

Last Call at Loon Lake: Counter-Narratives in Human Ecology

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Abstract

In cultures of excess, the challenge is to see. In a time of climate change, how will humans find the questions, the reflections, the poems, or the prayers that will bring ecological justice and peace? This writing begins a response to the call made on the last day of our gathering at Loon Lake for a “commonist manifesto” around environmental education. In responding to this, and to the journal’s theme of “Dark Matters,” the goal of this writing is to shine a plain light on the counter-narratives, the smaller, ground-level stories, that informally shape narratives around human ecology. Here, the tools of storytelling, narrative, counter-narrative, and poetry pose an inquiry into our earth-centred educational encounters. Such stories are rooted in gardens, forests, neighbourhoods, and classrooms in East Vancouver and in the Okanagan of British Columbia. The stories include questions for discussion that invite the development of “commonist” guiding principles among readers and researchers. This writing seeks common ground among teaching, learning, nature, humans, and all entities too often artificially divided. This paper is also a call to observation where the imagination becomes the starting point for healing and awareness as we enter an era of climate change, and a time of new human evolution. In a world of excess, in words and deeds, this writing is to a call to less, with story, with poetry—with less.

Résumé

Dans nos cultures de l’excès, le défi est de voir. Dans une époque de changements climatiques, est-ce que les êtres humains sauront trouver les questions, les réflexions, les poèmes, ou les prières qui apporteront une justice écologique et la paix? Cet article amorce une réponse à l’appel lancé le dernier jour de notre rencontre au lac Loon pour un ‘manifeste commun’ sur l’éducation relative à l’environnement. En réponse à ceci, et au thème du journal sur les ‘questions sombres’ le but de cet article est de faire lumière sur les récits à contre-courant, la petite histoire, les histoires du quotidien qui donnent forme aux récits sur l’écologie humaine. Ici, les outils de la narration, du récit, du contre-récit et de la poésie facilitent une recherche sur les rencontres éducatives centrées sur la terre. De telles histoires trouvent leurs racines dans les jardins, les forêts, les voisinages et salles de classe de l’est de Vancouver et dans l’Okanagan en Colombie-Britannique. Ces histoires invitent au questionnement et à la discussion sur le développement de principes directeurs communs parmi les lecteurs et les chercheurs. Ce texte cherche un terrain commun entre l’enseignement, l’apprentissage, la nature, l’humain, et tous les êtres trop souvent divisés de manière artificielle. Cet article est aussi un appel à l’imagination comme point de départ pour guérir ainsi qu’une prise de conscience alors que nous entrons dans une période de changements climatiques

et de nouvelle évolution humaine. Dans un monde de l'excès, en paroles et en actes, ce texte est un appel au moindre, avec des histoires, avec de la poésie – avec moins.

Keywords: nature, imagination, poetry, environmental education, ecopoetic pedagogy

The Call

In cultures of excess, the challenge is to see. In a time of climate change, how will humans find the questions, the reflections, the poems, or the prayers that will bring ecological justice and peace? This writing begins a response to the call made on the last day of our gathering at Loon Lake for a “commonist manifesto” around environmental education. In responding to this, and to the journal’s theme of “Dark Matters,” the goal of this writing is to shine a plain light on the counter-narratives, the smaller, ground-level stories, that informally shape narratives around human ecology. Here, the tools of storytelling, narrative, counter-narrative, and poetry pose an inquiry into our earth-centred educational encounters. Such stories are rooted in gardens, forests, neighbourhoods, and classrooms in East Vancouver and in the Okanagan of British Columbia. The stories include questions for discussion that invite the development of “commonist” guiding principles among readers and researchers. This writing seeks common ground among teaching, learning, nature, humans, and all entities too often artificially divided. This paper is also a call to observation where the imagination becomes the starting point for healing and awareness as we enter an era of climate change, and a time of new human evolution. In a world of excess, in words and deeds, this writing is to a call to less, with story, with poetry—with less.

Loon Lake Diary: Day One

Sunday evening. I get lost on the way to Loon Lake. Before leaving home, Google maps tells me that Loon Lake Lodge ... is not on Loon Lake. Believing the Internet map, I head down a steep road then follow a sign to another lake where Loon Lake Lodge supposedly is. The sky grows dark and the forecast, 100 millimeters of rain, begins to fall. The old car bottoms out and gets stuck in a pothole filled with water. The car chugs and the pothole splashes. With many forward and backward starts, going nowhere, tires whirring, I finally rock out of the hole.

I have no phone or map. The rain pours. I begin to turn around and go home.

Where the Loon Lake road meets the main road, at the site of a new building development, I see a forest clear-cut. Cedar trees, sawn to stumps, lie on the ground. In the dim grey rain-light a family of four deer, including three young,

stand on the blank land seeking a path that used to be. They walk gently through the destruction, picking their way through the new-nowhere.

In the clear-cut, the deer try to find something...where there is now nothing.

When forests are removed, pathways between places end in dead ends. The places, themselves, end. We are thus called to enter a new pathway into the wild, through ecological imagination.

Philosopher, botanist, and Ontario farmer Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2010) says, "The majesty of diversity is being reduced by ignorance, and nature is being assaulted in all corners of the world, and now, it would appear, in the boreal forests too" (p. 67). Canada's response to the earth is to clear-cut, mine, frack, and use whatever means necessary to extract natural resources at the highest profit. I turn to public intellectual John Ralston-Saul (cited in Freek, 2013) who questions: "As Canadians, we've taken this view that humans are on top and everything is here to serve us" (para 2).

Considering Wendell Berry's principles of eco-literate design intelligence ("What is there? What will nature permit us to do here? What will nature help us to do here?" (cited in Orr, 2004, p. 105)), I feel that we are increasingly unable to even answer that first question. Like the deer, we seek answers, a pathway, yet we are disoriented because the forests, our unique and natural ties to the land, are rapidly disappearing.

What are we, humans and animals both, looking at when we stare into empty clear-cuts, polluted oceans, or mined natural landscapes? We are like the deer, turned around: we are trained to see nothing, where there is something.

The deer look at me. Perhaps we are here to bear witness.

As environmental educators, with poetic hearts, we can learn, or re-learn, to see and hear what is there and not there.

As the deer roam in the clear-cut, seeking a path, the way to sustain our larger living ecosystem, or even the way to cultivate an eco-mind, may not be immediately visible to the eye.

I arrive at Loon Lake, late, with a poem:

OWL

*I sit by a stump
in old growth cedars.
A rustle. Someone there?
A top a branch, bare
soft, brown feathers.*

*So silent
above the highway,
the wrrrrd world rolls past.
We share a stare.*

*LOOK.
Do not flinch.
Says the eyes from up there.*

*The small plane passes,
on time;
his eyes follow
dismiss it.*

*The sun goes down, golden.
The owl
above all, calls,*

*like a friend
or a story.*

Question: In the midst of environmental crisis, crisis of land, and crisis of perspective, what is a just response to nature, to the sacred earth herself? What do you witness?

Counter-Narratives

Lesson One: Alternative With/In the Alternative

The first stage is listening to what First Nations are saying (Ralston-Saul, cited in Freek, 2013, para 5).

The Learning Garden was built on the campus of UBC Okanagan in 2006 (Gaylie, 2009). The purpose of the site was to provide an alternative model of outdoor, garden-based learning across all disciplines and to provide a space for ecological inquiry amongst teacher education students. The site began as an outlying site, an alternative model.

In the very first season, an alternative to this alternative learning model organically emerged from one of the students. Michael, the student, intended to explore meaning in the garden based on a local Indigenous learning model, specifically through the En'owkin process and traditional Okanagan teaching. The student explained that he was not interested in applying Western principles of education that did not represent his land or his people; he had no desire to fit into a way of teaching, learning, and research that excluded his distinct worldview.

Listening was central to the learning process. Michael consulted with family, Elders, faculty, and another student in Fine Arts, then began building a traditional First Nations Firepit next to the garden, that included influences of the Medicine Wheel and the idea of learning as process. The students built the pit at the bottom of a steep slope beside the pond, just outside the (first) boundaries of the garden. The symbolic value of the Firepit emphasized the idea that the entire garden, as a whole environment, was a site of transformation. The “outsider” knowledge of the pit became central to the learning in the learning garden, and, thus, changed the very hierarchy by which knowledge is measured and valued. As Michael wrote:

I was thinking of incorporating the En’owkin process into the garden experience by having four posts at key points in the garden with a sign on them to explain each of the four En’owkin food chiefs and to give the students a lesson in traditional indigenous Okanagan wisdom. (cited in Gaylie, 2009, p. 2)

Throughout the process, the student listened, and remained open to the ways the land was teaching him, even as he worked with the land. When the student began carving the grizzly totem pole, the first post in the En’owkin model of learning, he found himself working with a discarded, rotten piece of wood with uneven, pointed surfaces.

I had originally planned to carve a bear figure as it is representative of youth and vision, however I could not find the inspiration in the wood and it was not coming along ... I began to lose faith in the carving project until I began to realize that it needed to be a Salmon, representing action, that it began to take shape. (cited in Gaylie, 2009, p. 3)

The bowl was filled with large rocks that extended eight feet down; the placement of the rocks symbolized the idea where “there is more to the earth and human existence than the here and now. In time it will sink, be forgotten, but perhaps found again many, many years from now. The burying of the pit is symbolic” (K. Witzke, personal communication, May 8, 2008). Above the rocks, at the top of the pit, the students planted an Oregon grape (a berry bush, native to the region) and ashes collected from the Okanagan Mountain Park fire of 2003.

The Firepit, the students’ involvement in building the piece, and the collaboration with others around campus was a gift that focused the core learning of the Learning Garden. It all began by pointing in a new direction that pointed beyond the first artificially devised boundaries and limits.

From the start, the Firepit grew as an experiential lesson in the principle of equality through embracing alternatives. As it turned out, the Firepit ultimately provided not only a pedagogical focus for the Learning Garden, but later saved the very existence of the entire area. When the first bulldozers arrived, after clear-cutting the pine forest, they halted a few feet away from the Firepit. The machines never reached the pond, nor the Learning Garden.

The Firepit still (as of Autumn 2013) sits in a small, remaining patch of pine woods, beside the pond, and the garden. The rest of the campus is largely built up; the lower campus forest, long-gone. While the woods are not what they once were, I also know that the very existence of the Firepit, a site that started out as an alternative learning model to the alternative learning garden, saved a place whose value was largely invisible to the powers that be. The lessons continue to this day, as Michael visits the site several times a year to teach local school children and others in the community the history and significance of the area.

As a counter-narrative to indoor learning, and to the learning garden itself, the Firepit brought lessons to mainstream education about partnership and equality, about thinking and learning outside the boundaries, with a sense of responsibility towards the land and one another. The project, based on En'owkin values, also brought forward the importance of youth, and students, in the learning process. The learning process itself revealed the meaning and the path.

The counter-narrative rose from the ground, organically. In the moment, meaning may not seem momentous compared to the larger story, or even compared to the roar of bulldozers. In fact, a counter-narrative may seem quite ordinary at first, as it involves standing in a patch of woods, listening. Learning to listen for, and name, the sacred in the ordinary is part of learning in equal commons, in nature and community.

Question: What counter-narratives present themselves to you from the ground? What is your response?

Lesson Two: Garlic Power

A group of grade seven students recently visited the Firepit and the Learning Garden. The students are members of an Eco-Leaders Club in their school. They found and rescued turtle eggs in the school's long-jump pit. From there, they moved on to cultivating native plants outside their classroom windows. Now they want to start a garden on their school grounds, and they are having difficulty gaining acceptance for the idea at the school.

When the students visited the Learning Garden, their teacher told me to emphasize the history of the garden, and most of all, our hopes and struggles. The student who built the firepit, Michael, returned to help tell the stories.

Just a few weeks prior to this visit, the campus garden had in fact been bulldozed to make way for a geo-thermal heating system. I told the students how we rebuilt the garden with the help of the campus facilities crew.

The students listened intently to the story of the garden. They spoke of the legacy of the turtle eggs, and their work planting native plants on their own grounds, their sense of the power of community.

Their teacher told me, "These kids are going to save the world." The students each held garlic in their hands; they were part of the rebuilding too.

I asked the students what "it took" to keep a garden going. What kind of thinking, what kind of power?

One girl whispered, “garlic power.”
We raised our fists in the air and chanted:
What does it take?
Garlic Power!
What do we need?
Garlic Power!

When it came time to visit the pond next to the Firepit, we all stood in a circle, observing the migrating birds of Autumn. We listened to the traditional Okanagan rushes and reeds. The red-winged blackbirds stirred. I knew these students had likely already engaged in some soul searching about their instincts to serve the earth’s interests, above their own. Their experiences made them unique.

Facing the pond, the rushes, reeds, and nesting, migratory ducks, I asked the students: *What are you looking at?* Their answers were unique:

Not a university.
Not a building.
Water.
Something else.
Birth.
Life.
Us.
God.
Home.

Question: When you look into nature, what do you see?

Lesson Three: A Day at Grandview/çuuqinak'uuh

Grandview

*The grade fives went outside
to write about what outside reminded them of.
They lined up along the fence across from the cut,
the concrete pillars of the Skytrain.
To some it was a snake. To others, a sidewalk.
For some, the chain link fence was a prison,
the old jacket on the ground, someone’s escape.*

*The co-op across the street (the wood carved sign said
Paradise illas, the V long gone)
was not like anything.*

*Back in the classroom
the kids sat in their desks with their backs
to the grand view.*

*Between the school and the skyline:
rows of warehouses, hotels,
the Ivanhoe, the viaduct.*

*Condos shone like poppies in the distance.
The stuffed raven sat in the crayon box,
black feathers before the bright window.
One said the sky reminded him of nothing.
Another said outside reminded him of all
the things he was trying to remember
but kept forgetting.*

For the past 12 years I have taught poetry workshops in East Vancouver schools. Originally this work was part of a project called Poetry Matters that explored the value of poetry in low-ranked schools. These schools have included: Vancouver Technical High School, Franklin Elementary School and Grandview/ḷuuqinak'uuh, the first ethno-botanic school in Canada, and now, a designated Earth School. The school has a large aboriginal population, and the school promotes the values and principles of aboriginal learning.

My original research goal was to push the boundaries of the traditional notion of literacy, by engaging students in both their socio-cultural context and their local, biotic context (i.e., their local neighbourhood), specifically through poetic language (Gaylie, 2011). The workshop usually begins with a simple introduction to a basic ecological principle related to their bio-region. The core part of the workshop is then to walk with the students around their schoolyard, garden, and neighbourhood, engaging in poetic observation and making notes about their local ecosystems. The notes form the basis for later poems.

The following journal entry is from one day among several that I spent over a two-year period at Grandview/ḷuuqinak'uuh elementary school, with a grade six class:

Shortly after I arrive in the classroom, I ask the students: What is an ecosystem?

The students respond:

We are organic. We are living things up ... in this room.

This room is part of an ecosystem within a larger ecosystem.

When we die, do we become plants?

I don't want to be natural. Someone might pick my leaves.

If I eat McDonalds, then die, will I kill the ecosystem?

An ecosystem is sort of ... a world within a world.

I think the earth and the world, are two different things.

The earth is what you can see. The world is what you can't see. So people think they're part of the earth, but what about the world you can't see?

I ask:

So ... are we a part of the world, or the earth?

One student, Leo, replies:

People are parts of worlds they don't even know they're a part of.

Jacqueline adds:

The ecosystem of this classroom is easier than the one at home.

Their responses are wise, real, and poetic. After this discussion it is difficult to return to a traditional definition of an *ecosystem* that does not, in some ways, also mention broken connections and closed pathways.

Outside, we stand under the cherry trees, looking up at the pink blossoms blowing in the breeze. They write from the five senses, and recall the texture and colours of the soft petals, landing on the hard cement. They make notes about the trunk. What does a petal landing sound like? The notes will form the basis for further writing.

We walk around the neighbourhood, observing mud puddles, their local water bodies. For grade six students in East Vancouver, the Pacific Ocean is, for most of them, far away. We observe the birds, flowers, and raptors. I invite the students to take out their notebooks, and begin making lists of all they see and feel in this short walk. This will form the basis for their writing "odes" to the connected elements of nature.

I ask the students, "What does your heart say?"

The students look away. I gently invite the students to walk around and find a small rock, on the ground ... one that "speaks" to them. The students take the task seriously. Only rocks that speak will be chosen.

We gather in a circle, and try the exercise again; each student holds a small rock in one of their hands.

What does your heart say? I ask again. This time, they begin to write.

Eagle

Oh eagle

You are so brave

You are not a slave

And you are free

Oh eagle I hope you

can fly away as free

as you can see I am

free

Ode to Water

*Oh water
you are wet
and you are good too
drink, oh water, I
hope there is more
water to drink.*

Ode to Birds

*Oh birds
you are the flow
and you are the sound
in the air
oh birds I hope
you fly and chirp every day
for the flow of
life to shine.*

Ode to Oxygen

*Oh oxygen!
You are precious
in my lungs
and you are
plenty, Oh oxygen!
I hope you will
never
DIE.*

Our writing this day emerges through a combination of experiential environmental learning and poetic awareness. We learn the wondrous facts of an ecosystem, and more; we locate ourselves within the ecosystem as connected observers. Stepping out of the role of critic in an observer culture, the students begin to embrace the unknown and, with inquiring minds, they create poetic artifacts that permit authentic connections to local ecosystems.

When I am with the students, I am in poetic observation with small rocks, sticks, twigs, and insects. I share my awe; I share my poems and stories. I kneel to the ground, with them. It is a bit difficult to describe this process of earth-relation, yet the outdoor student poems speak for the power of outdoor teaching. Outside, the environment becomes the teacher and, with the students, I am ready to witness and record. Outdoors, a teacher joins students as a learner, a writer, a witness.

Their teacher speaks of the pride and freedom the students gain in writing poems about their neighbourhood. She says, “What is happening here ... is huge.” And yet, in the doing, it seems small (and good).

Vanada Shiva (2005) says:

... small-scale responses become necessary because large-scale structures and processes are controlled by the dominant power. The small becomes powerful in rebuilding living cultures. ... The large is small in terms of the range of people’s alternatives. The small is large where unleashing people’s energies are concerned. (p. 183)

I am able to better understand Shiva’s words in the context of writing poetry with children in their neighbourhood. When surrounded by the larger stories of the dominant social and economic power, small-scale responses, even small-scale awareness, become a means of survival.

Poet Jeffrey Yang (2011) speaks of the value of poetry in our time:

Over the centuries, the human beast has consistently trampled the planet’s nature out of nature so that today, the scale of the destruction of nature has become a moral imperative of the most crucial order. In this present of our own making and unmaking, perhaps a nature poem could, on one level, help focus our attention into an awareness of thought and need—as deeds follow the heels of words, each uniting the others. (p. xvi)

Teaching eco-poetry workshops in inner cities in Vancouver, San Francisco, Detroit, and San Bernardino, I have never failed to meet a group of youth who would enthusiastically engage in poetic observation. The work also convinces me that, whether in the inner city, the garden, the clear-cut, or Loon Lake, an eco-mind can arrive through careful, empathetic observation.

Primarily, I enter the schools as a poet. I share poetry, and love of place. It may be the lack of an externally imposed pedagogical technique that frees the students to wander, and, to wonder, in hope. Outdoors, students discover their own, unique, immeasurable pathways.

As Wendell Berry (2012) suggests: “It may be that when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work and when we no longer know which way to go, we have begun our real journey” (cited in Nepo, 2012, p. 247).

A poetic perspective is a call to less, not more. Such a perspective may, outwardly, look like “nothing.” It is an anti-heroic tale, an exhortation to the plain and the real, which prompts the doorway to the imagination. Such a perspective brings an open-ended call to see beyond limited, pre-prescribed perspectives; it is a call to the struggle, to the sorrowful, to the joyful, and, to the nothing less than real.

The deer in the clear-cut called me to ecological witness and observation, and back to Loon Lake. The deer told me that it is possible to find a way through, even when that way is invisible to the eye.

One never knows when the world will present itself. I tell my students to keep a pad and pencil at all times.

Question: Recall a time in the natural environment when you were beyond words. How will you share that experience with others?

Roots of Activism

[S]chool isn't supposed to be a polite form of incarceration, but a portal to the wider world. (Louv, 2007, para 10)

The work of counter-narratives begins with action; with the physical work, the digging, the walking. Action and activism shape meaning in an ongoing process. As time passes, and I review the meaning that may have emerged from these projects, I learn something quite different each time. The goal of this work now is to write the narratives of actions that will help the larger work of environmental education also grow and change. That work involves acknowledging that the intellectual role of environmental education has long included both social and ecological needs.

In the prison notebooks, Antonio Gramsci (1971) says: “all can be intellectuals, but not all have the social function of intellectuals in society” (p. 9). As the environmental crisis calls us to become public intellectuals, we might ask: What are we working for? How do we tell our stories? How do our actions support equality among all beings?

In 1966 Haida Chief Skidegate of the Traditional Circle of Elders said: “People are equal partners with the plants and animals, not their masters who exploit them” (Traditional Circle of Elders and Youth, 1989, para 7).

When we begin with the heart, we begin from pain, as learners, environmentalists, educators, and as human beings. Healing the earth will involve a healing, both in the world and in ourselves.

The principles of social and ecological justice, empathy, care, and compassion are integral to environmental education. As Cuban poet, educator, farmer, journalist, and activist Jose Marti (1853-1895) points out, there is really no escaping the connection between learning, labour, and love: “Education—who can deny it? —is above all a labor of infinite love” (Marti, 1878/1979, p. 74).

Environmental educators often know one another through shared values and passions that fuel the work. In the practices of environmental education, we have trained ourselves to see, to know authenticity, and to note the justifications for ecologically unjust resource extraction. Yet, we also remember the way that nature speaks, and the dreams we hold for one another.

Environmental activist Lierre Keith (2011) moves the dialogue beyond individual success, and even beyond purely personal healing, to urge us toward a collective sense of wonder, responsibility, resistance, and possibility, because “the facts are not conducive to an open-hearted sense of wonder” (p. 25).

As a poet, when I engage with groups of environmental educators, sharing ideas, shovels, food, activist activities, and faith, I see the heart of our work. I remember the values that bring us together, and all that drew us to Loon Lake and to other gatherings in the first place. It is the same impetus that inspires poets. When William Wordsworth (1802, n.p.) wrote:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky

he was reporting a sense of pure joy in the natural environment. This has always been the role of the poet: to report from the heart, and, by reporting, to create counter-narrative. When we look and listen with poetic hearts, we find new reasons for treating the earth with care. In *The One Straw Revolution* (1978), Masanobu Fukuoka called for an expanded role for poetic counter-narrative, where “artists and poets must also help to decide whether or not it is permissible to use chemicals in farming, and what the results of using even organic fertilizers might be” (p. 28).

Loon Lake Diary, Day Two

At Loon Lake, I am at home in my birthplace of British Columbia. The rocks and water have filled my imagination since I was small. I recall the beautiful, red, intelligent, mysterious, and sacred salmon I learned to swim beside in the depths of Howe Sound. Early on, I turned to poetry as a way of telling the story, of taking inventory, of sharing with others in ecological witness.

At Loon Lake, I hear a human call for a commonist manifesto. It is both a call and a cry for equal community that includes the human and non-human.

Mist continues to roll in from the lake.

I hear ideas debated about our approach to environmental education. There is tension and argument as we try to find the best path, the right way, the ultimate answer. Instead of more, I also sense a call to less.

I remember the water. The mist. Am I better than a salmon?

The salmon knows, when it goes home, to shed its skin. In the rivers of British Columbia, at a certain time of year, the salmon pass away. The decomposition returns nutrients of nitrogen to the lakes, rivers, and oceans. The salmon lives, to end. Its shell, instead of being fed by the world, humbly becomes food for the world. From there, it is carried.

The salmon is sacred and poetic, because its path is plain and continuous. The salmon continues; paradoxically, it becomes *more*, by becoming less.

Poetry permits the sharing of awe for these wondrous red rainbows I learned to swim with.

Poetry is the song that connects humans to the earth. Poetry is a language that brings eco-literate understanding in a way that leaves the lightest of foot-

prints. Poetry is a way of expressing our love and longing for nature in a way that speaks in solidarity with nature.

Poetry, no matter where it goes, remains. Sometimes a poem is found, and carried, in currents.

Far Fetched

*At water's edge
I caught a glimpse:
tail, back, head.*

*I went
struck out
across an empty ocean.
Just I, the salty sea.
Were you there?
Were we?*

*Go home,
says the water.
From a total standstill
I must turn.*

*Back at the edge
again, a glimpse.
Back at the edge
again, I went.*

Question: "If salmon could take on human manifestation, what would they do?" (Jensen, 2011, p. 15).

An Ideal Environmental Education

Using our eco-minds, we soon realize that in our complex human ecology, many of the most important causal interactions may not immediately meet the eye. (Moore-Lappé, 2011, para 7).

Life is embedded in interrelation, and in intimate knowing with others, which brings both rootedness and adaptation. Rachel Carson (1962) expressed this clearly in *Silent Spring*, at the beginning of Chapter Two, The Obligation to Endure: "The history of life on earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings" (p. 5). Carson thought like an ecosystem;

at a time when the majority did not question the use of chemicals in farm crops, she saw the lasting impact on the larger system. With a clear eco-mind, free from illusion, she spoke the truth to a non-questioning world.

A life rooted in care, community, and principled action, a life that strives to equally love and to be a companion to the world and to all living creatures, is also a practical way of living in the world. Here, the words of Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2010) ring true: “The ordered wisdom of nature inside the global forest still stands tall. It is the majesty that beckons us to keep still and behold a beating heart in a feathered breast. The forest forecasts our future in every breath it takes ...” (p. 52).

I wrote this paper because I saw the deer in the clear-cut. It was a moment that called for poetry. Without the deer, what matters enough? This paper is an invitation to consider the poetic possibilities: the simple, and the plain, where the sacred may present itself. A poetic perspective of the land potentially creates a new stance, a new attitude, a new approach, inclusive of imagination and possibility. Poetry brings immeasurable knowledge and new forms of engagement that begin with the small, and the real, on the ground.

Why else do we flock to Loon Lake?

In Canada, our landscapes, our natural resources and traditional ways of life are disappearing as fast as our awareness and memory of those landscapes. Understanding for those who traditionally live on the land, in both human and animal form, requires empathy, witness, and poetic observation.

To me, “Dark Matters,” the theme of this journal, signify all that is unseen, untouched, or unheard; a dark matter might be something, or someone, rendered invisible, in plain sight.

Poetry is one pathway that brings light.

Question: The call to consider Dark Matters is also a call to see and tell an uncomfortable story. In a world of excess, of artifice, of greed, how do we recognize Dark Matter?

Never Ending: Loon Lake Found Poetry

In the session I eventually lead at Loon Lake, tentatively called, “Something about Nature and Nature,” my goal is to go outside. I think of the deer. The clear-cut. I think about being lost on the first day.

I am inspired by Aldo Leopold’s field exercises in locally focused teaching where he invited students to walk to a portion of the forest, then write an inventory of all they saw (Tallmadge, 1996). We will adapt this exercise and make a poem from a list of things we see in one small area in nature.

Naming becomes the focus of the poetry session. The deer. The path. The pieces. The parts.

Soon the workshop participants are scattered around the grounds on the edge of Loon Lake. They pick their spots. We write for about 15 minutes, then stand in a circle and read our lists, as poetry. Yes, the lists magically turn into poems. We smile at each other as we read. Why? Because every poem is true. Everything in the poems are things we just found, here and now.

Vicki Kelly offers to play her traditional flutes to call us back from our poems. It seems a perfect way to end a poem, that brings a new voice and new beginning.

This is radical action. We make ordinary spaces sacred.

For my poem, in a space not far from the lake, I look up and see a telephone pole. A fallen bird nest sits by my feet. The nest has been here so long, the twigs and bits of twine once gathered by hopeful birds have returned to the moss below, and, amazingly, have taken root and begun to grow. It is as if someone has planted the nest here, thinking a poet might come along and take note.

I look around. Did someone put this here?

Telephone Pole

*A bird
nest
fallen
long ago from the telephone pole
now
grows
on
moss
below;
re-rooted.
The flute
calls*

Question: When was your last moment in nature that called for a story, a picture, or a poem? How will you bring it to light?

Notes on Contributor

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