

In Search of the Eco-Teacher: Public School Edition

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Abstract

This paper uses an innovative building-less Canadian public elementary school and its accompanying large-scale research project to consider the characteristics that might be required of a teacher interested in working in an emergent, environmental, place- and community-based experiential public school setting. The six characteristics considered here—lateral thinking, holding the paradox, reflection, rhythm and shape, attention, and mediation of decolonization and re-inhabitation—are understood through having observed, interviewed, and interacted with the teachers at the school for the last 18 months and through extension. That is, these characteristics are offered not solely because the teachers possess them, but also from coming to understand where the teachers are being less than successful in their mandate and theorizing out towards the desired. The paper begins by setting a frame around the school project, and then working through the six characteristics that we are all still actively trying to achieve.

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur une école publique canadienne, progressive, sans lieu fixe ainsi qu'un projet de recherche à grande échelle afin de réfléchir aux caractéristiques requises pour les enseignantes et enseignants intéressés à travailler dans une école publique émergente, environnementale, basée sur une communauté et l'expérience. Les six caractéristiques examinées ici soient la pensée latérale, soutenir un paradoxe, la réflexion, le rythme et la forme, l'attention et le processus de décolonisation, sont compris à travers nos observations, entrevues et interactions avec les enseignantes et enseignants de l'école sur une période de dix-huit mois avec extensions. Ces caractéristiques sont soulignées non seulement parce que les enseignantes et enseignants les possèdent mais aussi pour arriver à une compréhension des moments moins réussis et à une théorisation en vue du résultat désiré. Cet article présente d'abord le cadre de recherche basé sur le projet scolaire, ensuite il présente les six caractéristiques que nous cherchons encore à atteindre.

Keywords: environment, teacher education, eco-teacher, environmental schools

Background

In February 2010, the Community University Research Alliance (special Environmental Call), a branch of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, agreed to fund our research project: "Aligning Education and Sustainability in Maple Ridge, BC: A Study of Place-Based Ecological Schooling."

In our proposal, we (myself and co-director Mark Fettes) aimed to establish an environmental learning centre beginning with a publicly funded Kindergarten through Grade 7 eco-“school.” We put *school* in quotation marks because while the project would meet provincial public education requirements, we envisioned that it would look and feel different. In November 2010, the board of trustees voted unanimously to go ahead with the project. The “school” opened in September 2011 with three mixed-age “classes” and a total of 60 students between the ages of five and twelve. The “school” has since expanded to include a fourth class and another 25 students. There is no school building, though we do have a yurt. As a result, the vast majority of learning occurs outdoors. (See: <http://es.sd42.ca/>)

The underlying intention of the research is to determine how, or indeed whether, the prevailing culture can be transformed through public schooling. Can a single public elementary school become the locus of cultural change from, in this case, an underlying anti-environmental, economically exploitative one, to an as-yet-undefined more ecological version?

The teachers and the community as a whole would need support and direction with such a challenging new idea. To this end, a small group of researchers and the school administrator developed a set of principles that might serve to guide the change process (Blenkinsop, 2012). The hope was that the school would find teachers who were committed to this vision and who also possessed a range of skills that would support them, and their learners, into a more ecological worldview and into a culture in which education, community, and the more-than-human world intertwined for the mutual benefit of all.

Locating these teachers was challenging for many reasons. Logistically, teachers had to be selected from the body of teachers who had contracts with the school district. Theoretically, the teachers also had to be committed to the vision of the school, and willing to align their teaching practice with it. The coupling of these particular talents, along with a late hiring process and an incomplete sense of the skills that these “eco-teachers” required, led to the hiring of some willing and interesting, if at times “in over their heads,” teachers.

The characteristics listed below begin with some of the qualities that teachers at the “school” appear to need. When a quality is noted,¹ the research team considers how and where these abilities might be encouraged. It is a very real challenge to move out of the traditions of Canadian public education and into a new, more ecological view of the world as yet ill-defined. Thus, although this paper is focused specifically on an emerging set of characteristics needed for teachers committed to an ecological culture, it also takes account of our present-day culture that is its antithesis.

The remainder of this paper will offer a summary of some² of the skills we now consider important for a teacher in a Kindergarten-Grade 7 school mandated to teach a provincial curriculum, while simultaneously pursuing a curriculum that is place-based, community-based, emergent, outdoor, environmental, and

comprised of multi-aged groupings. Its vision is not only to offer the provincial curriculum in a new way, but also to change the culture of school and potentially the larger culture as well. Most of the qualities we present have been developed through observation of what the teachers are already doing, together with questions about what might be missing in current practice—questions that may be asked at any moment in the day-to-day activities of the school. The emerging characteristics that we explore are contextual; they are not intended to be generalized, although it is likely that most environmental, placed-based, experiential educators working in the public education systems of the north and west will readily identify with them.

Six Characteristics of an Eco-teacher

[a] Lateral Thinking and a Dirty Sock

This section begins with a challenge. Imagine a dirty sock or, better yet, go outside and get your own socks dirty. Now, while holding the sock in your mind or hand, imagine how you might use it as a point of departure for a 75-minute lesson on advanced calculus, or for a month-long unit in social studies in Grade 8, or again the Grade 2 year-long program. If you can use a dirty sock to inspire and advance your curriculum and its learning outcomes, you are certainly able to meet curricular obligations starting from whatever you might encounter outdoors, be it a giant old-growth Western Red Cedar, a pile of sand left by a construction crew, or the wheelbarrow you use to move it.

This test does not conclusively determine your suitability as an eco-teacher, but it does indicate the importance of lateral thinking in the eco-educator's repertoire. If you are able to make new connections, discover new metaphors, and get your students engaged and excited by this process, whether it be calculus, social studies, or Grade 2, and whether you start from a dirty sock or a wheelbarrow, you betray the aptitude and lateral thinking necessary in an eco-teacher. It is important to note that we have observed in our work with the teachers that there is a distinction between believing that you are working laterally while meeting curriculum requirements, and actually achieving both potentially conflicting goals, as well as the third essential goal: that of reaching all your students. Lateral thinking is easier said than done.

So what are the key ingredients within lateral thinking? There are at least two, and it is in their overlap, which reveals a significant shift in the epistemology, that eco-educating occurs. The two to be discussed here are an unconstrained curiosity and a flexibility of mind.

The first ingredient we discovered was a specific kind of curiosity. After more than a year of work at the school, the teachers have emerged as interested and interesting people, inquisitive about the world. Yet these same teachers seem to be ill-prepared when it comes to supporting the interests of their students

and challenging the overall nature of schooling. The reason for this is, I believe, related to the kind of curiosity they evince, which may have been acquired from years of exposure within conventional schooling,³ and which might be called the “curiosity of the tourist.” A typical tourist might read all the signboards posted at the local park, enjoy the ranger-talks on various subjects, and watch the historical films offered in the park’s visitor centre. But that is where the curiosity ends. The tourist does not normally seek out new experiences beyond what is readily accessible. This is a curiosity that happily consumes what is presented, but tends not to venture beyond the signposts. Despite an active interest in its surroundings, there is a deep passivity to this curiosity, a lack of awe that inspires and drives one to look further, go further afield, or seek explanations to questions raised by the information provided. Such curiosity might be described as a characteristic of the “domesticated learner,”⁴ the keen public school student, adept at satisfying the teachers, but not able to pursue independent courses of learning.

The second kind of curiosity is “wilder” (Smith, 2007), undomesticated, less constrained. We move from a metaphor of tourist to one of seeker. Seekers will pursue ideas, ask further questions, and venture to the limits of their understanding, and then beyond. They are the ones who head into the backcountry and bywaters of knowledge, who read independently, take risks, pursue their interests, and seek out knowledge. It is their ability to ask deeper questions that make them ideally suited to inspire the curiosity of individualized learners. They are curious themselves but, more importantly, they see themselves as being capable of solving intellectual problems and finding explanations to almost any question that might interest them or their students, and they derive enjoyment doing it. When such qualities occur in combination with that fundamental quality of a superb teacher—an interest in the learning of others—seekers are able to partner with learners, help them to formulate questions and look for answers, and to understand what it feels like to really come to know something.

This wilder curiosity must be complemented, however, by a second component of lateral thinking. This component involves intellectual flexibility, a versatility that makes connections between and amongst things that are not readily apparent in more direct ways. This kind of flexibility tends to be characterized by such things as sophistication with metaphor and nuance, but it also implies the imaginative awareness of the potential of everyday things, people, and events: the weather, people passing on the street, machines working, even that dirty sock. From the sock there is a connection to cotton and to black slavery, also to geography, while dirt opens to possibility of its analysis and scientific method, as well as to issues of hygiene. Such flexibility allows one to expand from a single lesson to an integrated unit, to encourage students to go from a more centralized universalizing learning to the kind of independent learning sought at this school. This ability to think laterally appears to be an essential skill for teachers in the constantly evolving curriculum of our ecological school,

whose final form is inherently unknowable, but less subject to the constraints of the regular school system.

These two aspects of lateral thinking raise an important epistemological distinction. The eco-teacher requires an epistemology of interconnection such that one understands and experiences knowledge as a vast web of inter-relationships. If one were to assume that knowledge were static, reduceable to chunks, like a wall made brick by brick, then lateral thinking would be eliminated and learning constrained. If, on the contrary, one believes that understanding is inter-relational, ambiguous, and complex, a fertile ground opens up.

The challenge for the teacher, as discussed in the next section, is to be able to find ways to attend to each child's interests and learning needs as well as those of the class as a whole, and also to bear in mind the requirements of the Ministry's curriculum and the learning potential of the more-than-human world as co-teacher (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2010). This is no mean feat in the best of scenarios, but it is almost impossible without the flexibility of mind provided by a carefully nurtured wild curiosity. The ability not only to remain open to what is offered by the world (Creeping Snowberry & Blenkinsop, 2010), but also to notice that the world is offering multiple opportunities for learning at each moment, is crucial for the eco-educator. Just as any object, even our dirty sock, can be linked to any discipline of thought, learners, with all of their differences, backgrounds, and needs, can be linked to a particular moment or object of learning. Lateral thinking and flexibility are essential qualities in the teacher that link curriculum to the world, and personalize the experience of the world for learners.

(b) The Paradox: Anticipating the Unexpected

At any moment during the school day a myriad of spontaneous learning moments emerge. Eco-educators can learn to recognize them, and then learn to recognize which of the many possible trails to pursue. Among the possibilities that occur, those worth following up are those best suited to the teachers' own abilities and imaginations; that meet their plans for the day, week, or year; that fulfill the anticipated outcomes of the centralized curriculum; and that meet the needs of their particular students. Each of the qualities mentioned is linked to the others; this ability to make use of unexpected opportunities for learning is a skill that is particularly relevant to lateral thinking.

A teacher in this kind of unpredictable but fertile environment needs to prepare in a very different way from their counterparts in a more conventional setting, but prepare they must. They must be fully acquainted with the learning outcomes required for the various disciplines and grades they teach, but they must also come to know the learning needs of the entire community, not only within the school, but also those of the families and the local community. They also need to constantly review and renew their sensitivity to moments and places where learning might occur. Such a concept of education necessitates

an understanding of who students are. They are rounded people, multi-faceted, bringing with them their own talents and their own social and cultural context, while at the same time in the process of growing. Teachers need paradoxically to be sensitive to students' incomplete completeness, and recognize both the abilities and the potential of each child, the extent of her or his current knowledge and future interests, and provide the needed support and challenge. All of this happens within the context of the group that is also interacting and growing, and a teacher who is changing and re-thinking practice.

This kind of teaching challenges the educator to be more authentic and involved than appears necessary or desirable in our traditional approach to pedagogy. It also does not readily resort to testing, to the all-too-common categorization of students: "x is a kinesthetic learner," "y is a bright child," "z is a behavioural problem." The goal is that the teacher is able to approach any situation that emerges and, having done the preparation with regards to each student, to the place where the teaching/learning is occurring, and to the curriculum, and having carefully nurtured that curiosity of the world and the flexibility to respond to it, to make use of that situation to generate learning. It takes an incredible amount of preparation to be spontaneous. Spontaneity is not about creating lessons that target particular objectives, but about preparing oneself to build on pedagogically fecund moments when and as they arise.

Given the applicability of these concepts to any teacher, the question as to how the consideration given to a learner in the eco-school might differ from that in a regular school might well be asked. Surely the call we make for the consideration of the student as a three-dimensional learner, for a curriculum that ought to be personalized, and for an understanding of the students' families and communities is something that few teachers in the modern west would, in theory, contest. However, the importance which the teachers in our eco-"school" assign to the self-critical and constantly reflective act of teaching is fundamental to, and supported by, the school's particular focus. Four reasons are given below:

- In the natural world, which does not obey the rules of rational human design, unexpected situations are the norm. With a curriculum rooted in the natural world, the eco-educator needs to be able to respond to the unexpected.
- The school, in its very design, is committed to ongoing, reciprocal interaction with its surrounding human community, so that the community is involved in both the learning activities and evaluation process.
- Since the more-than-human world is integral to the very concept and purpose of the "school," eco-teachers must always remain aware of all its influence on learning and be thinking about how they might share that insight with their students.
- Some students who come to our school are not easily accommodated in regular public schools. This does not mean that they are necessarily students with "special needs," just that they are less at ease in the more regulated,

less “natural” environment of the traditional system. It is especially necessary to develop individualized curricula for these students.

The ever-present awareness of the ecological and communal context of our school enables and encourages teachers to individualize learning programs and respond spontaneously to opportunities, sometimes unexpected, to generate learning.

(c) Reflection: Evaluating as an Eco-Teacher

One of the biggest rewards and challenges for the teachers at the eco-school has to do with their ability to work with the diverse group that comes together when the educational process is identified as being place- and community-based. The teachers have to find ways to work with each other, with community members, and with the more-than-human world, in ways that they previously never dreamed of. Simple things like constantly checking in with others around the plans for the day, the successes and progress of individual students, and the development of robust assessment tools are challenges in and of themselves, but the teachers must also maintain a hyperactive sense of awareness and thoughtfulness with regard to their changing eco-practice, their merging of practice with the more-than-human world, and their efforts to transform culture with all its related nuances and embedded metaphors. Thus, reflection becomes a critical element of the life and practice of the eco-teacher. The areas of reflection and the ways they are enacted might change as new eco-habits and ways of being establish themselves over time, but at this stage of our development, deliberate reflection is fundamental to the process of assessment as described below.

For the sake of this discussion, reflection has been separated into five different areas, overlapping and inter-linked, and all contributing in necessary ways to the dynamic practice of the eco-teacher.

The first area of reflection focuses on the situation of the teacher herself or himself, and involves questions and self-examination related to: (a) the specifics of one’s immediate practice (e.g., What am I doing? Why? Why am I choosing to do *x* and not *y* right now? How does what I am doing connect to the curricular mandates?); (b) one’s present context (e.g., What do I know about this place? What can this place or community help us to learn? How am I deepening my own understanding and connection to this context?); and (c) one’s personal life (e.g., How am I changing? What are my strengths and limitations with regard to the principles and values espoused? What more do I need to learn to do this job really well?).

The second area of reflection focuses on the students, individually and as a group (e.g., Who are these students as people and learners? What more have I learned about them today? What learning did I witness today? How did I document that learning? And, where does it make sense to go from here?). The third area, building on the first two, is a co-reflection with others whereby many of

the same questions from areas one and two are asked, but the answers are gathered from the community, thereby expanding the understanding of an individual teacher. This involvement of a larger group, including parents, teachers, the research team, and the students themselves allows the eco-teacher to learn from others, to plan with others, to better understand the students through the eyes of others, and to better make sense of themselves, the school, the place, and the project as a result of reflecting with others.

The fourth area of reflection focuses on the presence of the more-than-human world within the educational practice, the school, and the community. This is where the eco-teacher moves beyond the areas of reflection that are part of simply good teaching. In some ways it is an extension of the third area, but we have found that it requires its own category as it is easily overlooked. This eco-reflection involves being able to actually hear from the nonhuman and includes questions such as: What does the nonhuman world think of what I and we are doing? Have we been successful in integrating the natural world? How did we learn from and involve the more-than-human today? And, in what ways can and did the place make a difference in our practices?

The fifth and final area of reflection operates at a more meta-reflective level and focuses upon the situation of the larger community, the goals of the community, and the successes and failures related to the larger conversation of cultural change. Without this kind of reflection, the entire project of change would be for naught. It is here that the teacher might pose questions about what is supporting or getting in the way of this larger project of cultural change: What kinds of traditions, metaphors, systems, and boundaries are establishing themselves in the school's culture, and are those appropriate? What infrastructure, both physical and psychological, of the conventional school system supports or inhibits the work of the eco-teacher? What kinds of changes might we need to foster in our collective progress to inspire the cultivation of a truly ecological approach to education and way of being?

(d) Rhythm, Shape, and Structure

In the conventional school, much of the organizing, management, and direction is performed by the building itself, the routines, and daily rituals. Walls create boundaries, bells trigger response behaviour, the arrangement of desks indicates the relationship of power, and these together shape the actions and thoughts of students and teachers alike. Take these things away and a potent, if unrecognized, set of teaching aids disappears.

For the eco-educator, working in a "school" with no school building and, as much as possible, in an outdoor and relatively natural setting, the challenge is how to fulfill curricular requirements and care for the learning of students, and how to find ways to engage students in learning when none of the most obvious physical and regulatory supports are available. Part of this is about locating and creating a rhythm, to give a shape to each day and week, reflecting the interests

of the students, making use of the place where the class is being conducted, and being ready to respond to those unknown variables such as weather or unexpected learning moments. The box of the conventional school and classroom limits children, prescribes behaviours, and exerts a controlling influence that in and of itself subdues their spirit. When the walls are removed, young students will often express themselves in wild activity,⁵ so the teacher needs to find a way to bring shape and rhythm and guide the students as they learn how to both express and contain themselves at the same time.

Thus, eco-teachers need to develop a set of skills that are, in the regular school system, under-developed due to the imperative of the building, the imposition of routine and regulation. They need to plan and structure their days without the support of these external influences, assist students in finding ways to settle themselves, to engage in the discipline of learning, to allow themselves the time to observe carefully and think about what they have seen or felt.

Weather will affect students' moods. A day of constant drizzle will dampen enthusiasm, while bright sunshine can raise energy levels. But it is sensitivity to place and responding to it that is of utmost importance, learning to recognize and value the rhythms and appropriate use of different spaces, particularly natural spaces. There are areas for the release of energy, and others where quietness is called for, places for reflection and others for wonder. Learning to be aware of and sensitive to one's surroundings is fundamental to environmental understanding and the development of an ecological culture. Teachers need to develop these skills for themselves, but also encourage and support students as they learn the languages of the places they inhabit, and develop sensitivity to the natural world around them. Such teaching is no easy task, requiring not only flexibility but also rigorous direction, in its way as strict as the routine and regulation of the traditional school. As Abram (1997) says, the teacher must find ways to help students "breathe the day" and even to allow themselves to be breathed in turn.

[e] Attend, Engage, Attend, Trust, Attend, Risk, and Attend

Together the qualities we group together as *engage, trust, risk, and attend* might be called an orientation to teaching for the eco-teacher. Each is a pretty standard educational idea, but taken together they can significantly influence a teacher's practice.

To attend requires that eyes, ears, and senses are open at all times. This includes watching the students and the community, being aware of as much as possible at all times, and listening to what is said, not said, heard, and unheard. Because things are happening at all times, one never knows when an educational moment will present itself or when a valuable piece of information will appear to help a teacher better understand a student. At the eco-school this continues to be a challenge in part, and interestingly, because of historical union rules. Teachers are used to having "breaks" when they can withdraw into lounges at

recess and at lunch, and yet these are often the most fertile times for witnessing student interactions.

To engage is to allow oneself to immerse completely in the place and the project, to be aware of the need to do things differently, to recognize when one is lapsing into old habits and to work at changing them. The goal is to be fully present, because in this kind of school the teacher finds him/herself at the centre of a web whose threads are not only students but also place, parents, community, curricula, and life.

Risk and trust are vitally important; the teacher must be able to trust the students to locate themselves, to engage in learning, while also being ready to try new approaches, to admit not knowing, to never get complacent, to wonder, and to explore new areas of learning. Finally the teacher must accept the more-than-human world as an active participant in the process. There is more going on here than we can ever know.

(f) Mediating Decolonization and Re-Inhabitation

In a previous article (Blenkinsop, 2012) it was suggested that those involved in a process of cultural change must possess, to borrow from Foucault, a “hyperactive pessimism.” But for eco-teachers this constant questioning of the status quo is not enough. In addition to a state of constant alertness, in which they recognize the anti-environmental aspects of culture, they must also find ways to help students recognize those aspects and provide practical alternatives. This leads to further questioning and adjustment as the layers of colonization, including environmental,⁶ are peeled away and the teacher and community develop a more complete picture of the culture towards which they aspire. The educator must be developing a set of eco-lenses, however inadequate, in order to continuously “decolonize” (Greenwood, 2004) from current western attitudes to the natural environment, and to “re-inhabit” the places, moments, curriculum, pedagogy, community, and themselves with a new vision.

These concepts of decolonization and re-inhabitation have become important touchstones within the field. Greenwood suggests that one cannot simply re-inhabit the world in a more eco-friendly way without first decolonizing the more-than-human world. Nature has long been seen as lesser-than and suffered degradation at the hands of humans, an ongoing systematic destruction that might be characterized as oppression and, as with any attempt to overcome colonization, the oppressors must come to grips with their own flawed vision and systems that continue to maintain inequity. Humans need to recognize their role in this destructive process, seek forgiveness,⁷ and find a new relationship with the natural world.

Greenwood and other interpreters (Smith, 2008; Stevenson, 2008) suggest that there is a two-step process. One must first decolonize, and then begin the process of re-inhabitation. However, as Garrard (2010) has pointed out, there appears to be an interpretive danger whereby students engage solely in the first

step and become indoor critical eco-theorists who have no connection to the more-than-human world. Our experience at the eco-school suggests something entirely different.

A typical example might serve to clarify our concepts of decolonization and re-habitation. The children at the “school” are excitedly building a fort village. As imaginative buildings appear, social structures and relationships begin to emerge within the group. But then you may notice that there is growing discontent over the way the older students are gravitating towards a crude, exploitative economic model, autocratic rule, and even a kind of military regime. In a place where sticks and string are valued, and those good at lashing and tying knots are given high status, the students are showing signs of some troublesome “root metaphors” (Bowers, 1997) reminiscent of our present culture.

There is no single, simple reaction to such a situation. A teacher is going to have to engage the students in a discussion about concepts of wealth and its distribution, about governance and the use of power, about privilege and the potential rights of community members and the local natural residents, and so on. But, they are going to be building in the fort village again this afternoon, and the teacher must respond to all of the above and become a voice for decolonization and a mediator for possible versions of re-inhabitation simultaneously, as well.⁸

The analogy of a ship, representing the present-day world, might serve to illustrate the point. The ship is a giant tanker ploughing full-steam ahead, and we cannot simply jump overboard and swim ashore since there is no shore; the tanker is our world, our destiny. In order to change the world, to introduce a new vision, this tanker must be taken apart piece by piece, with each piece being replaced on site as the whole thing moves ahead. In this scenario, there is no dry-dock, there is no other ship, and there is no knowing for sure whether the replacement pieces are the correct ones. The point is that this moving, floating ship cannot be completely re-fitted, decolonized, and then later re-inhabited, the processes happen in a continual back and forth, decolonization in tandem with re-inhabitation. If too much is taken away at a time the ship acquires gaping holes and flounders. Furthermore, there is no complete sense of what it is that is being created, and most of the tools available are of the old system. There are possibilities and visions, but there is no blueprint for how to build an alternative ecologically-sensitive culture out of our current socio-economic values. Thus, the task, at this moment, is to evolve a way of looking and proceeding that will enable those involved to discern what of the old ship can be jettisoned, what saved, what restored, and whether the new parts are appropriate and consistent with the vision. As Plumwood (2002) has suggested, the view taken of the world determines what is given priority and what is not.

The important point to draw from this analogy of the ship is that the process of decolonization and re-inhabitation must, as in the example of the forts, be a constant back-and-forth, where even the smallest changes are re-assessed again and again. Working on little changes, making small adjustments in the light of

our vision, and then being willing to revise and re-evaluate: this is our mission. The teacher must be alert, acting as intermediary, refining her or his point of view—prepared for signs of colonization and ready to offer opportunities for re-inhabitation. And this process must be repeated continuously as ways of viewing the world gradually change and new metaphors prevail.

For the teachers at the eco-school, this process has been extremely challenging. It is hard work being constantly aware, transforming one's practice, and trying to develop a new set of values. But what has also emerged amongst the teachers, particularly those on the research team rather than those at the "school,"⁹ are what might be called nascent eco-intuitions; they are beginning to feel when things are heading in the right direction and when old patterns of thinking are occurring. For some, this process of immersion and their commitment to the project has, in fact, begun to change their worldview. It might be said that they are developing an eco-conscience.

Conclusion

Williams (2002), in response to Weston's paper entitled "What If Teaching Went Wild?" (Weston, 2002), describes, somewhat ornately, the teacher we have characterized above in our six categories.

It is in the mutuality of such nurturing that we can see Weston's redefinition of what it means to be a teacher: one who goes beyond being the "familiar fact purveyor;" one who is comfortable enough with her own animality to be able to reinvolve animality in her students; one who can share her totem with students; and one who must first herself "experience the human/other-than-human boundary as more permeable than our culture teaches us." In other words, Weston's model for wild teaching requires a certain kind of teacher who knows how to critique the present and who can simultaneously teach regeneration. If teaching were to go wild, this teacher would overcome anthropocentrism even as she practices humility and care. For such a teacher to flourish, the educational map might even capture more closely an ecologically embedded territory. (Williams, 2002, p. 55)

As is apparent, Williams is not only theorizing about these practices, but has had experience of the processes of change necessary for teachers to become "wild." It is also important to note, as we have indicated above, that this process of change is not easy. It implies a different orientation to the world as a result of living differently within and amongst the places and people we frequent. These changes may require not only the epistemological shift alluded to above, but also ontological and even metaphysical alterations that place the teacher at some distance from the mainstream. However, as is becoming more and more apparent, if at times change seems glacially slow, this may be achievable at the "school" through the concerted, ongoing work of a committed group of people, supported by an appreciative and active community and situated in a living and engaging place.

Notes

- ¹ The characteristics were noted, traced, discussed, and explored in various ways. Over the course of the project there has been a member of the research team present at the school almost every single day, and many of the involved researchers are skilled teachers in their own right. Most of these characteristics were first noted when a researcher wondered, and then recorded, about something a particular teacher might have done or not done in a particular situation. These questions were expanded through research team discussions, further observations, and interviews with teachers, eventually becoming the characteristics described here.
- ² It should be stated that this is not in any way a comprehensive list of characteristics. Another, given the range of what is being demanded, might be some combination of collaboration/co-creation/cooperation. Alas, as always, space is an issue.
- ³ There is an interesting complexification that might deserve further exploration between the intellectual curiosity discussed here and what might be physical curiosity. At the school there are several teachers who lean in the domesticated direction intellectually, and yet are much more wild in their physical curiosity. This includes things such as a real ability to act laterally around questions of building and being outdoors (e.g., fire-building, fort building, first-aid responses, making do with minimal equipment and resources, and tracking).
- ⁴ This parallels the kinds of descriptions of domestication that exist in the work of Evernden (1993) and Shepard (1998).
- ⁵ Please note that “wild” activity is not suggesting that students, if left to their own devices, are uncontrollable or do not use the cultural tools they have adopted to make sense of these new environments. Rather, it is that part of the culture of school is that when one is inside one sits fairly still, follows a fairly well-understood set of rules, and gets about the work of learning, whereas when one is outside (e.g., at recess, lunch, field trips to the park, even movement between classes in a high school), there is a more explosive/expansive freedom and that expansiveness needs to be re-understood as new norms are established in this new school environment. Thinking carefully about the space, about the version of structure sought, and about the rhythms of the place and students is important to this process.
- ⁶ There isn't the space here to explore this added concept of environmental colonization. Suffice it to say that there are many layers to this onion of decolonization (including, but not limited to, the colonization of Indigenous peoples and the colonization of the animals, plants, and places).
- ⁷ There is a Christian undertone that is not really intended. The history of forgiveness, however, seems to involve owning up to one's errors and then being given, through an act of forgiveness, the opportunity to (a) right that which has been done wrong, and (b) agree to not do the wrong again.

- ⁸ This fort village is a potentially incredibly rich discussion as it involves Indigenous and decolonization issues (e.g., Donald (2009), exploring the concept of forts, or Mignolo's (2010) challenges to post-colonial discussions), along with obvious questions about some of environmental education's tightly held beliefs with regard to the power of the natural world to overcome our cultural habits, but there simply isn't the space in this paper to do it justice. We are working to remedy that right now.
- ⁹ Only one of the teachers at the school is at times involved in the research, but many of the research team members are teachers in other places and they have noticed changes, as might be expected, in their own practices and intuitions.

Notes on Contributor

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