

The Natural Connection: Place & Epistemology

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INTRODUCTION

Time is finite; time is relative; time is entropic; and time is sacred. Over the past week, I had the opportunity to reflect upon my experiences on a spatial and temporal level. Aspects of reflexivity from Andy Goldsworthy (2001), Gruenewald (2003), Jardine (2009), Rassmussen and Akulukjuk (2009), and indirectly and directly conveyed the sacred immersion of land and place-based learning to connect and transformation on a personal level to the environment. The publications of *Rivers and Tides*, *Critical Pedagogy of Place*, *Birding Lessons and Teachings of Cicadas*, and *My Father was told to talk to the Environment first before anything else* were respectively different mediums of linguistic articulation which holistically integrated the symphony of nature-based story-telling, imagery, empathy, and unity to provoke a message of growth to personal, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of human interaction and pedagogy.

PERSONAL INFLUENCE

Rivers and Tides by Andy Goldsworthy (2001) was a nomadic and experiential depiction of inquiry into nature on a person level, from an epistemological and holistic mindset. Goldsworthy's pontification of the term, *energy*, was an abstract entity which was ubiquitous to *all* forms of abiotic and biotic interactions. This interconnected medium extended to the physical, chemical, biological, and spiritual dimensions of all qualitative observations, from micro-, meso-, and macroscopic scales. The way that Goldsworthy shares his experience with us on the life cycle of the rock, stating that "[I]t's a little memory in the life of a stone, but very much in the spirit of [the] nature of stone," (1:22:44 – 1:22:51) was a reflexive connection and episode into the story *it's life*. This personal connection extended with me when I was constructing an impertinence art piece, influenced by the art from Andy Goldsworthy. To honour and respect the energy fluidity of Goldsworthy's work, I implicitly integrated a unity story into the art piece, while connecting it with the atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere. As I collected aspects of the environment, a mantra of resonatory elements were selected, which each told a purposeful, epistemological story.

SOCIAL & CULTURAL INFLUENCE

My Father was told to talk to the Environment first before anything else by Rassmussen and Akulukjuk (2009) was powerful linguistic acknowledgement of indigenous knowledge to environmental education. Indigenous Knowledge (IK), including Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Wisdom (TEKW), is a spiritual philosophy and lifestyle to embrace, observe, preserve, conserve, and sustain the environment on a social and cultural level, touching the heart and life stream of *we*. Traditional and ancestral linguistics and lifestyles are essential to understand the temporal and spatial complexities of our interconnected ecological systems. Historic, generational, aboriginal, oral information are reservoirs of intellectual knowledge stretching back thousands of years. This holistic perspective that to be understanding of the environment, individuals' must be connected with the environment is a powerful and sacred lifestyle philosophy which reflects the empathy of natural sustainability of all life forms. This socially- and culturally-embedded way of knowing are integral to the understanding of environmental education. Reconciliation, holistic unity, and respect of aboriginal ways of knowing are transformative reflections to connect the ecological gaps of them and us, to *we*.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE

The *Birding Lessons and Teaching of Cicadas* by Jardine (2003), was a story-based narrative, which instilled imagery and perspective, which is often masked or forgotten in our uncharted environment around us. The complex notion that species, other than humans, are vectors for environmental knowledge is an abstract concept, often unnoticed. When Gruenewald states that "Cicadas are archaic storytellers telling me..., of the life I'd forgotten I'd lived, of deep, fleshy, familial relations that worm their way out of my belly and breath into the soils, these smells, this air," (2003; Page 93), was a passage of reminiscence of past lifestyle experiences. Feelings that are forgotten are often difficult to reflect upon, as a strong disconnect exhibit between reality, observation, and the environment. Critical Pedagogy of Place re-inspired me to more active in my inquiry into the "attention and devotion" (Berry, 1977; Page 34) of the environment. As an educator, lifelong learning is essential to progressively transform my pedagogical ways of knowing – and the empathy of the known are frameworks of thinking which may foster the beauty of nature.

CRITICAL PLACED-BASED PEDAGOGY

Critical Pedagogy of Place by Gruenewald (2003), was a combinatory approach to unite critical pedagogy and placed-based education, with extrapolations into the interconnected dimensions of social and environmental experiences. Ideas of infusing the frameworks of decolonization and reinhabitation of knowledge are essential to open and foster ecologically responsive citizens for the contemporary world, as well as future generations. This form of educational pedagogy is a transformative way of immersion to add meaning to space to become something even more, a place. Drawing parallels to the Pacific northwest coastal region of BC, the integration of critical place-based pedagogy is important and relevant, on all dimensions of ecological reasonings: theoretical, pragmatic, integral, and enriching scale, on education, social diversity, traditional knowledge, and community level.

HOLISTIC SELF-REFLECTION

Living in Prince Rupert, BC, on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Ts'msyen First Nation, indigenous epistemology and wisdom are integrated within and beyond local classroom community, where our diverse and traditional community are social frameworks for transformative and meaningful education. From totem poles, to traditional artifacts, to ecological interactions, to education, it all experienced on a temporal and spatial level of connectivity. Rassmussen and Akulukjuk (2009) stated that "Culture is the canvas [and the] language is the paintbrush; [and] together they display the ecological intelligence of a place" (Page 281), highlighting the integral part of culture to ecological values and understandings to a particular entity or community. I believe that this holistic and succinct reflexive passage which succinctly described the interwoven connectivity between one life to another and multiples lives to an ecosystem. The movie and all three readings narrated a symbolic motif to be more awakened, to be more attentive, and to be more observant, to be more transformative, and to be more *energetic*, while all life and time is sacred to every personal, social, cultural, and ecological interaction with nature to foster lifelong learning and epistemology of place.

CITATIONS

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