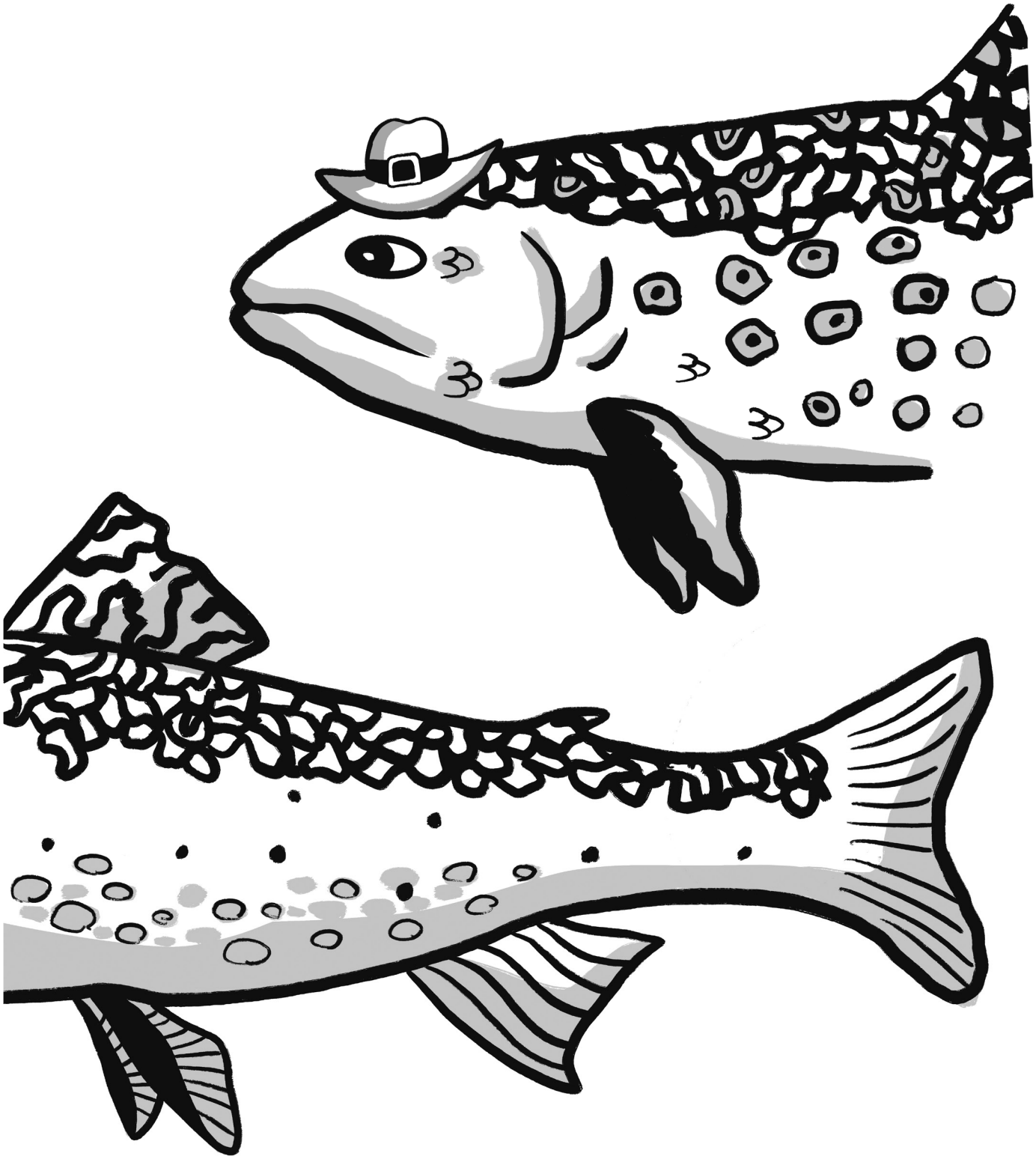
Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION
Winter 2024, 37(2)



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COEO

Formed in 1972, the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that promotes safe, quality outdoor education experiences for people of all ages. We achieve this by publishing the *Pathways* journal, running an annual conference and regional workshops, maintaining a website, and working with kindred organizations as well as government agencies. Members of COEO receive a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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Pathways is always looking for contributions. Please contact the Chair for submission guidelines.

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Features

Contemplations With/in Place: Engaging Photopoetics to Uncover Possibilities for Becoming in Education 4
Felipe Aguiar, Ellyn Lyle and Jeani Moura

Columns

Editor's Log 2
Kyle Clarke

President's View 3
Hilary Coburn

Education for Wellbeing
The Fifth Relationship: Spirituality & Outdoor Learning 15
Simon Priest

Education for Environment and Wellbeing
Eloquent Understories 29
Jonathan Egan

Education for Curriculum
The Road 32
Allister Thompson

Wild Words
Unravelling the Strands of Ivory Knowledge 34
Kelechi Chukwu

Explorations
Research News From the JAEOL 36
David Hills

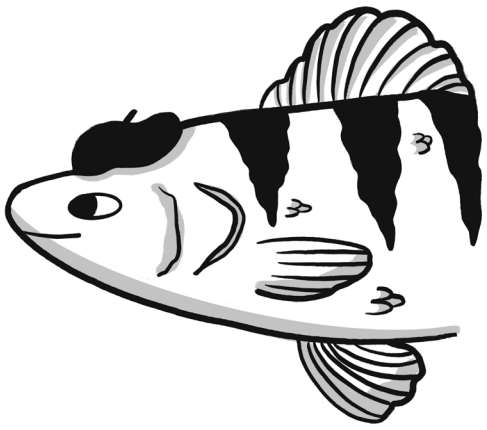
Editors' Log

This issue of *Pathways* begins with an article by authors Felipe Aguiar, Ellyn Lyle and Jeani Moura, entitled "Contemplations With/in Place: Engaging Photopoetics to Uncover Possibilities for Becoming in Education". As part of a larger research project called Geographies of Experience: The Contribution of Reflexive Walks to Teaching Identities, the authors share part of their work process and invite readers into their conversations and personal reflections, as they challenge themselves with the aim of fostering in future educators a conscious connection to and respect for the Earth and the lifeworlds it sustains. Next, regular *Pathways* contributor Simon Priest discusses the ways in which spirituality may emerge and develop through outdoor learning experiences. He expands on his prior work involving this topic and provides a definition, context, and its importance, and explores how spirituality can move well beyond understanding and knowledge, into action and change.

Jonathan Egan, a physical education teacher at Cégep Dawson College in Montréal, Québec, reflects on how his teaching philosophy has evolved over the past 15 years to foster deeper connections between students and the natural world. Once focused on physical performance (distance, height, endurance), his teaching approach now emphasizes relationship, reciprocity, and reflection through immersive outdoor experiences. Then, author Allister Thompson shares an excerpt from his forthcoming young adult novel entitled *Birch and Jay – The Knowledge Seekers: Book 1*. Within this passage we meet Jay, a lone traveler known as a Seeker, cycling through a harsh, post-climate crisis landscape in what was once Ontario. Despite years of physical preparation, he struggles with the intense heat, humidity, and deteriorating infrastructure—pitted roads, rusted vehicle shells, and environmental devastation. Those new to Climate Fiction (Cli-fi) will hopefully find this to be an interesting entry point and introduction to the genre, combined with the perhaps the familiar setting of Ontario's Nipissing District.

This issue contains some WILD WORDS, a poem by Kelechi Chukwu, entitled "Unravelling the Strands of Ivory Knowledge". Kelechi is a recent graduate of Lakehead University's Master of Education program, where he specialized in environmental and sustainability education. And we conclude this issue of *Pathways* with another invitation from our friends at the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* to read some recent articles published in their journal (open access via QR code).

Kyle Clarke
Editor



Sketch Pad – The art for this issue of *Pathways* was generously contributed by Brooklin Stormie. Brooklin is an artist and illustrator with a passion for storytelling and public art. A graduate of OCAD University's illustration program, her current focus includes picture books, editorial work and graphic novels, as well as murals and community art initiatives. Brooklin enjoys exploring myth-making and community with her work.

Instagram: @brooklinstormie

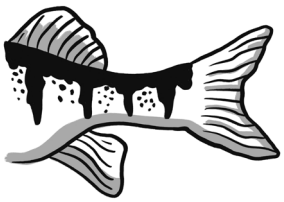
President's View

I hope you are enjoying this issue of *Pathways* while cozied up by a fire with a warm beverage in hand. With copious blizzards, snow days and in my town of Owen Sound, snowbanks taller than I am, we have such opportunity for outdoor enjoyment and adventure to kick start this 2025 year.

This January, the COEO community gathered for another inspiring Make Peace with Winter Conference. A huge thank you goes to exceptional co-chairs Kim Squires, Kim Barton, and Starlene Ruttan as well as the whole dedicated Make Peace with Winter Conference Committee. Their many hours of hard work ensured that this year's winter conference was packed with professional learning, connecting and networking, and leaving feeling inspired and ready to engage with new outdoor learning possibilities. We are lucky to have been hosted by the amazing staff team at Camp Kawartha. Much gratitude is also extended to the incredible keynote speaker Chris Gilmour, the many insightful workshop presenters, wise Elders Peter Schuler and Anne Taylor, musicians and all enthusiastic COEO attending members!

On the Friday of the conference, several COEO board members, Elder Ozhibiige nini (Peter Schuler), COEO members at large and Camp Kawartha staff were fortunate to share space and learning with Eliza Braden-Taylor, cultural interpreter, at the Curve Lake First Nation Cultural Centre. Eliza shared foundational information about who her peoples are, Michi Saagiig in Curve Lake, with a focus on their cultural connection to the land. From her presentation, we were honoured to learn the importance of their traditional language and insights into the Seven Grandfather Teachings, Doodem (clan system), the Medicine Wheel, and we spent time talking about the two big treaties that impact Curve Lake's land connection the heaviest: Treaty 20, and the Williams Treaties. One of COEO's current goals is to develop meaningful relationships with the local Indigenous peoples that are the traditional land owners of the beautiful spaces in which we attend conferences. Eliza's true passion and knowledge shone through, and the feeling of connection and shared love of the land and respect for traditional practices was palpable. We are so enthused to continue to build our relationship with Curve Lake First Nation, as well as any First Nation peoples from the areas where we host future events, and help with what we're able to with a spirit of reciprocity and true reconciliation.

The 2024-25 COEO Board of Directors have been busy bees, collaborating and working on inspiring initiatives like drafting our current Strategic Plan, event organizing and continuing with active subcommittee work.



We have four main focus areas for this year: reviewing and improving organizational governance, emphasis on media outreach to add to membership benefits, inclusive approaches and events to expand membership and creating three action plans for the board/organization. We are currently seeking free consultation support from MAS (Management Advisory Service) for these three action plans (Inclusion and Belonging Action Plan, Reconciliation Action Plan, and Advocacy for Outdoor Education Action Plan).

Mark your calendars for two upcoming wonderful events. It's with excitement that we announce the revival of the Ontario Wilderness Leadership Symposium (OWLS) with two trips to Killarney from June 5th to 8th and June 12th to 15th. We are also happy to invite you to learn and adventure with us at Camp Couchiching for COEO's 53rd Fall Conference from September 19 to 21st, 2025!

Wishing you a fabulous winter season. I hope you continue to enjoy the cozy moments and to embrace the cold and snowy adventures with family, friends, students and colleagues.

Hilary Coburn
President

Contemplations With/in Place: Engaging Photopoetics to Uncover Possibilities for Becoming in Education

By Felipe Aguiar, Ellyn Lyle and Jeani Moura

Inviting, writing, talking, and walking…

We wrote this text as an invitation for a walk of contemplation, but also of hope. The letters shared herein are not egocentric personal accounts but, rather, a deep dialogue among three educators with their interiority and each other—a walk toward that quiet knowing of always emergingness. Our conversation with each other and ourselves, we hope, reflects our continuous pursuit of humanizing praxis. Invite, write, talk, and walk—not necessarily in that order—are the actions that guided our wandering and wondering as we created a research project called Geographies of Experience: The Contribution of Reflexive Walks to Teaching Identities. This project was funded by the Brazilian Federal Government through the Sandwich Doctorate Program (PDSE) between October 2024 and March 2025, in partnership with State University of Londrina (UEL) and Cape Breton University (CBU).

The letters gathered here are steeped in the experiences we lived during this project, and they are nourished by the praxis of self-shattering and emancipatory reaggregation (Lyle, 2024; Pinar, 2010; 2011). Drawing on Bill Pinar's foundational notions and the ways in which Ellyn Lyle (2024) plays with them, we engage a praxis through which educators deconstruct tightly held identities to emerge anew in an always becomingness. We connect this process to Jeani Moura's teaching into a circular flow of "beginning, restarting, and new beginning" (Moura, 2024, p. 24). The three letters gathered here are a collective effort to walk the paths of the always emerging self while learning to linger with/in becoming so that we might continuously re/imagine who we are in education and who we might become.

Writing photopoetically, we draw on Lyle (2018), who positions "photography as initiating a kind of dialogue that provides access to things deeply held while supporting multiple ways of meaning making" (p. 4). This is reinforced by Cassie and Lyle (2022) when they affirm that "photopoetic inquiry offers us a place to pause to consider who we are and how our experiences have formed the tapestries of our lives" (p. 9). In this way, we understand our work here as both personal and political, as it pulls us from a familiar world by insisting that we ask what more is possible (Blue & Lyle, 2022; Greene, 2001). This is the poetics of our politics, and the politics of our poetics—this is our praxis (Freire, 2018)—one that hopes to create more fertile spaces for re/humanizing education (Lyle, 2022).

Felipe Aguiar

Dear Ellyn & Jeani,

Here in Gabarus, Nova Scotia, Canada, I have lived between the cold winds of the North Atlantic Ocean and the warmth of welcoming new friends…between the memories of a sandy beach with brown water and the sensations of a rocky beach with blue waters. Blue is the colour of the sky that separates Canada and Brazil, and I find myself between these two lands, between Jeani Moura and Ellyn Lyle, the phenomenological and post-qualitative supervisors.

This letter is an invitation—to writing, to conversation, to walking together—as we wonder about these many in-between places. Will you join me in a poetic and collective writing that will unfold between us as supervisors and students, between

Neither pure rock,
nor pure pebble,
between rock and pebble.

Between pebbles and
rocks, water,
a zone of mixing,
crossbreeding, knitting,
paint, cooking, color,
alchemy, flavor, pain, a
liquid that is not always
clear, because sometimes
it is a mixture.

Between rock and pebble
mixed water,
Between pebble and rock
mixed water.

A cuisine of water,
pebbles, rocks and other
things that the photo
doesn't reveal.

Brazil and Canada, and with/in me, an immigrant who navigates between these two countries following your guidance? It is to this place that I would like to walk in your company, to the in-between place that is our meeting point, from where we depart, where we walk, and perhaps where we want to go.

In this zone of mixture, I find myself between Brazilian phenomenological geography and post-qualitative inquiry, a zone I consider quite messy. Marandola Jr. (2024) emphasizes that if phenomenology inquires into phenomena, and these are what appear to consciousness, neither the appearance nor the consciousness is predetermined; rather, they emerge through experiences. Oliveira, et al. (2024) point out that, even when experiences occur, they are not as clear as we assume. Experience is more passive than active, placing us in the position of participants rather than owners of events. If we do not possess the knowledge and control of experience, every time we attempt to understand it, we do so partially, contingently, and precariously (Marandola Jr., 2021; 2024).

This is where I find resonance with post-qualitative inquiry, with the writing of scholars such as St. Pierre (2017), who alerts us to how qualitative research has

become "so formalized, systematized, and positivized" (p. 1) that we now have many manuals on how to conduct qualitative research. She claims that this is a poor subversion of research, meaning, and life itself because methods and approaches are "never enough for the too much of inquiry" (p. 5). For me, both Brazilian phenomenological geography and post-qualitative inquiry help us access the always emerging understanding that experience is not predictable and cannot be fully seen nor definitively understood. Therefore, we are left to suppose, wander, wonder, inquire, and provoke the possible meanings for the experiences we live. Engaging with experiences photopoetically is just one of the paths we can walk to release the imagination and think differently and emergently.

What zone of mixture is this? A zone of hybridity that I still do not have a name for, and perhaps I do not even want to name; I fear that, by naming it, this in-between place will lose its essence. It is neither one nor the other, but rather the place where pebble and rock meet in the pool of water, opening into a place of contact, of possibility—a porous place with permeable borders. In this place, weathering turns rocks to pebbles, and pebbles to sediments. Here lies the poetics of the Earth giving meaning to the movement I have been living with you: the creation of praxis, a

Like a candle that lights
and brings light,
Like mourners who
watch over the dead,
Like research that
reveals,
Between pebbles and
water there is something
that is neither one
nor the other.

Not as the dead,
but as the living,
I am veiled in this
in-between place.

It is here that I have
sheltered myself

In the abyss / In the languagues

between you two.

critical and reflexive pedagogic practice (Freire, 2018) where I find my voice in teaching, a place to call home amidst the dehumanized world of education. Home and dehumanized worlds...here we are, in-between two places again, lingering together in the abyss of language.

Drawing on Dardel's conceptualization of phenomenological geography (2011), I understand place as the existential foundation of being—an experience of being-in-the-world—grounded in place and opened to the Earth through the experience of landscape. He advocates for a deep existential relationship between humans and the Earth, called geographicity. Geographicity situates us existentially between land and sky, gods and mortals, all required to live a geographical existence within this abundant, integrated, complex, and relational situation. This situationality leads us to the living Earth as an abundant and integrated curriculum, where even the smallest places attune us to the larger landscapes, suggesting that "we do not bestow integrity and interrelatedness upon things by our efforts. Rather, the integrated curriculum—the whole and healthy course of things—gains its integrity insofar as it is an expression of the already existing interconnections of things themselves" (Jardine et al., 2015, p. 172). Drawing on Dardel (2011) and Jardine et al. (2015), then, place is not merely the location of a thing, but also the clearing where a thing comes together with its relational surroundings—where the world appears as a whole, complex home.

Inspired by these ideas, I return to Freire (2018), who reminds us that we are not teachers of subjects; we are learners among other people. Therefore, my commitment is not to geography and its disciplinarity but to people and the lives they lead. As a Ph.D. student in geography with a background in pedagogy, and having just completed 10 years of work in education, I wander my field to wonder who I am becoming in relation to theory and what theory is becoming in relation to me. I find myself dwelling in language to imagine this landscape of subjectivity unfolding before me. As I learned with Heidegger (2001), language houses and elucidates being. I am coming to understand myself as a being of the in-between places because, like my self, my language also emerges within this in-betweenness of theories, praxis, and supervisors. This language keeps reminding me that any geography class on water bodies and biodiversity is not emancipatory if it does not make me wonder about the waters I drink, the waters I swim in, the waters used to make the clothes I wear and, most importantly, how the abundance of water in my place depends on the lack of water elsewhere.

Among these languages, I find myself linked to words such as lived and living experience, Earth, teaching identity, landscape, poetics, education, walking, narrative, writing, humanization, praxis, conversation, dehumanization and, the most mysterious of all: place. With/ in mixture that I now dwell, I pose two questions to begin our conversation: what space does place inhabit in your praxis; and what is the place of the Earth in the curricula that you have experienced as supervisors? Through walking this path in dialogue together, I hope we might reach the in-between places where languages meet and, just perhaps, we will find there a place of always becoming.

Best wishes,

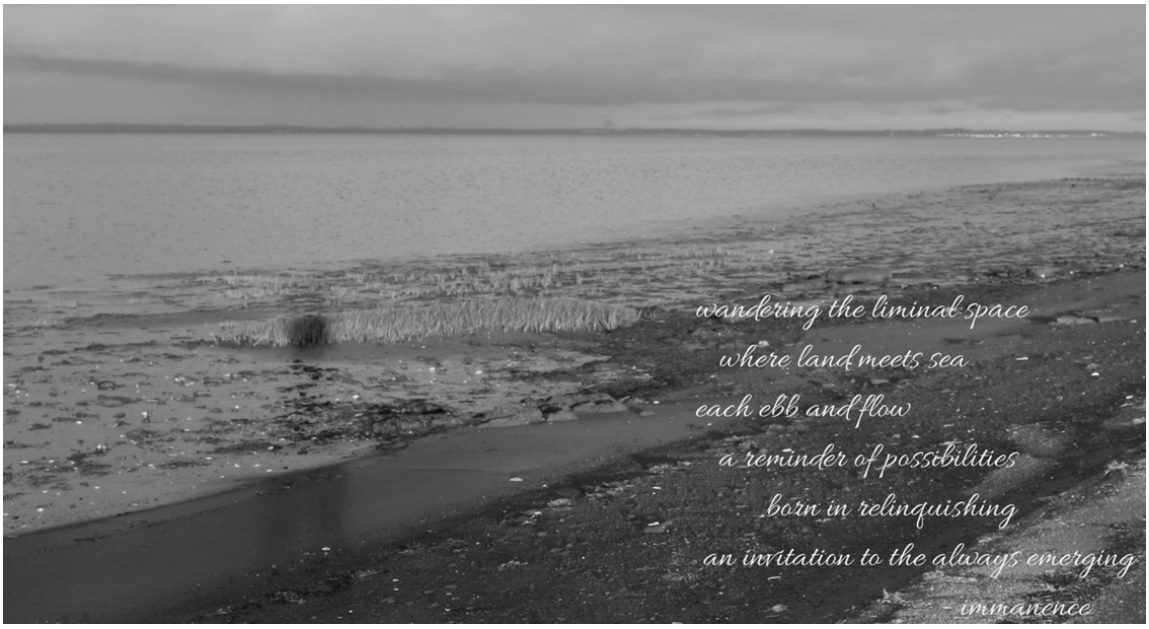
Felipe

Ellyn Lyle

Dear Felipe,

Thank you for your invitation to write our worlds together. I am delighted to welcome you to Cape Breton University and to the small village some 50 kilometres away from it that I now call home. I am coming to appreciate how you introduce yourself to this new landscape—this seascape. You take your time, introducing yourself gently as you walk the contours of the shores

with care and curiosity. You carry with you so many embodied remembrances of the sand and seas and flora and forests of your Brazil. Shortly after you arrived, we wandered and wondered together about how the places we live also live in us, and



you explained to me that landscape and seascape and skyscape are all captured with the same word in Portuguese: *paisagem.* How lovely that your language honours the integratedness of nature, blurring the boundaries between land and sea and sky. And how wonderful that, even amid this blurring, you still wonder about the in-between spaces—what I understand as liminal spaces.

Having grown up wandering the liminal space between land and sea, I know in the sinews of my flesh and tendons of spirit what it is to be crafted by an always shifting *paisagem* that has formed, informed, and transformed my ways of thinking and being. As I moved from the island that raised me to settle alongside various seas and oceans for a little while, I have come to appreciate how the places we inhabit, inhabit us.

Living with/in such an ontology of always emerging, I am called to attune to the rhythms of my body as I, too, learn to breathe deeply in this newest new-to-me place that has so much to teach me. Cerebrally, I understand that learning is mediated by our ontological perspectives, our epistemological assumptions, even our metaphysical entanglements. As such, I appreciate that teaching and learning must emerge from a place of integrated consciousness—a deep *awakeness* that intentionally accounts for how our ways of *being* inform our various ways of *doing.* Hearing echoes of Mary Oliver, I push aside the ever-growing to-do list and go out into my new world to *pay attention* and *be astonished* at what emerges.

My heart still flutters a range of emotions as I taste the brininess of the North Atlantic in each breath; **incredulity** that I am here—alone—having left behind people I love, a home we built together, and a job I valued; **gratitude** that I am surviving the too-much-all-at-onceness of it all; **fear** that the survival is temporary, a ruse to lull me into false confidence; **hope** that I will bring value to this new place and the people who invited me here; **overwhelm** that is undeniable in the aches and anxieties that are washing up on the shore of my soul. My body has always leveraged anxiety to gain my attention when it has been too long ignored, and I have often sought the sea to neutralize the heat of it. I walk

along it now, the North Atlantic rolling up on the beach, each breaker crashes then whispers its way back to wholeness where it will inevitably crash apart again. My mind drifts to Bill Pinar as I wonder if he thought of the ocean as he wrote about currere as self-shattering and emancipatory reaggregation. The water has always been important to me. I used to think it balanced my fiery side (I am an Aries, after all) but, increasingly, I recognize that the water is within me and coming home to it was akin to coming home to myself. I've been gone too long. I left the bay that raised me so many years ago after having been shaped by its ebbs and flows. Like the loss of a lover, I mourned the absence of such intimacy, and it seems the longing would not be silenced. Packing up my life and watching it retreat in the rearview mirror, my heart in my throat, I wondered if the Atlantic within me would be enough to steady me through so much change. Hearing Celeste remind me that I am *breathing from the neck up* (Snowber, 2018, p. 232), I take a deep conscious breath and resist my tendency to hurry toward what comes next. I hold the breath just for a moment and feel the expansion possible in the pause.

what opens up
amidst the sharp edges
and shimmering reflections
when we sit with the shards
and make art of them –
re/ constructing mosaics
of lost and relinquished selves
thanking them
for delivering us here
to this moment –
finding within it an invitation
to re/ imagine hope and risk
- reaggregation

I feel the tension begin to let go as my shoulders drop away from my ears, and my body and spirit settle into each other once again. In this re/integration, I relax the disciplined thinking and doing that hold me to task every day, and I linger with the unknown and always emerging.

Feeling the pull, I head to my meditation stone at the water's edge.

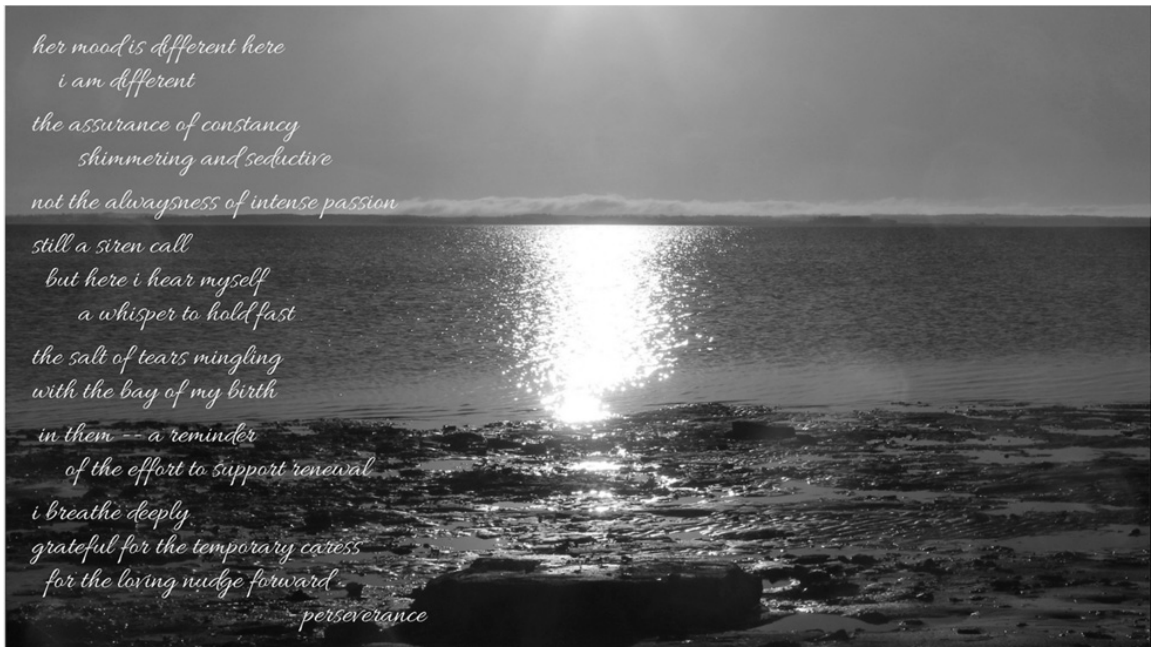
Deep breath in…

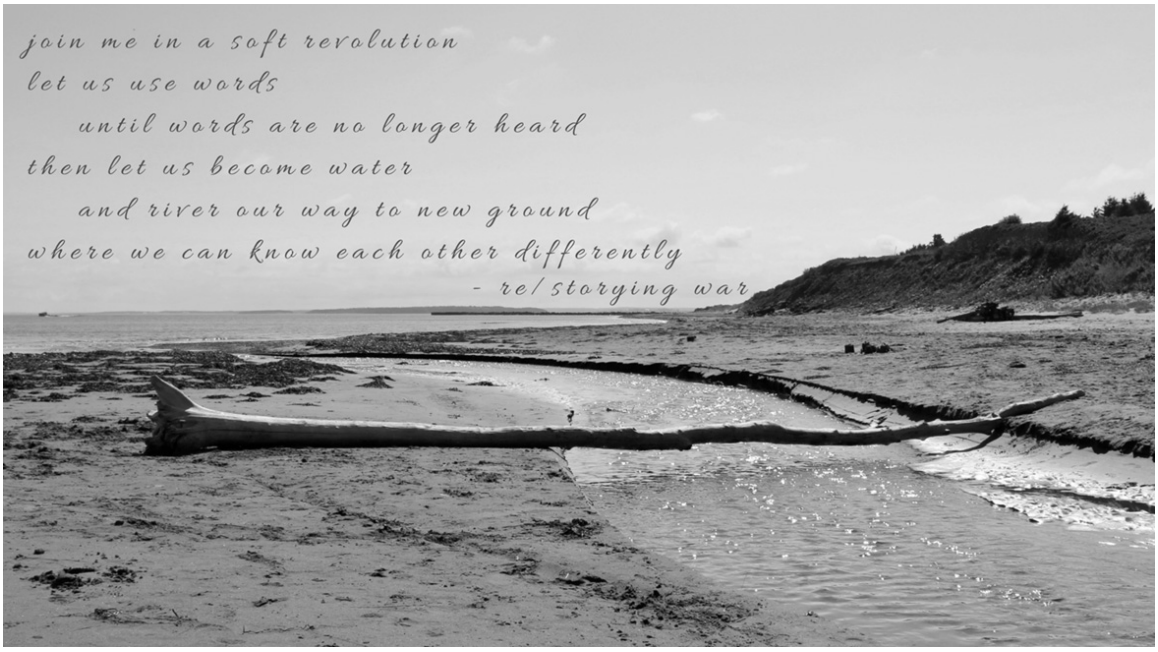
I give my attention to the coolness of my breath as it enters my nostrils. I follow my breath through my body where it takes on different colours and textures as it encounters my interiority. I surrender to the rhythms of my body and allow thoughts and emotions and insights and fears to emerge *un*curated.

Slow breath out…

I give my attention to the warmth of my breath as it returns to the world outside my body taking with it the doubt, fear, and anxiety. I linger in the lightness and let go into what more is possible.

On the wings of my exhale, I feel gratitude for the path that has led me here and for having had the courage to follow it. I





release the white-knuckled hold I have mistaken for determination and find agency in trusting the unfolding. I recall stumbling upon Elizabeth St. Pierre's work a few years ago and wonder if this is how it feels to live an ontology of immanence. I think of Joanne Yoo's recent work on the fulsomeness of knowing and being that is felt. My mind then drifts to Parker Palmer's call to live in ways that cultivate wholeness. I recall him reminding us that making room for the wholeness of who we are opens us to compassion as we encounter the multiplicity of humanness in our teaching and learning lives.

I am reminded of Gearty and Marschall's work and know that this kind of living inquiry supports an understanding of life as co-curricular. It is a loving act of transgression in its refusal to be bracketed by that which *is* in favour of embracing the messy work of *becoming*. I hope that my newness in this place has helped prepare me to support your emerging ideation

as well and feel grateful that we have connected through a shared curiosity about place and the possibilities of cultivating deep re/integration of mind | body | spirit to create more fertile spaces for re/humanizing education (Lyle, 2022).

Jeani Moura

Felipe and Ellyn,

Some time passed before I decided to begin my part in this collective writing. What a challenge it was to write after you both! I am at a loss for words, despite the pulsating thoughts. Your writings are inviting, and they reached me like an awakening to the beautiful things we can behold.

Like a new beginning that renews itself every morning, new opportunities for reconciliation with life arise where our differences meet and what once seemed distant now aligns in harmony, connecting our voices in a unique way. I wish I had such creative energy in writing; in any case, I hope these exchanges mix until something new is shaped. Felipe, your invitation for a collective writing is an opportunity to experience place as poetry, through the lens of a phenomenology that values lived and living experience as emergence (Marandola Jr., 2021; 2024).

With joy for

the tones,

sounds,

colors,

and flavors of

living life, and its

attributes

I invite you to give yourself body and soul to the art of appreciating memories of a place...

Perhaps, by walking together during this conversation, we can meditate on intimate places where our individual geographies intertwine, creating new meanings for education through poetic thinking, practicing what I call an education sensible to experience (Moura, 2024).

I find deep resonances between what you have narrated and what I live here in Londrina, a city that welcomes me into an intense routine, but one that is full of meaning. Among the many paths I have traveled in this city over the past three decades, the most constant is the one that connects my home to my workplace or, symbolically, my first dwelling to my second: the State University of Londrina (UEL). In fact, this is the place of my praxis.

Beyond a fixed point on the map, there is a living relationship in each interaction, each exchange, each learning experience that builds this space, transforming it into a place of resistance, affection, and turmoil. This place is where teacher education takes shape and experience manifests as living. The campus is a landscape that reveals untold stories, where my teaching identity has been continuously confronted, shaped, and reshaped. This very much resonates with what Lyle (2024) and Pinar (2010; 2012) discuss as self-shattering, and

Hopefully

May life fill us with hope in a geography with the purpose of building a better world. We need everyone's collaboration to continue this journey: an education and a geography for the lifeworld.

Could you imagine an integrated curriculum? One that wonder the lifeworld from the shadow on the floor up to the sky?

Hopefully

emancipatory reaggregation, but what I have named as the dialectal and eternal movement of "beginning, restarting, and new beginning" (Moura, 2024, p. 24). It is a space where I have built a praxis that resists dehumanization and promotes humanization, as Paulo Freire (2018) taught us. It is not a method or methodology, so much as it is a deeply personal act of meditating on what makes us resist the too-often dehumanizing experiences with/in education.

The daily walk across the campus connects me to this idea. With its imposing peroba trees and remnants of the Atlantic Forest, UEL is not just a workplace; it is a living landscape where nature and education intertwine.

These fragments of forest renew my awareness that education is also a movement: walking, narrating, transforming. Aren't all of us fragments and remnants of lived experiences trying to become someone? For me the question is not exactly how we become educators, because we are, and we know we are, even if we are always becoming (Lyle, 2024; Moura, 2024; Pinar, 2010; 2012). As dehumanized spaces neglect all of this ontological flow (Freire, 2014; 2018), for me the question is how we succumb to dehumanization such that we stop wandering and wondering about who we are in teaching, and what keeps us in it. Our desire to avoid this pathologic crystallization of non-searching that leads us to wander and wonder together in these in-between places. These are, for me, the intermediary spaces I dwell as a teacher educator, where languages meet, cross, and blend. It is here, between the lived and the dreamed, that I continue to seek my identity in teaching with all its potential for creation and transformation.

Best wishes,

Jeani

Our constant challenge in teacher education is to position lived and living experiences as co-curricular such that we overcome instrumentalized concepts that are reproduced in *a*pedagogical practices. Our challenge is not to situate students as individuals in physical spaces, but to invite them to examine what consciously connects them to the different constitutive layers of our being in relation to place and lifeworld. This exercise has expanded our notion of curriculum, anchoring it in lived and living experience and transformative praxis (Aoki, 2005; Freire, 2014; 2018). As teacher educators, our challenge is to cultivate in future educators a respect for the Earth and the multiple landscapes and lifeworlds it sustains.

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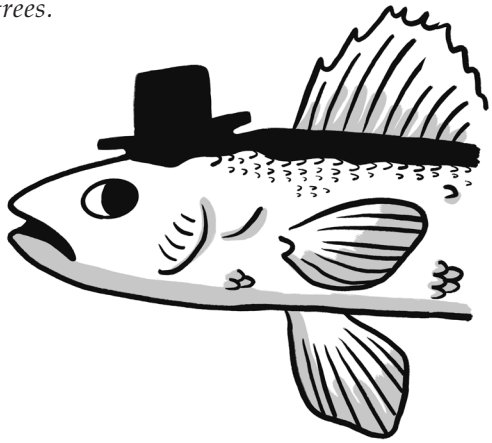


The Fifth Relationship: Spirituality & Outdoor Learning

By Simon Priest

> Spirituality is characterized by faith, a search for meaning and purpose in life, a sense of connection with others, and a transcendence of self, resulting in a sense of inner peace and well-being. A strong spiritual connection may improve one's sense of satisfaction with life…. (Delgado, 2005, p. 157)

Approximately forty years ago, I redefined outdoor learning as a matter of relationships (Priest, 1986). I stated that outdoor learning had two branches: adventurous and environmental. I called for both to become better blended, because they shared the same subject matter: human and nature relationships.

I outlined those four relationships. The adventurous side was mainly about improving participants' understanding of intrapersonal (to one's self) and interpersonal (among others) relationships. The environmental branch was primarily about enhancing participants' knowledge of ecosystemics (within nature) and ekistics (reciprocity between humans and nature). I closed this redefinition by saying that if the two branches were to functionally combine, then a fifth relationship could potentiate: spirituality.

This article is a look at this fifth relationship and its definition, context, importance, and development through outdoor learning. I now believe quite strongly that spirituality goes well beyond understanding and knowledge: into action and change. While I still believe great gains in spirituality are probable through the merging of adventurous and environmental approaches, I have also come to realize that some spirituality can be developed independently and inside the separate branches of outdoor learning.

Definition

While countless definitions exist in the literature for spirituality, and since these vary greatly, consider this one: robust enough for most to get behind, but with space to personalize. Spirituality means "comprehending our place in the world, our search for satisfaction or serenity, why we were put here, and what role we were meant to play with others and nature, during our brief time on the planet" (Priest, 2023, p. 1). In this way, spirituality becomes a kind of existential philosophy of living and/or a life path to follow, during which we encounter and choose how best to respond to life's challenges and opportunities. Also, each of us is going to define spirituality in our own "personal" way, inclusive or exclusive of our religious beliefs. Even the word "personal" is closely associated with both religious and secular public versions of spirituality (Emblen, 1992). This comprehension of our role can incorporate a deity and religious faith, as easily as it can integrate the scientific method and critical thinking. Spirituality is so personal, that each of us can make it what we want. However, the above definition will apply for this article.

Context

Prehistorically, spirituality was situated in terms of powerful and invisible spirits flowing through all living and inanimate objects (Tylor, 1871). Early on, this formed the foundation of several animas-based religions and philosophies, such as Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, or Daoism, and the positive and persistent spiritual beliefs of many Indigenous Peoples around the globe (O'Murchu, 2012).

Next, deification began as a means of explaining earthquakes, volcanic

eruptions, planetary movements, lightning and thunder. These causal narratives created the polytheism of the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Norse empires. These were soon followed by the monotheism of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Spirituality kept pace with all of these, inseparable from religious theology (Oman, 2013).

In the health disciplines, spirituality has shifted over the last century from a holy and pious perspective to a secular and impious view, where spirituality is correlated with physical and mental health (Koenig, 2008). The shift appears to have happened for educators in the 1990s (Estank, 2006), where spirituality became disconnected from its roots in religion, thus creating dualistic distance between these two.

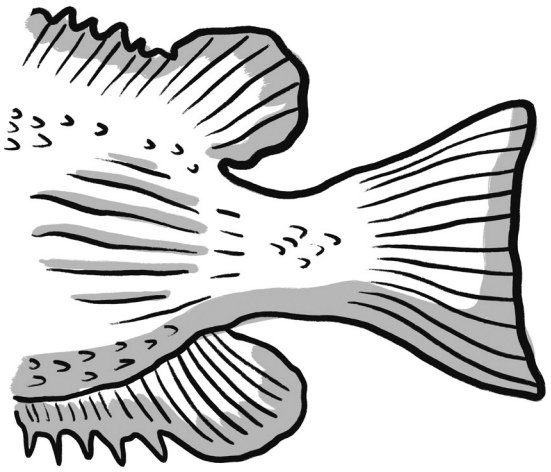
Importance

Among other compositional elements, spirituality includes morality and conscience (Smith, 1996). Without developing these two components, first and foremost, participants may not accomplish what they were born to achieve. For example, without morality and conscience, these two stories might be more common for graduates of adventurous outdoor learning programs.

I was consulting at a regional youth "development" center for juvenile offenders in the 1990s. When looking at one juvenile's chart I was assigned, I noticed he had previously been arrested for dealing drugs, especially crack cocaine. The judge placed him in an outdoor program for first time offenders. I asked him what he learned in the program. He spoke with pride about learning skills, such as preparing his meals over a fire and constructing his shelter for sleep. He noted before the program he was afraid of being outside, especially at night, so he would just go home. Upon finishing the program he said that instead of being afraid of the dark and going home, he used what he had learned to build a fire, stay outside, and deal crack cocaine all night long! – Personal communication of a story told circa 2000 by H.L. (Lee) Gillis, professor of psychology.

In the early days of our school, we did a lot of work with delinquent youth. In those days, most were there for rowdy behaviour, property damage, or other vandalism. While we knew the vast majority left with less destructive intent, we did learn of one [group] which had excelled at developing their teamwork. They were now working together as a petty criminal enterprise! – Personal communication of a UK story told in 1985 by Tom Price.

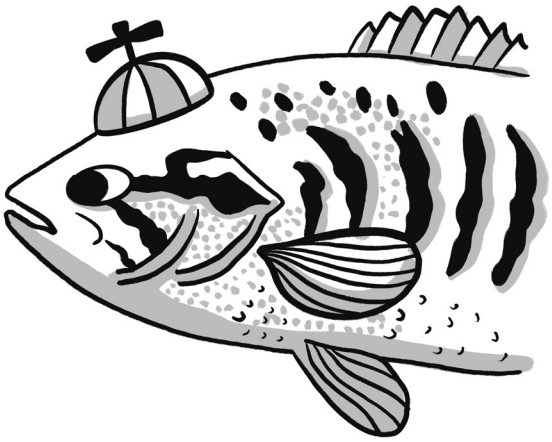
Furthermore, without morality and conscience, environmental outdoor learning programs appear to have not made much of an impact on sustainability or on action for behavioural and ecological change.



Sustainability is both a crisis of the ways in which modern capitalist societies combine with nature and a crisis of understanding…. Students fail to understand how knowledge connects, how processes in the social world might combine with those in the biophysical world to produce sustainable development, and how people's local knowledge can combine with academic knowledge to foster such development. (Huckle, 2004, p. 34)

We believe that environmental education has failed because it's not keeping pace

with environmental degradation, with human impacts on the environment. I also think that it's failed to provoke action. We have this idea that environmental education should provide us with the tools we need to make informed decisions, but I don't believe we're making informed decisions as a society commensurate with the pace of our consumption of the environment, our



destruction of the environment…. the standards on which public education is based don't include environmental education. In private schools, especially these private schools, there's a heavy emphasis on environmental education, and it's a significant and strong part of the curriculum. And we didn't see a lot of motivation in these kids. They knew the material and said what was expected of them, but we didn't really see a change in behaviour or a willingness to give something up for the benefit of the environment. (Saylan interviewed in Nijhuis, 2011, pp. 2-3)

Many authors have identified a pattern of failure for outdoor learning (Beringer, 2006; Brookes, 2004; Jickling, 2006; Jickling et al., 2023; Saylan & Blumstein, 2011; Walker, 1997; Walsh, 1984). One obvious causal factor is too few programs reaching too small a percentage of the population to create a critical mass for altering the status quo. Other factors might include the politicized nature of environmental issues, schools focused on cognitive memory, but not pro-social or pro-environmental behaviours, the need to teach scientific literacy, values, and human-nature relationships in the classroom, and the inability to link individual practices with environmental outcomes (Saylan & Blumstein, 2011).

The argument that adventurous and environmental branches of outdoor learning have failed to deliver, in some instances, on a promise for action and change is because general spirituality and specific morality or conscience were not fully developed in participants. One shortcoming of outdoor learning has been the avoidance of deliberately addressing spirituality due to concerns of offending religious sensitivities. This neglect of spiritual growth had resulted in the inability to inculcate stewardship of the Earth and to treat nature differently (Horwood, 1989). Aside from the coalescing of both branches into a spiritual mix, a closer look at the development of spirituality in each branch is now possible.

Development

The development of spirituality is moderated and mediated by antecedents, settings experienced, contemplative practices employed, and the presence or absence of other people. These biophysical, psychological, and social constructs are part of a connection process that mirrors cognitive development (Cartwright, 2001). While this developmental process may begin from an openness and awareness of the need to develop spirituality, it progresses through a series of increasing stages of conviction, and it ends with the establishment of a belief system that supports a personal spirituality (Cartwright, 2001).

Antecedents, or the characteristics possessed before beginning a journey to develop a personal spiritual framework, include: prior religious theology and depth of faith, beliefs about science and paranormal magic, existing philosophy

of life, cultural traditions, recent history, receptivity to new ideas, and socio-demographic characteristics like gender, age, education, and income (Heintzman, 2015). People who understand the foundation and baggage they bring to the journey are connecting with themselves.

The **biophysical** settings experienced play a powerful role in the development of spirituality and paramount among these settings is deep and mindful immersion in nature. Nature "elicits a sense of wonder, awe and amazement; helps some people connect with their [deity] or higher power; provides a sense of peacefulness, calm, stillness and tranquillity; creates space to explore spirituality through reflection; and is powerful and therapeutic" (Heintzman, 2015, p. 390). People making such connections are inspired by beauty, wonder, awe and majesty of nature, opening them up to spirituality (Fisher, 2011).

Sometimes, just getting away from one's restrictive daily living cycle can favour spiritual development. Unfettered by the usual constraints and responsibilities, an unfamiliar location can become conducive to thinking differently. If examined for its newness, then the mind is free to associate with this contrasting situation and develop an affinity for place. Landscapes that begin to be seen this way can become sacred. People who connect with novelty in contrasting situations of dissonance have great energy for change and are able to counter their resistance to transformation. Thus, outdoor learning is able to motivate a notoriously difficult-to-engage participant (Gass et al, 2020).

This is especially true for remote and wild settings that can provide spiritual inspiration (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). Pristine and remote wilderness, undamaged by humans, adds separating distance from daily life, technology dependence, and modern civilization (Stringer & McAvoy, 1992). People connect with wilderness like they do with nature, but wilderness brings extreme naturalness, undisturbed by humans, and tremendous solitude, remote from any human habitation. This lack of impact allows for pristine settings that develop spirituality (Ashley, 2008; Samangooei et al., 2023).

On the other hand, spirituality can also be discovered at archeological ruins (Ilies & Josan, 2009). The key to doing so is making a different kind of connection with the past. For example, Henderson (2005), while studying the Canadian wilderness environment from a canoe, uses historical stories of early explorers, trappers, and Indigenous Peoples to inculcate a spiritual dimension for participants.

So spirituality can involve making special connections with unique things: self, nature, novelty, wilderness, history, or culture. These connections are made in search of additional connections with others, the cosmos or universe, and transcendent affairs linking across and among all of these things.

The **psychological** contemplative practices employed include meditation, attentive breathing, acts of compassion, and actively holding postures or performing repetitive motions (yoga, tai chi, qigong, akido, dance, artwork, labyrinth walking, etc.). These practices are intended to quiet minds and permit the deepest concentration and non-evaluative mindfulness, often in the midst of distractions or other noise.

Travel components of adventure learning are full of long-distance repetitive and sequential movement: stepping, paddling, peddling, etc. These prolonged reiterations can become contemplative. Add to this the natural view, and adventurers become influenced by environmental forces around them. Paddlers are impacted by water flow, sailors are dependent on winds, and skiers are at the mercy of gravity. So the activities they choose to travel by enable them to access contemplative practices (Marsh, 2008).

In outdoor learning, contemplative practices should include opportunities and options. Opportunity should be provided for reflective free time, such as during solo isolation and in group discussion to help clarify thinking. However, options should be afforded to those participants who want to pray, fast, chant, study philosophy, perform groundings, and other meditative practices as part of their contemplation.

Sometimes, minds wander in a quest to explore ideas. At other times, minds ponder specific spiritual or philosophical questions in a journey to confirm thought. What is the meaning of life? Who am I? Why do I exist? Where am I going? When will I get there? How will I get there? The former approach seems best for early investigation of spirituality, while the latter appears useful for validating the investigation.

The **social** presence or absence of other people is influential in developing spirituality. Although usually described as a progression from solitude through group discussion, the process may alternate back and forth between both options. The benefits of solitude (not loneliness) and group discussion (not debate) include self-awareness, freedom, clarity of thought, and creative imagination (Long & Averill, 2003). Some of the contemplative practices noted above uphold solitary introspection and self-inquiry, while others sustain self-exploration and self-transformation during group discussion (Davidson & Dahl, 2017).

Solitude, not normally a part of people's busy lives, provides them with the opportunity for their minds to wander and begin thinking about life's deepest questions. In outdoor learning, the solo experience is a period of isolated time (several minutes to a few days), where the solitary participant contemplates life in silence (Knapp & Smith, 2005). This is a retreat from the surrounding stimuli of the program group or home civilization and allows for contemplation in a manner that is difficult to achieve in everyday life.

Group discussion, on the other hand, is a chance to compare one's own thinking with the thoughts and responses of others. Doing so can reinforce or contradict personal spirituality and lead to confirmation or modification of that philosophy. Discussions are typically held in circles, with a facilitator asking proactive, open-ended questions that allow participants to discover learning and pledge for change (Priest & Gass, 2018). However, participants can be split into smaller groups of two or three people.

In outdoor learning, the sacred space created in homogenous group discussions, most notably single gender programs, specific age cohorts, or special interest factions, provides non-judgmental support from peers. Sharing with people, who are in the same boat with respect to their life situations and spiritual development, creates a climate of mutual trust and psychological safety (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). In addition, the shared adversity common to most adventures reinforces the notions of solidarity (the group being in the experience together as a team) and camaraderie (new friendships being made with previous strangers). These further reinforce interpersonal trust and safety (Gee, 2019).

Process

Many religious scholars have proposed sequences by which devout faith develops, especially in children (Fowler, 1981; Peck, 2002; Erikson, 1981). These are often tied to cognitive developmental stages for childhood (Cartwright, 2001; Piaget, 1936). Moral and secular spiritual development seems to follow a similar pattern (Kohlberg, 1973). Table 1 compares these theoretical stages of human development.

Table 1: Comparison of Cognitive and Spiritual Development Stages With Approximate Ages Due to the Unconsidered Influences of Cultural and Social Learning

Approximate AGE RANGE	Consciousness (C) develops as:	PIAGET, 1929, 1932, 1936	FOWLER, 1981	PECK, 2002	ERIKSON, 1968, 1981	KOHLBERG, 1973	DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGIES
0 – 2 years	**C = sentience** (an awareness of feelings)	**Sensorimotor**: sensory input and psychomotoric control develop from reflexive reactions Begin to know reality by: object permanence, cause and effect, pretend play, habit formation & pleasurable stimuli enjoyment Intelligence begins, but with no awareness of thought or logic	**Undifferentiated Faith** is about basic needs for warmth, protection, sustenance, and security If nurtured, and not neglected, children will gain a sense of trust and safety within their own sphere of consideration		**Trust v. Mistrust:** Children learn trust, and if treated well, trust those around them, who introduce them to deities **Autonomy v. Shame** they learn love and respect for deities	**Obedience and punishment orientation:** Infants reason "how can I avoid a penalty?" & "Its okay to do this as long as I don't get caught!"	Nature exposure and talk Practice looking and listening
2 – 7 years	**C= ABOVE + meta-cognition** (an awareness of thoughts & how to think)	**Preoperational**: children are the centers of their universes, can only view situations from their own perspectives, and cannot comprehend that others might feel differently They project human intentions, thoughts, and emotions onto inanimate objects during play and imaginatively pretending The start of curiosity, primitive reasoning, language/literacy, the ability to imagine an object without seeing or holding it	**Intuitive-Projective** is identified by awareness of the unconscious mind and where religion starts to develop through the influences of significant others (friends, family, etc.) and their stories, images, and beliefs Children begin to consider how they are thinking (scientifically, imaginatively, etc.) and know what they think		**Initiative v. Guilt:** Children imitate their parents, all stories they hear, religious ceremonies, and related activities Spirituality is often piggybacked upon childhood imagination Children are extremely curious about who deities are, what these do, or how these do it	**Self-interest orientation:** Children ask "what reward do I get for doing or not doing this?" "If it feels good, then just do it!"	Risky outdoor play and games Guided nature immersion Solo, silence and observation Seek safe sensory stimulation Movement-based activities Exercise and nutrition habits Practice kindness and caring
7 – 12 years	**C= ABOVE + conduct conditioning** (an awareness of appropriate or inappropriate behaviors and consequences)	**Concrete Operational**: Thinking is based in reality and is evidenced by conservation comparisons, where, for example, children correctly identify the same amount of liquid in different containers: short wide and tall narrow. Figurative expressions (symbols, metaphors, etc.) are interpreted literally and taken at face value	**Mythic-Literal**: Children hold strong beliefs in fairness and justice, so begin to accept religious indoctrination They begin to think about how they are reasoning: inductively, deductively, and no longer **transductively** (specific to specific)	**Chaotic-Antisocial**: people rely on and may become well attached to institutions for personal stability and they may live self-centered uneasy lives	**Industry v. Inferiority:** Children believe deities are infinite powers that they have heard from parents, teachers, and their religious communities; if they doubt this reality, they believe doing so is incorrect and so they reject the propositions as false	**Interpersonal accord and conformity:** Children hold a "good child" attitude; they wonder "what is right thing am I expected to do here?" & "this will benefit someone else!"	Mindfulness training Inculcate curiosity / wonder Volunteer service projects Meditation and breathwork Journaling (count blessings) Personal affirmations Adopt attitude of gratitude Group reflective discussion

12 – 19 years	**C= ABOVE + morality** (an awareness of ethics, values, and principles)	**Formal Operational** Adolescents transition from fantasy to reality by advancing from logical to experiential reasoning using abstract examples (no longer concrete ones) and they are able to imagine the future with themselves in an ideal lifestyle	**Synthetic-Conventional**: Adolescents conform to authority and develop a personal identity, which may include religion, but ignore conflicting beliefs for fear of threatening to change their perspective	**Formal-Institutional:** people can get very upset when their sacred beliefs are questioned	**Identity v. Confusion:** While testing their limits, adolescents begin to comprehend the spiritual world and ponder transcendental concepts or existential issues with their peers	**Authority and social-order maintaining orientation:** Adolescents ask "what is correct according to the law?" & "this will keep the peace!"	Personal contemplation Spiritual readings and rituals Join a spiritual community Chanting, singing, and laughing Give up toxic social media Music, art, science, etc.
19 – 35 yrs		EARLY adulthood	**Individual-Reflective:** many adults start to look outside their enclosing belief system and realize other philosophies exist They begin to critically examine their beliefs and may become very disillusioned with their faith, so much so that they come to consider alternative perspectives and resolve few conflicts amongst those beliefs	**Skeptic-Individual:** people start sincerely questioning their belief systems and can abandon organized religion in favor of more secular philosophies or spirituality	As adults, they may put aside their parents' religious beliefs or values, and desperately search for connection, meaning, and purpose in life during times of great ideological desire	**Social contract orientation:** A few people wonder "what if everyone chose to not to adhere to that rule?" &"this action is what thoughtful humans would completely agree on!"	Earthing or grounding Cultivate plant growth Care for a pet or animal Fasting (occasional and brief) Stop consuming negative news Enjoy extreme weather Grow empathy & compassion Practice loving and forgiveness Pilgrimage to social justice site Give charitable time & money
35 – 45 yrs		MID-LIFE adulthood	**Conjunctive**: few adults transcend the limits of their logic and beliefs to face discrepancies and to possibly abandon their faiths in favor of new spirituality without holding on to theological or paradoxical views	**Mystical-Communal:** people learn to go along with and accept life's paradoxical mysteries and embrace spirituality found in a different or alternative community They live with broad sensitivities for many different philosophies		**Universal ethical principles:** A few people adhere to a conscience that questions "what if I disagree with the rule, because other actions bring greater justice?" & "my commitment to equality demands that I disobey unequal laws!"	
45 – 99 yrs		LATE adulthood	**Universalizing:** some adults may reach a form of enlightenment, where they re-establish a new personal spirituality and find peace, justice, love, compassion, and the ability to clearly know other people's spiritual opinions, especially ones differing from their own				

Human development follows a reasonably well-expected path for cognition, spirituality, and morality. Humans develop at different rates and so the age ranges presented in Table 1 are approximate. Some people progress quicker, while others go slower than the averages. The influence of society or culture and the learning that accrues in each context can speed up or delay the developmental rate. Cognitive development is continuous and domain specific, so people will simultaneously occupy different stages when their literacy, numeracy, spatiality, sociality, and morality are considered (Cartwright, 2001). The theories do not explain how development takes place from stage to stage, only that it follows an order.

With these caveats, the first steps to developing a personal spirituality lie in openness or receptivity to new ideas. A closed person is likely not a critical thinker and remains unable to question consciousness. Consciousness is a united self-awareness of emotions (sentience), thoughts (meta-cognition), behaviours (conduct), and ethics (morality). Over each of the four initial human development stages, consciousness adds a single component: feeling, thinking, behaving, and choosing ethically (Mayer, 2000).

Strategies

Finally, a personal spirituality can be established through several strategies tied to the developmental stages summarized in Table 1. Outdoor learning practitioners can make use of these strategies to assist participants with developing some small parts of their personal spiritualities. For example, artistic and scientific exercises are commonly used to teach environmental learning, while challenge activities are frequently used to teach adventurous learning. Although these strategies are organized by approximate age groups, teachers and parents will know what their children are ready for. Adults stuck in a rut with their spiritual development may want to revert to some child-like activities so as to change their game.

If babies are exposed to nature (with ample sun protection applied), then parents may want to begin by talking about nature in positive ways, much like Erikson's (1968) ideas around positive talk about a god. When infants are old enough to understand the environment around them, parents may want to get them looking and listening to certain natural sights and sounds. This practice is useful in developing interest, sensory awareness, communication, and a sense of self in babies (Greenspan & Lewis, 2009).

During the pre-school years, outdoor risky play and outdoor games are essential for child development (Sandseter, 2009). Guided nature immersion is beneficial for physical, mental, social, and self-image development in children (Mygind et al., 2019). Hence the increasingly popular nature kindergarten and forest pre-school movements, which provide both risky play and nature immersion (Harris, 2019), while positively impacting a child's environmental attitudes and behaviours later in life (Wells & Lekies, 2012).

Children at this age (2-7 years) are capable of sitting alone in silence, if given the task of observing and reporting back what they saw. They are also ripe to extend their sensory awareness with safe smelling, touching, and tasting under adult supervision. This is the age to introduce them to movement-based concentration or contemplation activities (yoga, tai chi, qigong, aikido, dance, artwork, labyrinth walking, etc.) and to physical outdoor exercise (walking, running, peddling, paddling, skiing, swimming, etc.), nutritious eating, and the practice of kindness and caring towards plants, animals, and other people.

> A key theme arising in the broader literature on spirituality is that it is widely held to be an innate aspect of being human. Children are thus often believed to have a natural capacity to be spiritual; something which education has the potential to nurture. (Adams et al., 2016, p.763)

When children first go to school (approximate age for 7-12 year olds), they are ready for

spiritual development. This is the time to start mindfulness training and to inculcate curiosity and wonder. Mindfulness training has shown promise in improving sustained attention and self-regulation in children (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Curiosity and wonder are the gateways to learning and further cognitive development, especially for creative and critical thinking, ultimately leading to spirituality or a life philosophy later on (Opdal, 2001).

Children at this age can participate in volunteer service projects that begin to encourage compassion and empathy (Eyler & Giles, 2014) and readily practice meditation and breathwork. Meditation has long been known to reduce stress, hyperactivity, and attention deficit in children (Fisher, 2006; Harrison, et al., 2004). Breathwork or purposeful breathing exercises are recommended as a pairing with meditation and as a separate method of focus for school children (Sessa, 2007). Breathwork used with technologies can improve cognitive abilities and better manage socio-emotional problems (Mitsea et al., 2022).

As with any experience (environmental, adventurous, spiritual, or otherwise), meditation should lead into reflection. For literate children, journaling can be a powerful form of reflection (McGough, 2013). Their journal entries can include personal affirmations, attitudes of gratitude, and a daily count of their "blessings" (Froh et al., 2008; Leigh, 2020; Li, 2016). With older children, teachers can lead interactive group discussions by asking provocative questions to explore the spirituality of these practices. Special facilitation techniques might include funneling, frontloading, focusing, and more (Priest & Gass, 2018).

In the teenage years (12-19 years), mature youth can undertake personal contemplation, spiritual readings, and spiritual rituals (Forthun & Shaw, 2018). Often, joining a spiritual community (religious or secular) enables additional contemplation, reading, and ritual, as well as spiritual discussion among community members. Some additional strategies for spiritual development include chanting, singing or laughing (Johnson, 2005), giving up toxic social media, and doing something completely different. Most social media content runs counter to the development of spirituality (Monks et al., 2021). The toxic content of sites that promote conflict and advance cyber-bullying also prevent spiritual formation (St. John, 2011).

Sometimes, just changing the activity focus can help move people forward in their spiritual journeys. The artsy teenager should try something scientific and vice versa, in order to engage different parts of the brain. For example, when conducting environmental activities, mix up the choices for teens to pick what best speaks to them, then encourage them to attempt a second activity that is completely different (Thomas, 2005). Music can be common ground for teens. Playing secular songs with spiritual meanings can frequently provide a starting point for reflective group discussions (Cobussen, 2008).

For adults (19+ years), a re-examination of spirituality is common. During mid-life, adults may want to try out some of the strategies for children as noted above. In addition, some other exercises that have proven useful include earthing or grounding, cultivating plant growth, caring for pets or other animals, and occasional and brief periods of fasting. Earthing involves grounding oneself to the electrical fields of the planet, like walking barefoot in the sands or grasses. Research on the practice suggests a number of health benefits including spiritual benefits (Chevalier et al., 2012; Ober et al., 2010). Horticultural, animal-assisted, and other therapies are known to benefit psychological health and developing spirituality (West, 2000). Simply brushing a horse or gardening gets one back to nature as a substitute for a god. Fasting has long been a component of deprivation or cleansing for people on spiritual journeys (Towns, 2011). The

important concern is not to overdo the hunger-inducing process to the point of starvation.

Adults may want to further change their game by no longer consuming the negatively distorted world news. A constant bombardment of war, crime, crashes, and other disasters does little to bolster the soul and grow one's happiness (Van der Meer et al., 2019). Instead, adults are encouraged to go outside into nature and to experience extreme weather, such as high winds or heavy precipitation in order to feel the full force of nature. Obviously, don't go sailing or swimming in a storm and take precautions to protect against the elements, while enjoying the lightning and thunder.

Efforts to grow empathy and compassion and to practice loving and forgiveness seem fundamental to developing spirituality (Oliner, 2000; Oman, 2011). Kristeller and Johnson (2005) posit a two-stage model for altruistic spirituality. In the first stage, people must disengage from their preoccupation with self, especially feelings, thinking, and behaviours that are self-defeating. Once free to consider others, the second stage involves re-engaging with society in a consciously mindful manner focused on altruism. This should extend to taking action for those with a well-developed morality. Therefore, adults may want to consider taking pilgrimages to social justice sites or giving charitable time and money to important environmental issues. By volunteering for these causes, people come to know who they are, how to work with others, what goes on in society and nature, and what they can do to influence the latter. In other words, this has the same intent as outdoor learning.

Conclusion

Spirituality is a critical component of living because it governs and motivates our feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. In turn, our thoughts, feelings, and ethical principles are highly influential in developing our spirituality (Kilicarslan Toruner et al., 2020). Armed with a personal spirituality, people should be able to move from thought to action. They should understand what needs to be done and subsequently do it.

Outdoor learning presents a myriad of opportunities to develop spirituality through a personal journey of discovery.

> With the blending of adventure and environment, this journey … becomes a spiritual quest seeking clarification of meaning and purpose around personal values, ethical living, a life well lived, death without regret, future directions, the universe, and the existence of a higher power. In addition to understanding how they relate internally, socially, and naturally, participants ascertain who they are, why they exist, and where they are headed. (Priest & Asfeldt, 2022, p. 490)

However, with a clearer picture of how to achieve spiritual relationships, either environmental or adventurous branches of outdoor learning can independently help participants to develop spirituality. No longer is the unification of both branches necessary. Yet, I still encourage environmental educators to include some adventure in their programs and vice versa. The other paired relationships are well worth developing.

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After his tenure as a university professor of adventurous and environmental outdoor learning in Ontario, Simon Priest was a dean, provost, vice-chancellor, senior vice president, president, commissioner, and advisor to a minister of Education. He has received numerous awards and accepted over 30 visiting scholar positions around the world in outdoor learning.

Eloquent Understories

By Jonathan Egan

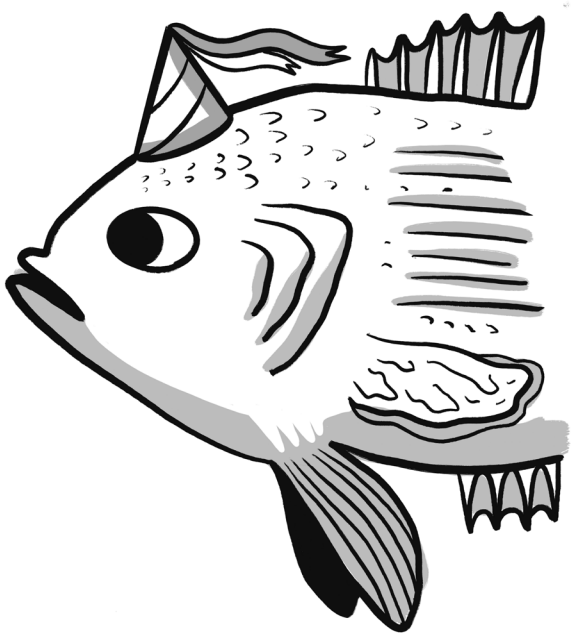
Editor's Note: This speech was originally presented at the Metropolis Blue Montreal International Literary Festival in April 2025 as part of the Bold & Creative Talks Series.

As a teacher in the physical education department at Dawson College here in Montreal, I have the great privilege of taking groups of students into landscape as part of their course. Unfortunately, wilderness has become for many of us, a distant acquaintance and now, more than ever before, we must re-kindle our relationship with the natural world. I believe that visiting forest, marsh, hillside and field acts as a form of reunion that consoles our nostalgia. Much like the living world, my practice as an educator has grown over the fifteen years since I began. Recently, my work helping younger people connect with nature has taken an optimistic turn, and two critical thoughts stand out. First: we must spend time alone, away from technology, getting to know the landscape and our non-human neighbours. Secondly: we must sit closely with others and use the power of story to share the excitement of our new relationships.

To help clarify these notions, I will weave a story and my insights together, bringing you into the woods with the students to share in the contemplation and optimism I experience when camping with them out on the land. It begins on a cool September morning.

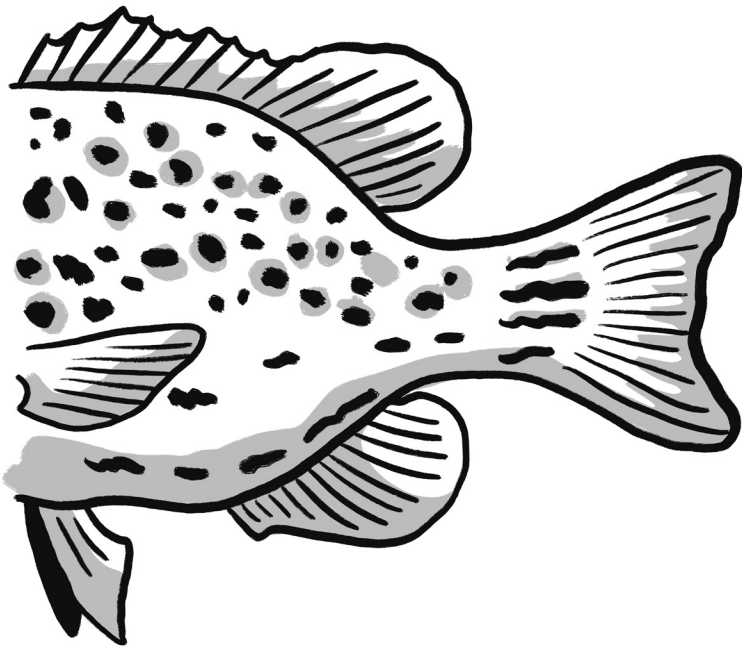
The phrasing of the forest floor under foot spoke insistently, urging me to be still. Each step into the delicate decay, unravelled a carpet laid by fractures and season's falls. I was surrounded by the nervous babble of students, their youthful confidence tested by my determination to lead them off the trail and into the beautiful chaos.

We gathered in a circle, pretending to believe that what we had created was absent of angles. Our congregation had students using bags as forest ottomans while others chose the abundant, autumn earth. I could tell they were weary, their shoulders shrugged protectively, some clasped their knees as they shuffled on makeshift furniture. Others gazed ghost-eyed into the wood, seemingly taken, as if by Philip Pullman's spectres.



Robin Wall Kimmerer, in *The Serviceberry* (2024) writes about a spatial phenomenon known as ecotones. Kimmerer writes: "[ecotones are] the gap edges of landscapes, where two ecosystems, the new and the old, meet, [they] are among the most diverse and productive." Much as ecotones are presented as part of a larger metaphor for understanding reciprocity by Kimmerer, their nature of merging has revealed new symbolism for me. This idea of a place of convergence resonates and echoes how my perspectives regarding physical education have shifted. This has led to a deeper understanding of the change in paradigm I have experienced over the last few years teaching in the Anthropocene.
In the past, my approach to planning a trip with students was focused on what

we consider a recreational model of travel; how far can we go? How high can we climb? How many hours can we walk? Now, through exploring the places where recreational approach converges with something more emotional, I see myself searching for connection, reciprocity, and community with the students. This perspective has dissolved distances and harnessed heights, now we experience the plural flourishing of the natural world around us while we travel. Hours are spent, as Scottish author Nan Shepherd (2011) writes, going "into landscape," rather than upon it.



It is with profound humility that I approach the notions of fostering relationships with nature in my classes. Through reading the work of Anishinaabe Professor Jean-Paul Restoule at the University of Victoria, who I was fortunate to meet this year, I recognize my settler role in the educational system that employs me. Indigenous education approaches are the wellspring which is shaping how I see my role in physical education and health. Sustainability, community, and reciprocity are integral to what Restoule refers to as "the old ways" that "are the new way forward." Furthermore, I have been fortunate enough to learn that much of what I experience with students is what Niigaan Sinclair (2024) has taught us as a form of "land commitment - a recognition of the life of a place, so it recognizes you."

Back in our circle in the woods, I watch, as the students scuttle like startled fish under a heron's saffron eye. Into the eloquent understory and towards a yet-to-be-found place, where they will sit alone undisturbed, to let wander their thoughts amongst the wonders around them. They do not go empty handed: a notebook, a pencil, others carry collections of crayons and one, a small wooden watercolour kit. They also take with them a quest; a series of questions to help guide them in their sitting; and writing prompts for a wooded room.

The questions are challenges: to be vulnerable, to show curiosity and to express empathy. Once they are comfortable, safe, and alone, they must resolve the following thoughts: who do you see? What are they? When did they arrive? When will they disappear? Where are they going? Why are they there? And how do you think they feel?

Timeless essentials of elemental inquiry, these questions catch flight, carry thoughts to the page, to the brush and to the heart.

In *Underland* (2020), his seminal thought symphony on deep time, Robert Macfarlane writes: "The real underland of language is not the roots of single words, but rather the soil of grammar and syntax, asserting powerful influence on the proceedings of language and its users. They shape the way we relate to each other and to the living world."

While the students embrace their surroundings, they are, in what I feel Macfarlane is getting at, exploring new habits of discourse and thought. Re-surfacing mycorrhizal sinews of dialogue, and language, which I believe foster profound, empathetic relationships to the natural world.

Given time, I hope that the students grow towards what Kimmerer calls a "grammar of animacy", where our non-human neighbours are welcomed as relations rather than that of things.

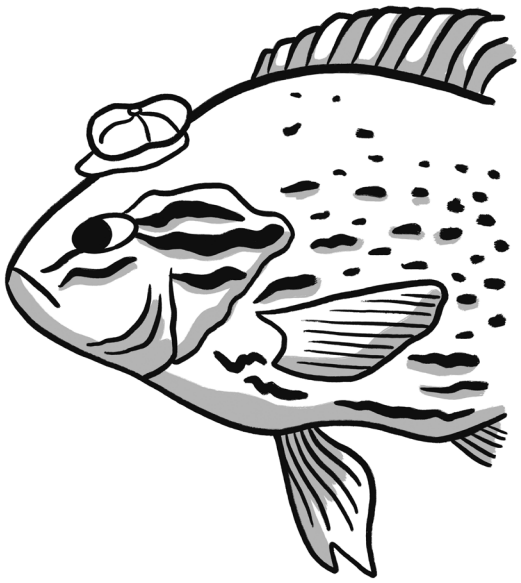
After approximately an hour of silently writing, and creating with their thoughts, I can hear the students excitedly chirping as they return to our original gathering spot, singing the kind tones of their newly acquainted kin.

As the last members convene, I ask them to sit with a student they do not know well, someone who holds mystery and curiosity for them just as the forest did moments before. I ask them to share their woodland story with this new friend and offer them the abundance of experiences they have just gathered. As previously when they were solo, they must remain curious; the art of questioning sustains the ebb and flow of their conversation.

Walking along the hedgerows of storytelling students is remarkable, and my most cherished moments of these trips. I am often quick to dismiss younger peoples' skills at building relationships with land and the living world. Their primary involvement with nature tends to be governed by their thumbs. Scrolling through infinite obsolescence, nature becomes a secondary experience.

But ambling amongst these saplings' impromptu prose, I am enriched as the water of their spoken tales seeps down to soothe my skeptical soil. I listen to stories of endearment, concern, and celebration. I read journals of place, of affection, and of belonging.

Most importantly of all, I see young people forming relationships that are not only essential to their personal well-being, but also to the well-being of every living entity around them.



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Jonathan is a teacher at Cégep Dawson College in Montréal, Québec. He specializes in outdoor education courses that carry an emphasis on land relationship and connections to personal health and well-being.

The Road

By Allister Thompson

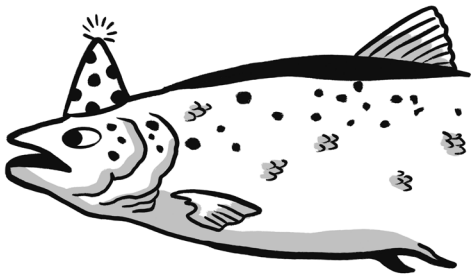
Editor's Note: The following contribution to Pathways *is an excerpt from the forthcoming young adult novel entitled,* Birch and Jay – The Knowledge Seekers: Book 1. *Written by Allister Thompson and published by Latitude 46, the story follows two young residents of a Northern Ontario proto-utopian community who, decades after total environmental collapse, leave their home on separate quests to help save their families— and each other. Described as an adventure for our time, this is a tale to inspire readers of all ages to contemplate the choices we are making now, and how we might learn from history, break the cycle, and create a better future for ourselves and our world.*

Jay

It was already uncomfortably hot, even though it was still early in the day. At this time of year, you never knew when you were going to get a forty-five-degree scorcher, and it seemed today might become one. You'd think we'd be more used to it, but the combination of heat and humidity could kill, so we had to take it very seriously. I was happy to have a decent supply of water with me; finding ways to slake your thirst was an ongoing problem all Seekers had to deal with on the road. I had a bottle with a filter in it, but it was still best not to take water directly from half-dried-up, muddy lakes if you could avoid it. A wide area south of Norbay had once been renowned for the sheer number of beautiful lakes it held. Most of the smaller lakes were now more like scum-covered mud pits.

I'd been as far as Great Sudbury before, so I was no stranger to lonely stretches of northern highway, and there wasn't usually much variety to see. I had to keep my eyes on that pitted road or I'd take a header over a twisted piece of asphalt.

There were also occasional rusted, crumbled shells of motor vehicles, from small cars to giant "rigs", which had been the main way goods were transported from place to place. That always seemed very inefficient to me in such a populated place, putting small amounts of things on the road dragged along by pollution-spewing engines, especially considering they also had rail lines, but the ways of our ancestors are often incomprehensible to us. Look at the mess they got themselves into, after all. The long boxes attached to the rigs were collapsed and rusted almost into nothingness as well and strewn across the road, the contents long removed or rotted away.



What had happened to owners of these cars, what had made them abandon their vehicles on this lonely stretch of road, and where they had gone, was lost to time.

Occasionally I'd see the remains, skeletal or otherwise, of an ungulate, stripped of its flesh by the packs of wolves and coyotes that had reclaimed much of the land in this part of what was once called "Ontario". It was a reminder to keep my wits about me.

On both sides of the thin slash of highway there was nothing but lush, almost impenetrable scrubby forest and undergrowth.

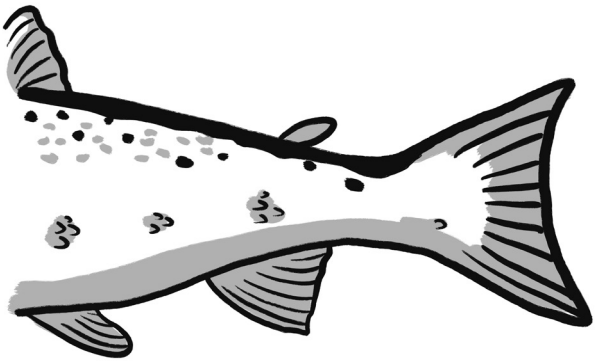
About an hour or so of cycling south of Norbay, it started to get hillier around the narrow expanse of four-lane highway, and I had to do some heavier pedalling in places, while still weaving painstakingly around jagged obstacles and crevasses, usually where there'd been a culvert. It was grueling. I had spent the last couple of years cycling religiously for at least two hours every day in preparation for this

moment, and my leg muscles were well developed, as was my lung capacity, but it was still taxing work, especially with the sun beating mercilessly down. If it was as hot by noon as I suspected it would be, there wasn't much chance of making Huntsville by nightfall.

Just as I passed a place called Trout Creek, a few hours into the journey, the area around me to the left and right was suddenly bare, and the road itself was even more chewed up and washed out than elsewhere. A wide strip of vegetation had been torn away from the hills as though by a set of giant teeth, leaving a gash in the dense thickets and exposing the shield rock. I realized this was probably the result of the tornadoes of 2115 that I'd heard about in my early teens. I remembered the mega-cells passing to the north and south of the town, just barely missing us while we cowered for hours in the basements of our houses, listening to the howl of the wind. There were tornado warnings at least twice a year, but that had been the most destructive one so far in my lifetime.

Despite my desire to make good time, I had a sudden urge to look out over the landscape; the escarpment in Norbay gave a fairly impressive view but wasn't really that high. Because of the storm's devastation, I would have a panoramic view of the whole region from here. The crown of a nearby hill had been completely denuded, aside from scrubby, low thickets, by fire or storm and should provide a clear line of sight.

I hid my bike behind a huge piece of granite, took out the reasonably fresh sandwich wrapped in leaves that Dad had sent with me, and my water bottle, hopped over a soggy ditch, and headed toward the slope. It was a lot farther than it had looked, and I started to regret it halfway there, but it was too late to go back without rendering the exercise pointless, so I took a break to eat the sandwich, then kept going. About thirty minutes later, gasping, I crested the hill to find another massive chunk of rock dominating the hilltop like a sentinel or an altar. I sank down into its lee, slugged back some water, wiped my forehead with my arm, and looked out over the landscape. I surveyed an unpopulated land, an ocean of leaves marred by frequent large black and brown patches caused by the giant forest fires. In fact, far off to the east I could see one raging now, sending up a spreading plume of smoke that looked like photos of atomic mushroom clouds I'd seen in old books. Of course, this scene was part of life most of the year; today, fortunately, a strong breeze from the west kept it away, otherwise I'd have been cycling in a giant cloud of noxious dust and debris. I could still smell its distinct tang.



Not too far away, I saw birds of prey with wings spread wide coasting lazily and gracefully on the currents of overheated air.

Darker patches of green, almost bluish, in the landscape indicated lakes still covered with the summer's thick mat of algal bloom they always acquired that rendered the water undrinkable and unswimmable. We had to take our drinking water from flowing streams or collect rainwater, or suffer dire physical consequences.

Allister Thompson spent his youth dividing his time between working as an editor for Toronto-based publishers and touring with a rock band. He is also the author of an alternate history sci-fi novel, The Music of the Spheres. *He currently runs his own freelance editorial business out of his home in North Bay.*

Unravelling the Strands of Ivory Knowledge

By Kelechi Chukwu

The beauty and mystery of the land.
Rich soil on this earth, a caring vessel for all things
Fertile soils, luxuriant green brushes. Mountain House, where wine seeps out
Hills flow milk & leaves rest; River dances.
Once upon a time we lived in harmony and grew up nursing from its naked belly
Just as an infant sucks its mother's breast
So does a mother become her baby's haven. Mothering her child throughout life
Amid natural habitat, fertile lands' womb
Kwezen tends to with love, humbleness and respect (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. XII)
A priceless river of gold bestowed by the land. Natures bountiful! Full of divine blessings
Abundant in wisdom, a flowing stream of knowledge
Adorning our mind with experience and nourishing our soul
An Opus of teachings and practices. Teachings of the ancient and truths of the elderly (Arellano et al., 2019, p. 399).
In the realm of beauty and the beast, serenity battles discord
The beast in settlers lurks beneath the surface as his greed emerges
In a place where the native heart and soul coincide
Rooted in a Nation of blood and ancestry
Settlers' dreams of conquest, sown in new territory
Where the heart of the native finds solace
Reaping without sowing, they plundered and stole
Unmindful of the price
Wildcat et al. (2014) assert denials and suppression
Native run, native hide, native cry oh, the land of mine
An eclipse of the native
Settlers carved a path of arrogance and pride
A path of knowledge blended into the untamed land.
Molding young native minds to conformity and uniformity
A hiss to dubious victory
Native people lived with the land, and settlers lived and are still living off the land (Wildcat et al., 2014 p. IV).
The act of giving conceives the act of receiving
"Do unto the land what you want the land to do unto you."
In the relentless tide of forced assimilation
Cultural roots dwindle, and identities wither (Arellano et al., 2019)
The identities often untold reside in an abyss of the soul

Season after season
The spirit remains unchained as it dwells in the heart of the wilderness
The land never forgets as it stands resilient and steadfast, bearing witness
Wisdom still lies beneath the land, in every sound
Every bark tells a story carved by the trees. Tales of Manoomin pop fizzled up (Wildcat et al., 2014)
In the darkness, hope shines a light through adversity
Resistance persists, seeking knowledge of the land (Arellano et al. (2019).
One that embraces ancestry, and respects lineage. Plants seed of harmony and trust
Arellano et al (2019) unravel(ling) the strands of ivory knowledge (p. 393)
Beneath distant haven lies the tale of a Ghostkeeper
The tale of reconciliation, in Kitcisakik's cradle (Arellano et al., 2019).
Echoes the Wabanakik peoples' ancient secrets (Koller & Rasmussen, 2021)
The sacred is in its gentle sway
In its embrace lies spirituality that we abide
In the warmth of its embrace lies its healing hands
Together, breaking down this known authority on knowledge.

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Kelechi Chukwu, an international master's student from Nigeria, specializes in environmental and sustainability education. He aims to equip future generations with a transformative educational strategy that addresses pressing environmental issues and promotes sustainability.

Research News From the JAEOL

By David Hills

Rethinking art education through integrating outdoor learning practices as sites of memory, *Megan Wonowidjoyo, 2024, Malaysia.*

This paper explores how outdoor learning can encourage students to engage in deeper critical thinking during artmaking. By using various spaces like nature, urban settings, and galleries, it aims to shift the focus from purely technical skills to fostering a Malaysian identity and personal expression in art.

Looking back: The lasting impact of outdoor education for adolescent girls, *Shannon McNatty, 2024, New Zealand.*

The research reveals four key narratives that shape long-term impacts: nature as a source of nourishment, the benefits of living simply, the balance of support and independence, and the development of a confident female identity. These findings emphasize the enduring positive influence of extended outdoor experiences during adolescence.

"Release them into the wild, but how far can they go?" Improving social and emotional mental health through teaching bushcraft skills to children with special educational needs and disability: A preliminary case series evaluation study, *James Tonks, 2024, United Kingdom.*

This study highlights the potential of bushcraft programs to support the mental, social, and emotional health of children with SEND. By engaging in a five-week outdoor program, participants showed improvements in self-concept and reduced stress, indicating that this approach is both effective and beneficial for this group.

Attending 12 weekly sessions of Forest School sessions improves mood and cooperation in 7–8-year-old children, *Annie Hepworth, 2024, United Kingdom.*

This study investigates the impact of Forest School programs on children's mood, co-operation, and cognitive skills. Results showed that children who attended Forest School reported feeling happier, calmer, and more co-operative compared to those in a classroom setting, though spatial cognition and self-esteem showed limited changes.

Building resilience and teaching learners about sustainable living through outdoor swimming and water safety learning, *Torbjørn Lundhaug, 2024, Norway.*

This study explores how a new curriculum in Norway integrates outdoor swimming and water safety to promote sustainable living among students. Through observations and interviews with teachers, it highlights the role of experiential learning in building resilience, emphasizing the importance of student engagement and control over their learning process in enhancing wellbeing.

David Hills is the book review editor for the Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning *editorial board, the official publication of the Institute for Outdoor Learning.*

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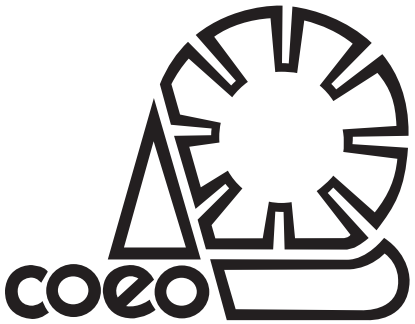

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