cow, he asked me how it felt. And when he allowed me to assist a birthing sheep who was struggling, and I held the little lamb in my arms, he placed his hand on my shoulder and gave it a squeeze. It never mattered to him that I was female or in grade 9; to him, I was one more person who valued what he valued. His office was a shrine to ecology and biodiversity with skulls, furs, and animal images covering every inch of available wall space. (A 1987 restory, Master of Education writing, 2009, further restoried, 2016)

My exposure to animal science through this mentor and experience was the driving force behind my initial postsecondary choices. It felt natural to do the work, like being close to nature, and I was good at it. During that co-op week (see Figures 18, 19, 20), when some university students in their first and second years of the program shied away from the experiential learning, I stepped forward as a 15-year-old without hesitation. I loved every part of the learning and was dedicated to the hard work that it required. The scheduled week with the doctor ended too soon, but the memory of the experience continues to endure even after all these years (see Figure 21). When I reflect on the power of this experience to influence not only my identity back then as an adolescent but also my identity now as a mature educator, I am taken aback by the capacity of

experiential learning to affect a life and create a connection with the environment that is sustaining for both the teacher and the learner.

My office today looks very much like his did 29 years ago. It's covered in animal prints, skulls, furs, and plants. It is a shrine to ecology and biodiversity. Rarely does someone enter the office without commenting on the way it makes them feel. Unbeknownst to most visitors, this is *biophilia* at play. I teach today much like he taught me all those years ago, with a belief that anyone can learn about the environment if they are allowed to hold it in their hands.

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Figure 22 (Left). China Beach, Vancouver Island, BC. © 1991 Personal archives.

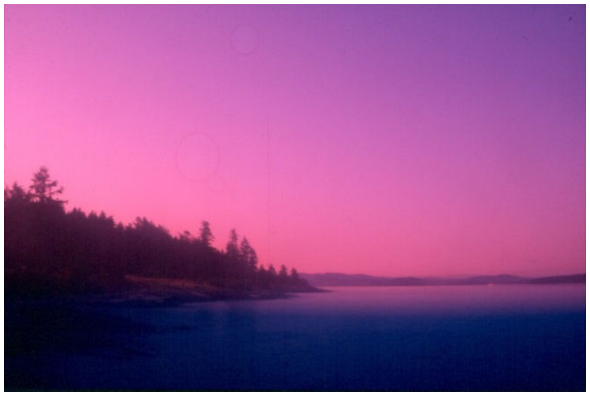

Figure 23 (Right). The view from Salt Spring Island, BC. © 1991 Personal archives.

Figures 24, 25, 26. Protests on Government Street and the Legislative grounds, Victoria, BC. © 1991 Personal archives.

Shades of Grey

Growing up Catholic in a small rural town, truths had been pretty clear for me— there were things that were right and things that were wrong. My travels across Vancouver Island showed me that there are only shades of grey. I marched when the protesters marched, and when they spoke I was there to document them with film. It was the first time I had seen community created entirely by choice. How could a place have so much natural beauty and so much human turmoil at the same time? I learned that the man who sits in the tree has as much right to speak as the politician on the hill. And I learned that there are many trails one can follow if one listens to his or her internal compass; listening though, is the hardest challenge. (A

1991 restory, Master of Education writing, 2009, further restoried, 2016; see Figures 22, 23, 24, 25, 26).

In my mind I was left with few options after my failure at university. I decided to withdraw from the idea of a life and work in nature and I turned to my second passion of photography. It's hard to say why I felt the need to venture west to Vancouver Island when there were plenty of photography programs in Manitoba. Perhaps I needed distance, a separation from the prairies that had promised me companionship in the early years, or perhaps I needed to stand on a landscape so different and foreign that it would expect nothing from me as a visitor, and I, in turn, would feel no obligation towards it.

Photography was my window into this new landscape, and it provided unexpected lessons in both my personal and professional life. The land was wild, in many different ways than the prairies, and it was both welcoming and punishing as I sought to know it through my images and stories. Nature continued in its role as teacher as I ventured out into its space to push my limits of comfort and to almost test, once again, if there was a connection between me and the environment.

I learned how to scuba dive and explore the ocean from the inside out. I camped in the backcountry for the first time carrying very few creature comforts, and I hiked the old redwood trails to their end. I clung to a cliff ledge to get a glimpse of the seal herds basking on their isolated island, and I sat in the middle of the ocean in a small zodiac boat for hours, my camera held poised with frigid hands, to capture images of the great grey whales as they migrated south. Throughout these adventures and experiences I became aware of a new language emerging within me, one that was both familiar and strange at the same time, and I saw another face of nature I did not recognize but that invited me to consider another way of being.

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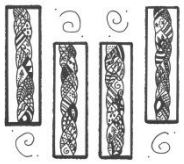

The Criminal

"Who are you shooting for?" The man appears agitated when I ask permission to take his picture for the newspaper, and I am slightly taken aback. I have been following the environmental protestors for hours and so far they have enjoyed the attention they are receiving from media. I am not one of the protestors, but in my heart I am "one of them" and my photographs reveal my bias as I tell their story through favourable lighting, poses, and movement. The man shifts his weight behind the fold-away table he is manning in the inner harbour; the top of the table is littered with papers that say "Save Clayoquot Sound Now!" I inform him I am shooting for the local newspaper on the island, and in response he declares "well then!" and holds up a flyer next to his smiling face. I take the photo, and he hands me a flyer. I must appear confused because he leans over to whisper in my ear, "I wouldn't want my picture in the national papers, they might be looking for me. I skipped parole last month." He winks at me and diverts his attention to the tourists walking by. In a booming voice he delcares, "let me tell you about what they're doing up in Clayoquot Sound!" (A 1991 restory, 2016)

I think often of this man in the street when I ask my students who has the right to speak on behalf of the environment. They are quick to answer "everyone", but I wonder if they understand what it truly means to provide everyone the opportunity to have voice. I remember feeling humbled by the man that day who risked his future to speak on behalf of the environment. What drove him to do this? What in his past set about a clear obligation to nature that superseded his own best interests when it came to his freedom? This man has helped me

over the years to ask myself the questions, ‘what do I risk to speak on behalf of the environment?” and “where does my obligation to myself end and the one to nature begin?”

I had observed much in my short time on the island. I saw ways of engagement with the environment I had not witnessed before—the fishing boats that brought in the daily catch from the ocean I dived in, loggers speaking lovingly of their life and work in nature, whole up-island areas turned ghost towns due to the closure of the mills, and a city run on tourism with nature at centre stage. With my camera I had collected these observations visually, trapped them on film, but today they are more like a movie reel that continues to play whenever I teach an environmental science class. That is when stories from this time enter the classroom and take a seat amongst the students to represent data that lie neither in their textbooks nor on the internet. The stories are simple ones full of complexity that tell about the place where humans and nature intersect, and students are encouraged to find their own place and beliefs within the narratives. It was a year and a half before the prairies called me home again from the west, and I answered the call with a return to university in the field of interdisciplinary studies with a focus on the environment.

Turning Back Toward The Wild Threads: Narratives From an Accidental Teacher

Ages 21-27

> *You will also know yourself better. That is another kind of survival knowledge. The more intimate we become with other lives, the more aware we are of how those lives connect with and affect our own. There may be only a few obvious connections at first – two animals in the same woods, hearing the same sounds, smelling the same smells – but as we track the animal farther, we find that its trail is our own trail. As it moves, it affects*

its surrounding. What changes the animal changes its environment, and thus changes us. There is no separation; its fate is our fate. We are tracking ourselves in a sense.

(Paul Rezendes, 1999, p. 9)

Figure 27. Me snowshoeing, tracking, and winter camping in Huntsville, ON. © 1998 Personal archives.

Green Fire

He is a funny fellow, this Brit, and when he teaches he rarely looks at his notes. Every lecture is filled with stories of his adventures, accounts of his primary experiences, and he is incapable of standing still when he speaks. His energy is infectious, but the trait I appreciate the most is his ability to question himself in the presence of students, to display that he too is in the process of learning. He speaks lovingly of the environment, almost like he is speaking of a close friend, and within his personal narratives he weaves in the narratives of the great writers and adventurers—Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau. He speaks of Leopold and

his killing of the wolf, and the pain that followed as Leopold watched "a fierce green fire dying in her eyes." He notices me tearing up in the corner of the room, and I am embarrassed. As class ends he calls to me to the front of the room and says, "if these stories mean something to you, do something with them." (A 1993 restory, 2016)

The problem I encountered upon earning my interdisciplinary degree was the same one that would follow me for the next 20 years. I lacked a clear label, something to define myself and my career in the environment, and this created inner tensions for me as I struggled with how to demonstrate to the professional world where I fit in while still trying to remain true to my vision of what it meant to have a life dedicated to nature.

I found reprieve during this period, working summers and weekends as a nature interpreter at the city's environmental centre. I had taken the job to learn more about nature but found that the majority of my work involved people and engaging them in learning about the environment. One day, a young boy engaged in my talk about animal adaptations called me "teacher," and I smiled at the compliment. My mother was a teacher, and she was good at it. For decades she had been bringing home stories of her students, her challenges and hopes for them, almost like they were her own. She was passionate about teaching like I was about the environment, and I hoped to one day look at my career as she did, with the same satisfaction in knowing that life and work were linked.

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Figure 28. (Left). Me hiking the Pennsylvania Mid State Trail. © 1999 Personal archives.
Figure 29. (Right). Me ice climbing in northern Ontario. © 2000 Personal archives.

"I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in." (Muir, 1979, p. 439)

"Sometimes the best maps will not guide you

You can't see what's round the bend

Sometimes the road leads to dark places

Sometimes the darkness is your friend"

(Cockburn, Pacing the Cage, 1996)

Alone

After our campfire dinner we paddled out across the lake and were dropped off for our sunset solos. This was perfect timing because we got to see the woods change from light to dark. This time we were very far apart from one another, and when the canoe pulled away from the shore I felt completely alone. I saw a loon and heard its call across the water. In the dark I thought about what I had learned about being in the woods and decided that maybe I may have something to offer in this field of outdoor education. (Tripping Journal noting second solo experience in outdoor recreation program, September 30, 1998)

I was excited about enrolling for the one-year certificate program in outdoor recreation. My husband and I had been in the east for 3 years and I had yet to translate my education in the environment into anything resembling a career. I determined practically that my entry into such a program would enhance my employability in the environmental field, but on a personal level I longed to return to the days out west where I had been immersed in nature and had been introduced to an alternate reality.

That year back in school transformed the way I saw nature and my place in it. Pushed to my physical limits (see Figures 27, 28, 29, 30) it challenged me to fully experience nature in her raw form, and not just the parts I wanted to engage with. As students there was little we were sheltered from—the extreme weather, the oppressive weight of the packs, the rush of the white water, and the consequences of a poorly designed campsite. I loved it all. There were unexpected outcomes of the experience too: the camaraderie of the group as we travelled in a common direction, the privilege of being present during another's great triumph or heart-breaking failure,

and the surprising surfacing of alternate ways of knowing that seem to be inherent in people who seek out the company of nature.

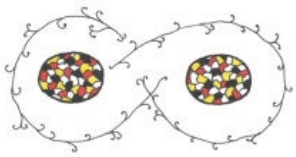
Figure 30. Me kayaking in the Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick. © 1999 Personal archives.

Paddling

During the day I was thinking of how I got here—in a kayak in the Atlantic Ocean. When I look at my life a year ago and I look at it now, I still can't believe the change. I feel like I've been given this great gift—a year that was all for me and a chance to do what makes me happy. And sitting there in the middle of the waves today I felt free, like I could do anything and it would be a good decision because it came from inside. It couldn't be wrong. To experience pure joy like this is such a privilege. (May 12, 1999, Bay of Fundy Trip Journal)

Somewhere towards the end of the year another thing surfaced too that was unexpected. I was invited to consider a teaching role within the program on a part-time basis. The instructors felt I had something to offer students in the program, something innate in my nature that made

students feel at ease, particularly those who had come to the program with little previous experience in the out-of-doors. I hadn't seriously considered a future in teaching before, but the idea seemed natural to me, like an invitation to dwell in a place I had frequently visited before. I found myself an accidental teacher with only the landmarks of the past to guide my way forward.



Cricket

The night program was an owl prowl with pellet examinations and an owl hoot. The brownies were attaching themselves to me on the trail and talking up a storm. The leadership here at the field centre is excellent. They don't talk down to the girls but instead fill them with responsibility. I have watched the way they teach and how they inspire. Everything here is about doing for you; "teachable-moments" are the priority. I received my nature name tonight during the brownie campfire ceremony for nature encounters. They have renamed me Cricket. (Co-op Field Placement Journal, October 19, 1998, restoried, 2016)

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Figure 31. Canoe tripping on the Gibson River, Georgian Bay, ON. © 1998 Personal archives.

The Test

The wind had picked up much faster than we anticipated, and we had to abort our original plan to camp on the south shore. We had seen currents like this before, and we wouldn't take the chance of going out into the open water again. By the time we reached the cove, the waves were tossing the canoes side to side, and many students dumped while trying to stick the landing. In the chaos of the storm I remember only counting and tying down the boats as the students ran for cover in the forest. When I rejoined the group I found a small handful of students trying to put up a fly to cover the group from the rain while the others sat in a huddled mass on the ground as their packs washed away into the lake. I couldn't believe how easily they had succumbed to the elements and had given up hope and how little they considered that what was inside their packs could save their lives.(A 1999 re-story, Earth & I Workshop narrative, 2011, further restoried, 2016)

As a new educator, the described event (see Figure 31) was a valuable lesson for me to see how different people reacted to nature during a time of great personal challenge and how my reaction to the event as an instructor would either promote critical reflection within students or have them file away the experience as something negative, never to be repeated again. Later in the evening on the night of the storm, I wrote in the leader's trip journal the following:

The group's morale is low. During trip debrief tomorrow I'm going to read them an excerpt from The Elders Are Watching written by David Bouchard to hopefully provide them some comfort and clarity. (Trip journal, first year teaching, September 30, 1999)

The name of the book's author means little to me at the time of this 1999 writing, but 16 years later it will prove to be very important as I begin to investigate my identity and past. It is another landmark, placed unknowingly by me on my personal landscape, at the juncture where education and ways of knowing intersect, to guide me back to this place when I am ready.

During the debrief of the trip the following day, many students stated they had never felt so little control over what happens to them. The ones who saved the camp stated they were amazed at the willingness of the struggling students to "lie down and die in the face of challenge." Today, I see this story as a reminder of my first exposure to resiliency outside myself, and consider it often when I think about what it means to be truly resilient in the face of environmental challenges. I often dwell on the notion of resiliency and its importance for what may lie ahead in our collective future, and in my second PhD residency I further explored nature's ability to teach resiliency through this writing:

On Resiliency

Indiscriminate in your teachings

You speak to those who will listen

It matters not the years they have walked the earth

Time does not always dictate wisdom

We grow in reverse

Unweaving the intuitive fabric of which we were born

One sense dominates at the expense of others

Imbalance is the result

If I see it, it is real

Foolishness

Tell it to the mole within the ground

Your lessons are full

You believe me worthy of authentic teachings

Because of you I know how to start again

After devastating loss

Control is just illusionary

Something we believe we wield

Resiliency comes from flexibility

A reaction to a reaction's reaction

Not bad, not good, just is

Flow

Lessons of the landscape

Both expected and unexpected

Converge at the juncture

Straight lines give way

To accommodate the circles

Wonderful and chaotic

Lessons neglected over decades

Nothing is wasted in this world

Just absorbed, recycled, and reborn

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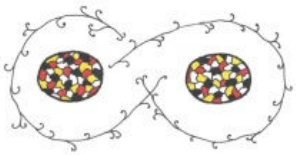

Inner Voice

Being a teacher is so much more than getting your facts straight. You have the ability to inspire dreams or crush them with one simple word. I want to see their eyes shine with a story I'm telling or let them know their efforts at sharing their story matters. My inner voice is getting louder, telling me to remember what life is all about and to reach out into the unknown so that I may truly know myself. These last 2 years have been the best of my life. I have shed all the chains from the past and all the beliefs that never came from me. The song I now sing is my own. It is often out of tune and I frequently get the words wrong, but it is all mine. I have never been more like myself than I am right now. (Trip journal, first year teaching, September 20, 1999, 8 years before graduate work)

Beyond A Circle of One Threads: Adding Voices to My Story

Ages 27–33

"...I cannot become all I can be unless I help you become all you can be" (Miller, 2010, p. 84).

Figure 32. Our wedding day. ©1998 Personal archives.

Vows

it has to be this place

where first promises were made

in the beginning

and kept

every moment

afterwards

the landscape turns its attention

to the little gathering in the garden

to bear witness

as I make promises again

only this time with another

who will share with me

how his landmarks led him to this place (author, 2016)

I began to first become aware of the long-lasting influence of nature in my daily life when my husband and I decided to get married in 1998. Where we would say our vows became of utmost importance to me, far beyond what dress I would wear or what we would serve as a meal. We returned to the prairies and my childhood home, and together we marked the field where the tent would be erected, across from the long row of poplars that used to guide me to my friend's house as a child, where I used to play baseball. But under the trees is where we said our vows (see Figure 32), to the open sky and what exists above, and we headed to the river

afterwards with friends and family, to stand where the land meets the water, to document with film both the starting of our new life together and my dedication to the land from which I came.

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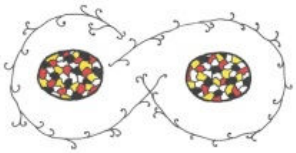
Figure 33. Our dog Brody (2001—2014). Excerpt from PhD coursework—*Principles and Rules I Live By*. © 2013 Personal archives.



Brody

My husband is hoping a rest will help, but I am already preparing for what I know will come next. Literally overnight, Brody has lost control of his hind quarters and struggles to make it across the floor. At the age of 13 he is still a handsome dog, and only his white face gives away his true age. The ride to the emergency clinic is a hard one, and we're both silent, not wanting to discuss what will soon need to be discussed. The x-rays reveal a large mass in his stomach—cancer, and his age prohibits any invasive procedure. He is panting heavily when they

wheel him into the room and together my husband and I say goodbye as we watch the gentle green fire in his eyes go out. (A 2014 restory, 2016)

It is hard to describe to someone who has never had a close relationship with an animal what it means when they leave. Brody (see Figure 33) had been our first "child," and for me, he was a constant reminder of the love I held for animals and nature. I often saw nature through his eyes, all of it again new and exciting, with the most attention spent on the smallest of details—a leaf in the wind or a bug on the ground. And how he loved people! He was an ambassador to the natural world, a welcoming host that encouraged a swim in the lake, a hike in the woods, or a simple step outside. For the children he was their initial guide into nature, a physical manifestation of a primeval and ancient knowing. For me, he was a companion on my journey through the transformative years, a constant reminder of the places I had been and the ones I hoped to revisit.

***

Figures 34, 35, 36, 37. My daughters exploring nature. © 2010 Personal archives.

"They walked the same trails and dip-netted in the same marsh where I once taught children their age." (Master of Education writings, 2009)

Naming

"And what are your names?" The clerk leans over the drugstore counter and smiles at the girls as they choose a treat. "My name is Brooke" says my elder automatically as she scans the rows of chocolate bars. My younger is more apprehensive, and with wide eyes on the woman

she whispers, "Holly." The store clerk smiles and says, "I guess your mom sure likes nature!" (A 2011 restory, 2016).

I hadn't been fully prepared for the impact my children would have on my identity. I knew I wanted to impart on them what I had learned about life, about the environment, and how to care for nature. What I didn't anticipate was that they had their own lessons to teach and that they were going to cause me to question the assumptions that I held and the directions I had chosen.

In their early years I moved continuously back and forth from the role of teacher to the role of student, and together we created a new curriculum made of experiences (see Figures 34, 35, 36, 37). I hadn't expected them to come with their own stories, a surprising admission for me when considering that I perceive my whole life as a story in motion. Even today I continue to get surprised as they layer my stories with ones of their own creation to construct new meanings we then all share.

I did not anticipate that their relationship with the environment would be different from mine. I thought if my teachings mirrored my own experiences growing up, then we would share the same understandings. Instead, I found they created a unique way of interacting with the environment that was often different from mine, and that it provided for them what they were seeking from nature.

Our stories are not the same, but we share an appreciation and love of the natural world (see Figure 38). This has become enough for me, who once feared that they would grow up without the connection that has sustained me throughout my lifetime. Instead, I now focus on offering them opportunities that I once had, without the expectation that they will create the foundation of their ecological identities. Because of my girls' teachings, I have been able to

extend this greater understanding of my role as facilitator into my teaching practice, where instead of asking my students of their experiences in nature "don't you get it?" I ask instead, "what do you get from this experience?"

Figure 38. My daughters playing with Brody at the lake as I had played with Nancy on the river 35 years prior. © 2010 Personal archives.

By utilizing concepts grounded in constructivism, hermeneutics, and voice, I now have a better understanding of how these transformative years have helped me to construct and interpret my current views of nature and my role in it. I focus next on seeking signs in the present time to help identify parts of an ecological identity in evolution from theory to practice in the hopes of nearing praxis.

Dr. Stephen Brookfield: Landmark Scholar

Stephen Brookfield is a professor of higher and adult education and currently sits as the John Ireland Endowed Chair at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota (www.stephenbrookfield.com). His focus on experiential learning and reflective practice in adult education, combined with his belief that true facilitation "incorporates elements of challenge, confrontation, and critical analysis of self and society" (Brookfield, 1986, p. viii), is a major influence in my inquiry work, especially when considering my teaching practice. Like him, I see my interactions with others (family, friends, students, colleagues) as strongly informing my identity, and I see my own learning as a "transactional drama in which the personalities, philosophes, and priorities of the chief players (participants and facilitators) interact continuously to influence the nature, direction, and form of the subsequent learning" (Brookfield, 1986, p. viii).

The question of identity is a recurring one for me both personally and professionally. Prior to 2007 I would say I was deeply affected by "premise distortions" (Mezirow, 1991 as cited in Brookfield, 1995a, p. 45) and that my inner "nagging voice of denial" was most certainly my gatekeeper who defined the boundaries of my inquiry (Brookfield, 1995a, p. 45). Through Brookfield's teachings, I feel now that the thoughts, feelings, and intuitive gut reactions I experience regularly are more than just "idiosyncratic experiences" (Brookfield, 1995a, p. 36), and that reflection helps shed light on my life and work, and their potential to be "filled with magic and mystery" (Hole, 1998, p. 413).

CHAPTER SIX: UNPACKING THEORY AND SEEKING SIGNS—AN ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY IN EVOLUTION

This chapter embarks on the third and last stage of my exploration of ecological identity and its relation to how I see my self, my place, and my practice. It focuses on my most recent critical stage of life, defined here as my *later years*, which span the last decade and end in the present in my mid-40s. I see this period in time as a transition phase, where I'm moving from a place of deep and meaningful learning towards a place of active being that has yet to be landmarked. This phase is marked by my entry into graduate school, first in a Master of Education program and later for my PhD in Educational Sustainability, and is important in the evolution of my ecological identity as I begin to focus on balancing my personal and professional theories with my active practice. In this chapter, I revisit the important role that research methods play in deepening my inquiry, and I view these years through the lenses of the four landmark areas in order to seek signs that I am moving towards praxis.

Life Is Curriculum

I appreciated the honest feedback I received when I asked the question. At my request, the Academic Chair had set aside time to talk about opportunities in the department and had advised me that if I was serious about a full-time teaching position in postsecondary, I would have to earn my master's degree. The thought of returning to school for yet another round of education was daunting. I had two young children at home and a busy career balancing many part-time positions. But I loved to teach, so I headed back to school in the Master of Education program and took my seat at my first night class in the fall of 2007. Music had been playing in

the classroom when I arrived that evening, and behind the many stacks of books that covered the front table a woman greeted each student as he or she entered. When class started, she read aloud from the books, one after another, accounts full of personal commentary and insight into education, and on the board she wrote "life is curriculum," and that marked the beginning of my 9-year graduate journey to this place and time. (A 2007 restory, 2016).

Evolution in the natural world occurs when an organism is faced with a changing environment. It is then that the organism must either change how it interacts with the new environment or it ceases to thrive. The beginning of my graduate work, landmarked by this story of my first meeting with my supervisor, is like this natural phenomenon for me when I consider that my environment was so fundamentally changed by the content of the graduate programs that I was forced to reevaluate all I knew about education, teaching, and indeed life itself. In this chapter I move through my evolution over the past decade and reveal how I have begun to ease the tensions that once existed between my theory and practice. I contemplate my movement forward, away from landmarks of familiarity, towards new landmarks that are forming that mark the place where praxis may be possible.

On the Goal of Praxis

"We can theorize an ethical stance but not live what we theorize, and we can practice an ethical stance that we have not built on a solid foundation of reflection and inquiry, in which case our practice is groundless" (McGinn, Shields, Manley-Casimir, Grundy, & Fenton, 2004).

There were many goals I wanted to achieve when I embarked on this research. Among them was an interest in expanding my theoretical understanding of how I came to know about knowledge creation and the role education and nature played in my construction of my sense of identity and place. I also wanted to reach out to the *field*, to the place where I engage daily in the

practice of teaching, and where landmarks of meaning already existed for me but which I never fully recognized. And in between these two areas of inquiry lay this journey, one of many to come, that brings "theory and practice together" so that I may "ground [myself] in the living ethics that "we construct and reconstruct across time for ourselves" (McGinn et al., 2004, p. 7). In this way, this landmark writing aims to take this research "beyond theorizing to something practical" (p. 7) and extend its reach beyond a self-study to one of relevance for a community of inquirers.

I turn now to seek out signs that I am on track to realizing these goals. I understand that before *intention* there must be *attention* to how I think, what I do, and how I extend beyond myself. Narrative inquiry as both methodology and method allows exploration into both these areas of attention and intention, and through reflective practice we can come to know intimately how we see the world, how we interpret the world, and how we voice our place in it.

Creating Spaces

The campfire is growing brighter now as the students continue to add the wood they have gathered from the forest. Sitting in a circle, they are handed a piece of paper and are instructed to write down one of the biggest challenges and one of the biggest successes they have experienced on the 2-week backpacking trip. Turning their papers to the campfire light, they take 5 minutes to reflect and document their choices. With papers in hand, they are asked to consider reading what they have written aloud to the group and, if comfortable, to theorize why they have chosen those examples. Some students display no hesitation in reading their words, and they talk with ease about their theories concerning their cited experiences. Some students fold up the piece of paper, free of markings, and place it in their pocket, while others place the

paper within the fire itself, so only the flames know what was written. (A 2001 restory, 2016, reflection on the challenges of bringing theory to practice.)

A Word About Signs

Looking back across time I can see that there have always been signs in my journey to tell me where I was traveling, but I was never fully *aware* of them until this narrative inquiry research. Armed now with this comprehensive methodology and practical methods that aid exploration, I see signs everywhere, not only for myself but also for others, and this has greatly impacted my teaching practice. Now, I feel I have completed a baseline study that can form my foundation for understanding my identity and my role as educator, and it is from here that I will continue to venture out to seek further understanding as an individual and also to deepen inquiry as a member of the educational community.

The stories represented in this last chapter are different from my previous narrations. They seek to reveal the crossroads at which my landmarks intersect with one another, allowing for expanded interpretations of past lived experiences. This intermingling of inquiry spaces is further informed by voices from the present, authors, artists, family, and community, who help me deepen my understanding of my own intersections by allowing me to intersect with their stories and meanings.

I return now to the original landmark categories with which I began my story. I view them presently as places where convergence is possible and where many interpretations that were previously hidden can now come into full view. Each story presented here is marked with multiple landmark symbols to indicate that I am now beginning to synthesize my data towards something that approaches praxis. The four categories of landmarks I use to organize and manage my data remain the same: physical landmarks that use the senses, ways of knowing the

present through the past, human landmarks and their influence on direction, and landmarks built in and by the community.

The Email

"I hope you don't mind me writing . . . " The email is a surprise as I haven't seen or heard from this student in over 6 years. He speaks of having recently attended a class that was similar to mine, based in experiential learning and narrative, as part of his new Master of Arts program at the local university. He asks if he can connect me with his current professor, a scholar interested in sense of place. I am shocked that he remembers our time together: a single class in what is a very full program. But he does, and I take it as a sign that maybe what we build together in class, each of us moving between the roles of facilitator and learner, endures throughout the years. (A 2009 restory, 2016, a reflection on the power of narrative inquiry to sustain and promote learning).

I reflect next on stories that seek signs in the physical that were supported by my methods of visiting places of meaning, reviewing personal writings, reflecting on conversations that aid interpretation, and collecting meaningful images.

Seeking Signs in the Physical: Navigating on the Ground

It seems like I've been here before
I can't remember when
But I've got this funny feeling
That I'll be back once again
There's no straight lines make up my life
And all my roads have bends
There's no clear-cut beginnings
And so far no dead-ends

Harry Chapin (1972)

Figure 39. Artist interpretation of my childhood home through my descriptive narratives. © 2016 Kelton. Used with permission. Photo © 2016 Schlamb.

The Return

"I haven't been here in so long . . ." My eldest sister peers out of the window of our parents' vehicle, an old jeep that I borrow during my visits to Winnipeg. She rolls down the window to get a better look at the house as I slowly drive past, and we can see that much has changed. The house from the outside is the same, but the land is different. Trees that used to tower along the roadside are now gone, ditches that used to flow with water in front of the property are dry, and the large garden plot has been sodded over. I turn the car around at the sign that marks the end of the concession road and I drive back to the lot. *"I wonder if they would mind if we looked around?"* My sister looks both alarmed and interested at the

suggestion, and I can tell she is likely torn, as I was the first time I returned to the property, at the thought of revisiting the place of our childhood which held so many memories. We pull into the property and are met with a barking dog whose wagging tail belies its fierce exterior, and a man emerges from the shop—"dad's shop," wiping his oily hands on a cloth. In true prairie fashion he warmly welcomes us not only onto the property but into his home—"our home." The changes in the house are less impactful for me than the sight of the riverbank, where the land now meets the water much further away from the shore. From the top of the hill we hear the roar of an ATV before we see it, and soon a 15-year-old girl drives by at break-neck speed with her little sister on the back, who waves to her father. "Don't forget to haul that wood from the pile to the house!" Both girls wave in response before they drive down the same road my sister and I drove down with the old tractor 35 years before. (A 2012 restory, 2016)

I have returned several times to this childhood place since leaving it in 1991 (see Figure 39). Most times I go alone, but sometimes I return with family, as I did last year with my middle sister who, like me, no longer resides in Manitoba. In an attempt to add voices to my own story, and to gain greater clarification on my own constructions of my sense of place and identity, I looked to her to provide me with clues that would reveal whether we shared a common ecological consciousness that stemmed from this place. I wanted to see if the place meant different things to her than it did to me, and I carefully watched her response to the visit. Without prompting, she spoke of the physical elements of the place, the details of the landscape then and now; she commented on the things we used to do when young; and then her conversation turned spiritual while standing on the riverbank and she connected that physical space with her present metaphorical place in life. Using the property, she guided her thoughts, as

I have done in this research, and looked to landmarks to provide meaningful interpretation and orientation for her current place.

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Figure 40. Me returning to Victoria, BC after 21 years away. © 2013 Personal archives.

The Ocean Bids Welcome Back

My mother looks out over the ocean. She loves this place, and I'm not sure which pleases me more, being back here again to visit after all these years or seeing her back here again standing on the shoreline. This is a special place for us, a brief time when we both dropped our previous identities (mine as a science major and hers as a school teacher) and took a year off to welcome in possibilities of being something else. She connected to this place in different ways than I did. I engaged with the environment in a full physical sense, and she engaged with it in other ways of knowing that I will likely never fully understand. It is enough for me to know that this place has left a landmark on her journey, as it did mine. (A 2013 restory, 2016).

My return to Victoria was an important visit for me as part of this research (see Figure 40). I needed to see the island through my current lens, to interpret it anew so I could extend the original feelings I had made about the island in my transformational years into my current framework of inquiry and interpretation. The environment, while stunningly beautiful, did not call to me to return, and I saw it through the eyes of a visitor instead of a native coming home. I think now that what I had learned within its borders had come with me when I left, and my presence on the land, while appreciated and welcomed, was not necessary for those lessons to be applicable. This realization that the landscape came second in importance to my construction of a time of great personal change is meaningful to me now when I consider that in the future I may visit and reside in many other landscapes. My identity carries these landmarks with me, both in body and in spirit, like charms on a bracelet, that I reflect on when I need them to help guide my current direction. They provide information that feeds my present-day schema that in turn prepares me for experiences that have yet to come but that are reflective of what remains rooted in this place and time.

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Figure 41. Our cottage near the Kawartha Lakes, ON. © 2013 Personal archives.

Rethinking Resiliency

My Ottertail paddle cuts silently through the early morning water on the lake; each stroke temporarily shatters the liquid glass to distort the images reflected there. The paddle is made of black cherry, known for its strength, flexibility, and resistance to rot. In my hands it becomes my partner, and together we perform our canoe ballet upon the water.

I'm always sure to tell my students when teaching paddling skills that my early strokes were not so smooth or nearly as graceful. The paddle in my hands in the beginning was a tool used for one purpose alone, to overcome the current of the water, to steer the vessel where I believed it needed to be. This was my mark of resiliency, the ability to sustain my position regardless of water flow.

I am proud of this resiliency trait and share that without shame. As a daughter of two hardworking parents, I am no stranger to the setting of goals and the subsequent sacrifices demanded by the pursuit of those goals.

Between 1974 and 1987, my parents' rural property that bordered the Red River in Manitoba's Red River Valley experienced three major floods that threatened to devastate not only our land but the land of all Red River Basin dwellers. I recall people coming from the community to form a line along the dyke wall where sandbags were being stacked. Day by day the waters would rise and creep towards the house, and the men and women would work faster to prepare for the day the wake would meet the wall and all efforts would be put to the test.

As a child I remember being fascinated by the approaching water. Much like an army on the horizon, the water appeared to be strategizing its approach to the house, rising faster in the night than the people expected, or tearing trees down almost purposefully to use as ramming logs against the concrete barrier.

The battles with the water came slowly at first, with minor breaks in the wall that were quickly repaired, and then came the big war that trapped us within the house for weeks except for a few trips into town by boat. The dykes had held and the victory was ours, and all we had to do was wait for the water to retreat back into the bed from which it came. This time of confinement was treasured by me and my sisters, who felt like castaways on an island without rules, schedules, and demands. We called it freedom. We occupied our time with whatever we chose, and even mom's home schooling efforts in the early days of the confinement were eventually abandoned in favour of the holiday she also enjoyed.

The 1979 flood left in its wake contaminated soil, dead livestock, and fully submerged basements for residents who did not attempt to dyke their properties. My parents' commitment to

stand their ground had paid off, and the house had been saved. The floods tested their resiliency again in 1987, 1996, 1997, and for the last time in 1999 when, shortly after, they moved into the city four blocks from their original family bungalow purchased 28 years prior. (A 1979 restory, 2013, further restoried 2016).

The theme of resiliency emerged early within my doctoral work and persisted in its importance as I continued to collect field texts. A lesson had been taught to me in those early years, but perhaps not the lesson I had originally interpreted. My sense of self in relation to the environment had been formed on the modern notion of control and manipulation, where nature was often seen not as a partner or ally but rather a challenge to things that were civilized and orderly. I could not shake the feeling, however, that there was something more to learn than punishment, hidden there in the waves of the flood waters, a lesson that once taught could never be unlearned and would be forever sustaining. Looking back on this period since the transformative years, I would say that much of my attention was given, first unconsciously then consciously, to gaining access to a place where the land meets the water. Almost like a pilgrimage I would return to the same area every season, accompanied by family and friends, and wish that one day we could call it our own.

In 2012, my husband and I purchased a small cottage on the edge of a lake (see Figure 41). The cottage sits back and up a respectful distance from the shoreline, making up in view what it lacks in direct access to the water's edge. I was pleased with the property, which seemed to direct itself, its shoreline changing every time we visited, and I made no attempt to alter it in any way. The plants grow where they will and the animals live where they please. This decision to approach the property as a visitor to the land rather than its owner gave me the opportunity to

permanently revisit the role of castaway I had experienced so many years prior. At the cottage we have no schedules, few rules for the children, and no demands on time. We call it freedom. I began to see that a mark of resiliency was not always what you were successful in holding back, but perhaps also what you were successful in inviting in. The mark of true resiliency may be the ability to fling open the floodgates, let the dykes be dammed, and stand amid the rushing waters, not knowing where they are going and what they will touch. And in the aftermath of the cleanse, stand in the sunlight and prepare yourself to do it over again.

I turn next to seeking signs from the past that resurface in the present through voices that translate ways of knowing. I use the methods of conversation, collection of meaningful images and symbols, historical data analysis, and review of personal writings to support this story group.

Seeking Signs of the Past in the Present: Welcoming Ways of Knowing

> *I wanted to tell stories because I wanted to honour the teaching and learning traditions of the community I grew up in. I was also, I would understand later, be drawing on ancestral traditions of storytelling, and in doing so, would be honouring the teaching and learning practices of my ancestors.* (Shields et al., 2011, p. 73)

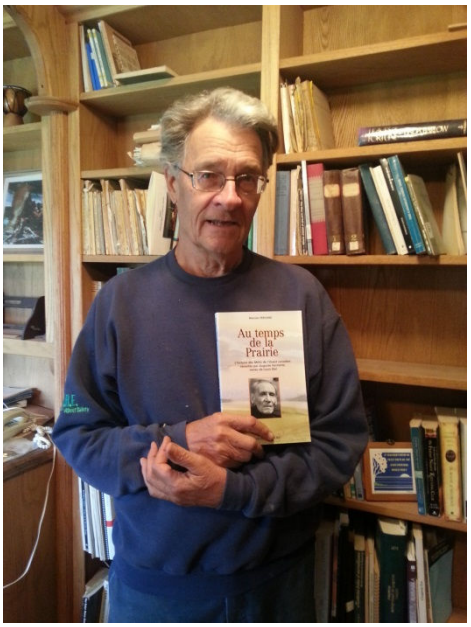

Figure 42. Marcien Ferland, author, professor, composer, and amateur historian, Winnipeg, MB. © 2015 Schlamb.

The Historian

*He had found great grandpa quite by accident while collecting folk songs, "Chanson en rond! How the old man could tell stories!" This makes me smile as I sit in the author's living room taking notes. The coincidence that I am also telling stories 30 years later is not lost on me. The author has been very willing to relay to me the relationship he had with my great grandfather, whom he affectionately declares as one of his life mentors. Twice a month for 2–3 years they would sit together and great grandpa would relay, in his oral tradition, knowledge of the Métis culture and history. His stories, the author confirms, had no particular order, and I am again taken slightly aback by the resemblance between great grandpa and me, for I, too***,**

often lack order in my narrations, as they seem to come about spontaneously and without formal calling. It occurs to me then that this author, whom I don't know and had never met previously, is providing me information about my own family that I never knew. The depth of what I could learn from this stranger becomes apparent as we continue to speak, and I am reminded again how necessary it is to open the door to my own spaces so light from the outside can be let in. (A reflection from meeting Marcien Ferland, author of Au temps de la Prairie: L'histoire des metis de l'ouest canadien racontee par Auguste Vermette, neveu de Louis Riel, Winnipeg, 2015; see Figure 42).

My conversation with Marcien Ferland is revealing in many ways. He confirms some things I already know, such as great grandpa's Cree background and the poor treatment he received at school, along with the other Métis children, because of their accents and their upbringing—"we were nothing." Of great interest to me was how great grandpa came to learn of the Métis history through his father (my great great grandfather) who, according to Ferland, fought under Riel and was an informer. At night the old man could be overheard in the next room speaking in detail about events at the Red River, and my great grandfather, anxious to relay those messages at school the next day, would be told he was wrong, and to study what the textbook said.

It becomes clear to me upon hearing these stories that history has always been constructed and that the existence of *facts* is really illusionary. Voices that would have added knowledge to our collective understanding and interpretation of history were systematically silenced by the dominant paradigm to uphold what was believed to be the one truth. With that silencing came additional losses in the form of natural remedies and Aboriginal language which, in some cases, has passed into oblivion.

What did not pass into obscurity is the lingering resentment on both sides of the culture war. I become very reflective when Ferland speaks of a new time, when discrimination from the past can finally be put to rest, and I wonder if this will ever be. I did not grow up with stories of my heritage, but I did grow up with stories of hardship, three generations that warned of a culture that would not be accepted. In my very brief engagement with this part of my identity I can say truthfully that their fears were not entirely unfounded. I have seen things over the past 4 years that lead me to believe that there is still much work to be done in this area of acceptance, on both sides.

Ferland draws my attention back to great grandpa and his many stories involving the Red River floods or what he referred to as the "high water," and another connection emerges between us as family that I would not have known about without the help of this guide. The author comments on great grandpa's skills regarding the reading of the weather, hunting and the preparing of skins, his panache for bison meat and pemmican, and his trading of bannock for bread with the local boys at school. Ferland ends our conversation with an appreciative reminder of the old man's tenacity when it came to his heritage by telling of a time when he asked great grandpa about the evolution of the Métis culture in the late '80s: "Today there are two kinds of people, those who are Métis and those who would like to be!"

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Figure 43. David Bouchard, award-winning Métis author, Richmond Hill, ON. © 2016 Schlamb.

The Storyteller

He is very familiar to me, this storyteller. His warm way of speaking is undeniably prairie, but there is also something more I cannot place right away. I have come to know some of his story through his books and the short videos I have seen online, and that is what convinced me to contact him, to ask him if he would engage in conversation with me over the phone, from his place in Victoria, to discuss our common Métis heritage and to help me understand how this piece of my identity has found its way into my research. He speaks earnestly of the first half of his life, living without any knowledge of his indigenous past, and how genetic memories revealed themselves to him through his work and other ways of knowing. This is the reason for our conversation, a chance for me to connect the dots between what I am aware of and what is still hidden from view. And with his help I may, for he has gone through

the same journey ahead of me and knows the trail and the terrain, as our ancestors did. His stories are my stories, only further along in their telling, and we speak together of having learned the same lessons—of nature as teacher, of our natural kinship with animals, of our respect of the weather, and of our return to landmarks when we needed to be grounded. (A reflection from speaking with David Bouchard, award-winning author and Métis storyteller, 2015; see Figure 43).

I appreciate Bouchard's self-identification as a "modern Métis man", and see the moniker as he does, as a way to bring the past to a place of relevancy in the present. I like this way of thinking, like seeing different sides of the same valuable coin, and as we continue to speak the distance between us shrinks and commonalities are revealed—his childhood on the prairies, his move out west, and his search for ancestry. I smile upon his mention of his flute and pelt collection, for I am well known at work for my obsessive collection of all natural artefacts from the grounds on which I teach. Like him I never hunted, but I seek out tangible reminders of my relationship with nature, things I can hold in my hand, that connect me to the environment in ways textbooks and videos never will.

We speak of our love of open spaces, for me, where the forest opens to the water, and for him, the badlands of the west with their broad valleys. This reminds me of a wonderful aspect of Métis heritage, a homeland that would not be bound by geographical lines but was rather defined by our sense of community. He helps me to consider why I am approaching this piece of my identity for my research and provides me with a sense of purpose, a way to translate my theory into practice. And I am both surprised and honoured when he suggests it is my responsibility now to take forward the teachings I have learned. I return briefly to my thoughts on voice, and for a moment I question if I have the right to do this, to speak on behalf of a

culture that was hidden to me. He dismisses these thoughts with the simple statement, “you weren’t ready then but are now,” and with his certainty I accept this conclusion.

My community has expanded with one simple phone call, and I am reminded again of the power of stories to connect the past to the present and to bring the scattered ones back home again.

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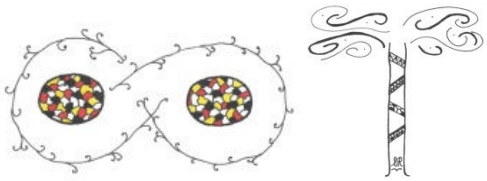
Figure 44. The Métis sash. © 2015 Schlamb.



A Starting Place

I am saddened by my limited knowledge of this culture but understand why it was thought best to leave it in the past. Now, in my 40s, I am ready to seek the trail my ancestors once walked and am ready to begin forging my own path without the feelings they once carried

so heavily. I will not forget their journey, but I will not let it define mine. I wish to celebrate what has been imprinted on my life and not dwell in the place where there was more loss than gain. My daughters will come with me on this journey, and I will show them more of a future through these inherited memories than a past that was defined for us. I wish to honour a grandmother who should have been called Nokum. (A 2013 writing restoried, 2016).

I was the first in my immediate family to self-identify as a Métis person. This step in reclaiming part of my past was a difficult one at first and required extensive proof and the involvement of historical societies. The irony of the process was not lost on me when I considered that for generations attempts were made to hide the same identity I now wanted recognized. My girls were also the first students to self-identify in their school. In a community full of multiculturalism, this fact continues to surprise me, and I believe it is reflective of a culture still in confusion. My attempts to gain back lost ways of knowing needed to begin here in the naming process, as my other areas of inquiry have, and today I focus on moving my theories into practice with the help of the Métis community.

In October 2015 my daughters and I attended our first Métis gathering. I was not expecting the warm welcome we received at the door, and we were instantly drawn into community through the fiddle music and the movements of the jiggers. My younger, who is very talented in the arts, quickly picked up finger weaving, and we purchased our first Métis sash (see Figure 44) and were shown how to wear it.

Shortly after that visit I was invited to my daughter's school to do a talk on Métis heritage in honour of Louis Riel Day. At first I was hesitant speaking about something that had so recently been added to my paradigm, but part of inquiry is allowing the unknown to become known by providing it space in which to grow into understanding. The talk was informative for

both the students and me, and as we walked through history together I saw that this is where the next step lies, in making a singular inquiry into a collective one.

Half-breed

She is white

No, she's not

She is red

No, she's not

She is neither

She is both

Poor girl

Rich girl

Sweet girl

She is striped candy

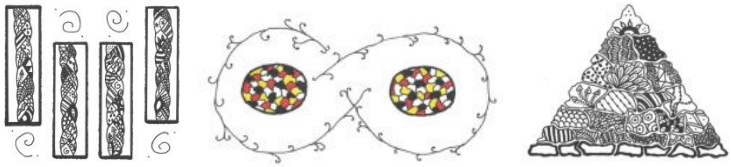
(By author, 2013)

My next search is focused on seeking signs from people who have travelled or are travelling a similar path to mine in inquiry. I use the methods of conversation and review of personal writings to investigate this influence.

Seeking Signs From Fellow Travellers: Charting My Course

> *But there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied. The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera . . . when I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver gut. When I see this second way I am above all an unscrupulous observer.* (Dillard, 1974/1999, p. 33)

Figure 45. Sharon Butala, award-winning prairie author, Calgary, AB. © 2015 Schlamb



The Guide

It is hard to know how to open this conversation. A million questions run through my head that have been placed there by her books over the years, starting with the first book my supervisor placed in my hands in 2013 and said "you must read Butala." She is very welcoming as I enter her condo, a place filled with what you would expect of someone who creates—books, flowers, art, and music. I am not one hundred percent sure what my goals are for being there. I am aware that this visit is part of my doctoral research, but other than that I have no agenda. I only know that I need to be there, to speak with her, not about her books but about her, her current life and thoughts of living in the city after a full life in nature. I look to her as I do her books, to act as my guide as I search for my identity in nature, and to help me find my way in a life that, in my mind, so closely resembles hers. She gathers her coat and we make our way to

the parking lot; a nice lunch has been planned at the local restaurant, one of many excursions we will take over the next two days as we talk about life. (A reflection from visiting with Sharon Butala, author of The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship In Nature, Calgary, 2015; see Figure 45).

By choosing the method of conversation over the act of interviewing, I was able to gain much more perspective on Butala's life and, subsequently, much more perspective on how I felt about my own life and identity in nature. Other readers had contacted her as well in the past to say that her story was their story, and during the visit I was suddenly struck with the idea that maybe the act of inquiry itself—her walking without a destination, writing, reading, and researching the unusual—is what spoke to people who longed to find clarity in their current spaces, and not necessarily a connection with nature.

I found clarity in many things during our visit. I hadn't contemplated before, for example, the important role my husband played in my relationship with nature prior to my visit with Butala. I hadn't considered that over the years, while I was exploring, he was standing still to ensure safety, stability, and encouragement. And what I perceived as risks in Butala's writing, ideas I thought might be subject to judgement or criticism, she perceived merely as statements of happenings that the readers could imagine for themselves and make up their own minds. This reframing of risk, for me, was pivotal in my understanding of this research, and it allowed me to see how I, myself, construct many of my own limitations.

Because nature had been my constant companion throughout the years, I longed to gain a view into the future, to see if changing circumstances in life or work would interrupt that relationship and recreate tensions that I had worked so hard to alleviate. I looked to Butala, who had experienced these changes herself, an interruption with her relationship with nature as she

knew it, and she showed me a future where redefinition is possible, even when one's identity is so fully interwoven with a particular landscape. I could see that a new identity is not formed in the place of the old, but rather an evolution occurs, an expansion of self supported by engaging with different communities, paying attention to emerging passions, granting oneself permission to attend to those new passions, and visiting unfamiliar landscapes, both local and abroad, to allow new relationships to emerge and be enjoyed.

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Figure 46. Where the water now meets the land at the cottage, Kawartha Lakes, ON. © 2014 Schlamb.

Father

I think of my father and his journey to this place, our home on the prairies, from his original beginnings in Denmark. A self-made man, my father chose to stay in Canada, a country that would provide him opportunities he felt he might never receive in Europe. I remember him standing on the riverbank, his hands resting on his hips, surveying the land in quiet satisfaction. The family used to say of dad's long working hours that he was a slave to the land, but I think it more accurate to say they were partners. Getting dad to go on holidays anywhere was always a chore, and now I wonder if he feared leaving the land, even for a short period of time, in case he might not return. He had redefined his home in this small prairie province, and in return she had claimed him as one of her own. Perhaps his journey had always been to this place of knowing, a son returning home. (A 2013 writing)

I have spoken often with my father over the years about his perceptions of the land. His commitment to the prairie province is undeniable, even today, and I wonder in turn if my connection to it is in many ways an extension of his. His certainty with what constitutes *home* always impressed upon me a loyalty to the land of my upbringing, and I see now I have likely been attempting to duplicate that home ever since leaving it.

My life is in the east now and will likely remain that way for the foreseeable future. In the first years of my transplant to this new province, I would catch glimpses of home in sights and sounds no one else seemed to notice: the cricket in the grass, the way poplars vibrate in the wind. It was only recently that I felt the call of home so strongly that it refused to be ignored any longer. And that call led to the purchase of the cottage (see Figure 46), a return to a new place

where the land meets the water. I have decided to stay here for a while and partner with the land, and perhaps in the future she will claim me as her own and I will finally call her home.

I turn now to seeking signs within community that demonstrate how individual inquiry can both encourage and support collective inquiry. I use the methods of personal writing review and collection of meaningful images and symbols to interpret this last grouping of stories.

Seeking Signs In the Collective: Connecting With Community

"What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from."

T. S. Eliot (Little Gidding, stanza V)

Figure 47. Me presenting at a conference in Gothenburg, Sweden. © 2015 Personal archives.

How Do I Do This?

The group is more interested in my paper presentation than I expected, and after the session several are waiting to speak with me in the hall. "How do I do this?" a young gentleman leans forward with a pen and paper in his hand, his Scandinavian accent makes me smile because it reminds me of my father. "You have to model the inquiry process yourself first; you must share some of your stories with your students to show them how it is done." He pauses on this information as others stand by waiting for his response. "But how do I know if the story is worth telling?" This is likely the most common question I receive when facilitating ecological identity work, and my answer is always the same, "If you have thought of a story long enough to question its worth, it is most certainly worth telling." (A 2015 restory, 2016).

In the past 9 years I have attempted to venture out with my theory, to seek signs that this research is relevant to more people than just me. More recently, I have come to recognize and understand conferences (see Figure 47) as a middle ground upon which theory and practice meet. It is there that I gain a sense of my work beyond myself and see applications for my theories that I previously did not imagine. I have also gained a sense of new community through these gatherings as I engage with people who are similarly looking for connections. For me, conferences do not represent a place of *testing* but are rather a place of *discovery,* where new data and direction emerge that would never have come to light otherwise. This is a significant turning point for me, as I finally shed my old belief that theory had little to do with my practice.

I look to these gatherings now as wonderful opportunities to gain a sense of self within community and to see where my research contributes to a better understanding for both scholars and practitioners.

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Figure 48. "Dedication," © 2014, Neill. Example of an Earth & I Workshop artistic expression. Used with permission. Photo © 2016 Schlamb.

The Earth & I

I find the student standing outside the log cabin, her hand resting on one of the old maples that shades the door. "Were you needing me for something?" My arms are full of workshop materials, but I immediately lay them down on a nearby stump to provide her with my full attention. She looks slightly embarrassed at being caught in a moment, but then she recovers, her voice is strong and solid: "I never thought about how nature played into my life before, this helps me answer a lot of things." I had seen many reactions to ecological identity

work before, but this one was special. As a mature student heading into her third career, she had been exposed to a lot of education over her life. Her reflective demeanour upon completing the workshop highlighted for me that inquiry work has an important place in environmental education and we only need to make room for it among all the other critical modes of learning. (A 2009 restory, 2016)

I first heard of the concept of an ecological identity when attending a conference in 2007. I remember during that session being moved by the fact that unbeknownst to me I had been doing ecological identity work for years. I began to wonder if I could facilitate the same work with my students to help them see their connection with nature during their general education electives. I thought of this regularly, and over the years I returned time and time again to a working model I had built that I hoped would stay true to the act of inquiry while accommodating the restrictions of a college single semester course.

What came of this process is the *Earth & I Workshop*, a single, half-day guided activity for students involving experiential learning, deep reflection on specific categories of inquiry, active storytelling, and the creation of an artistic expression of identity. The workshop begins with contact with nature and proceeds to go through seven parameters of inquiry involving family and culture; sense of place; the elements; travel and adventure; relationships with animals; special places; and the role of technology. Students are given time to reflect on these parameters, and at a later date they are asked to produce an artistic expression (see Figure 48) to relay some aspect of their identity that emerged through their consideration of the parameters.

Artistic expressions can be anything from painting (as shown above), to drawing, sculpture, interpretive dance, acting, life writing, poetry, music creation, pottery, or installations. Every time I run the workshop I believe I will not see a new form of expression that I haven't

seen before, and then I am surprised again! By opening the door to students' creative talents, by leaving the learning unsubscribed, I receive much more than any other assignment I have given in this area to date.

The workshop closes with a one-to-one sharing of the student's expression with another person in class. This piece is likely the most critical point of the process, for the sharing allows the student to let their inquiry see light so it may grow in the future.

For me, this is praxis. When I see signs in my students that they have gained new knowledge about themselves and how they perceive themselves in this world I can see the theory I have been working with for years is finally coming into practice.

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This exploration of ecological identity is not finished. The baseline represented here only marks the start of what will be a lifelong journey to a place of knowing. By embracing new ways of inquiring into identity, and the role nature plays in constructing a sense of self, I hope to offer support to the community of inquirers who may also be seeking signs of their place in time. Together, sharing stories of our experience, we can create new meanings from old ones and further define our collective identity. This is where I feel my next step lies—with various communities that see connection to this research. This present exploration landmarks my current understanding of identity, and I leave it on the landscape of inquiry in hopes that it will continue to guide me in the future, as well as any others whose travels cross with my own.

Dr. Richard Borden: Landmark Scholar

Richard Borden is a professor of psychology, history, community planning, and human ecology at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine. At the university he occupies the Rachel Carson Chair in Human Ecology and is "past president and former executive director of the Society for Human Ecology, as well as a founding member of the human ecology section of the Ecological Society of America" (Borden, 2014, p. 453). Borden's latest work, *Ecology and Experience: Reflections from a Human Ecological Perspective* (2014), mixes personal narratives and memoirs with historical context and ecological science to create prose that engage multiple intelligences when considering our sense of place in the world. Human ecology, or the study of the space where humans and nature interact, is the foundation upon which my research is conducted. For me, Borden models self-study research conducted within a practical, applicable, and collectively shared framework. "We are each other's teachers. Our learning comes from sharing, and the cardinal points of our compass, many times, are the insights and counsel of others" (Borden, 2014, p. 155).

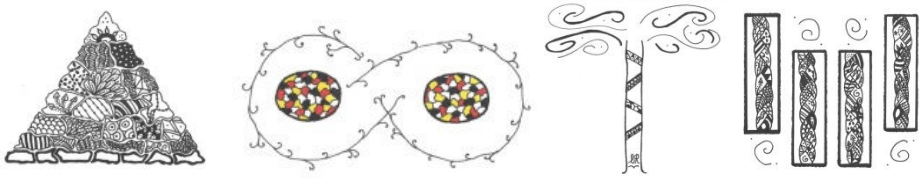
EPILOGUE: LANDMARKS—REVISITED & FOUNDED

"Art imitates life, not as a carbon-copy to be sure; but we narrate from the situation in which we find ourselves, and our imaginative engagement with the past, present, and future all take shape from our own lived experience" (Treanor, 2014, p. 4).

As I look back now, I can see that my sojourn in this place of inquiry over the past 4 years has been both planned and unplanned. When I began, my intention was to contribute to current understandings of ecological identity in both the sustainability and educational fields and, more specifically, to model for environmental educators the opportunities that are inherent in self-study research for those interested in placing their theoretical knowledge within their own experiential knowledge as a means of enriching their practice.

What I had not planned was to engage continuously with the inquiry itself, to have it become a partner in my day-to-day living, where, like the stories I tell, it became a pervasive and contributing part of my life rather than separate from it. This narrative inquiry self-study research has been my constant companion over the past few years, encouraging me to revisit stories of past experience to determine what they mean for me now in the present. As I complete this work focused on my ecological identity, I see that I have travelled only a short distance in what is a very vast landscape of personal and professional inquiry. My landmarks of the past and present, experiences told and retold, have been invaluable guides in leading me purposefully to this new place of understanding. Looking back, I can see that these landmarks have likely always existed in this capacity; but I needed to locate and name them to begin the journey of connecting my experience to the land. Now, at the end of this journey, I can see that my landmarks have changed, that I have altered and modified them through conducting this research. Their original forms still stand as markers on my landscape, but they are now different.

I have been able to add a rock or two to the cairn, scratch new inscriptions on the bark, turn my medicine wheel, and paint another blaze on my trail.



My landmarks of the past have become clearer; they now populate a landscape that I understand and appreciate in a much deeper way than before I engaged in this self-study research. Individually, they represent for me the growth and changes I have experienced in their respective areas of inquiry from the beginning of this work to now.

Landmarks I can Touch, See, Hear, and Feel

Because of this research my sense of *place* has been redefined. I am now aware of the dynamic nature of place, its capacity to be fluid and ever changing, and its ability to reveal itself to me beyond the physical into the mental, emotional, and spiritual realms of my life. I have learned that while I believed I was seeking place, and in many ways *home* as well, what I was actually doing was attempting to define my self in relation to my current environment. I was in the process of evolution, existing in a new environment where redefinition was not only desirable but necessary. And like all evolution, this process has taken time. As I crossed time and space in this work, I began to see that my physical landmarks of the past, like the river, were not designed to hold me to one particular environment but were actually present in many environments in my life in slightly different forms. Their presence was meant to be a guide for

me in new environments, an invitation to explore something new while something familiar stood close. I feel similar to Freire (2000), who discovers his

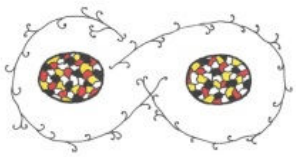
> childhood backyard has been unveiling itself to many other spaces – spaces that are not necessarily other yards . . . where this man of today sees the child of yesterday in himself and learns to see better what he had seen before. To see again what had already been seen before always implies seeing angles that were not perceived before (p. 38).

Now, with a more experienced eye, I am able to see that there are many places I will go where the land meets the water, and I will belong to all of them.

Landmarks Built and Valued by Community

This research has changed the way I conduct my *practice*. Prior to this learning I saw my practice as something I performed separately from the way I lived my life. Often, I would find my personal and professional theories did not match my actions in the classroom, and I would be left to deal with the tensions created by this dilemma. This research has helped me close the gap between who I am in life and who I am as an educator. Story by story, narrative inquiry self-study has opened my eyes to seeing that the two roles were not as far apart as I once believed they were, and that what I perceived as barriers were possibly creations of my own making. I also became aware of the valuable role community played in supporting my inquiry into my own past experience. By *community* I mean those outside myself who identified with the process of self-inquiry and whose enthusiastic engagement in the process afforded me greater understanding of both my own identity and also how an individual inquiry can contribute to a collective identity.

I did not anticipate the interest people would have in this research and was surprised at the wide range of inquiries I received about this work, including faculty wanting to perform ecological identity work with their students and parents who wanted to understand their children's needs in relation to the environment. I discovered that self-study was of great interest to many people, regardless of their age, and that self-study research could be conducted at any level of education from grade school to graduate school.



Landmarks that Connect Me to Ways of Knowing

I no longer identify my *self* as I once did. At the beginning of this research I was intent on being defined, removing all ambiguity that seemed to be at the root of my past confusion when considering identity. I had consciously omitted parts of my Métis heritage, completely unaware of its significance to the overall formation and perception of my identity. I did not see the connection between my feelings towards the environment and a past that was purposefully forgotten. Because of this research, I have reopened that door that was once closed, not only for me but also for my daughters. I have provided us all with more information than we previously had about our inherited memories and past.

Human Landmarks that Affect or Possibly Change my Direction

It was my relationship with nature that initially prompted this research into my identity. However, my biggest surprise in this journey was how important people became to me in the

process of *inward*, *outward*, *backward*, *forward* reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, emphasis added). As one who has already stated that I felt more at home in nature than I did in the company of people, this is a rather significant revelation. Throughout this study I found myself drawn to people, those from the past who gained new life through my narratives of lived experience and those in the present who became important guides to me in this research; their favourable viewpoints of the self-study process and the voluntary sharing of their own stories became the benchmarks by which I evaluated the value of this work.

I also did not expect present-day authors and artists to be so accessible, to be willingly to give freely of their time so we could share stories. This revelation makes me pause to consider how much room I have provided in the past for new authors of different genres (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) to sit in my mind among the classic authors such as John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, and Aldo Leopold, whom I credit for my foundational understanding of human–nature relationships. This process has helped me see the value in direct engagement with writers of today. Through their work, and our subsequent dialogue concerning our common sense of place, I am able to better locate myself in present time and gain a more relevant perspective than I had before our connection.

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I have always seen, and likely will always see, story in life. Like King (2003), I do believe "the truth about stories is, that's all we are" (p. 2), and when I had an opportunity to embark on this doctoral journey using narrative inquiry self-study, it seemed a fitting path for someone like me, who had stories but who had no knowledge of how to collect or share them.

This research, focused on self-exploration, has discovered a new place where future inquiry can begin. As this research continues to evolve for me over the next few years, I imagine

my boundaries of inquiry will also evolve and expand to include working with groups of people who are interested in inquiry as a way of expanding perceptions of knowledge and ways of knowing. I see opportunities for inquiry with youth, students in postsecondary programs, parents of young children, educators (both outdoor and indoor), and administrators who are interested in expanding experiential learning options.

This is where I see my story heading next, into new territory that further braids the areas of self, place, and practice using threads that "reflect a constellation or network of relationships where individual identity, social identity, world, and environment intersect and are entangled" (Treanor, 2014, p. 4).

In the writing of this work I have found a new landmark, one that marks this time and place where my theory has finally merged with my practice and my identity in nature has been named. The old landmarks that led me to this place of knowing will always dot the landscape that rests behind me, in case I should wish to revisit them in the future. But ahead of me now are multiple trails, of various terrain and length, all open for exploration, that all diverge from this common landmark of inquiry into my self, my place, and my practice.

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