Transforming Existing Perceptions: Language as a Tool for Accessing the Ecological Self

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Abstract

The way we story our lives shapes the way we understand and experience the world. This paper draws on concepts from narrative therapy and examples of traditional wisdom to argue that an important step in recognizing our interdependence and co-extensive relationships with the more-than-human world is to introduce language that acknowledges non-human beings as subjects rather than objects. To frame experiential learning pathways that enter into wild pedagogies of nature, this paper will focus on two reflective touchstones: 1) agency and role of nature as co-teacher; and 2) locating the wild. By exploring the possibility of narratives that are co-created with the wild, we may expand our identification with the more-than-human world, opening us up to experiences of our own, more inclusive, ecological self.

Résumé

La manière dont nous concevons la trame de notre vie modèle notre compréhension et notre expérience du monde. Le présent article, s'inspirant des concepts de la thérapie narrative et d'exemples de sagesse traditionnelle, soutient que l'une des étapes importantes de la reconnaissance de notre interdépendance et de nos relations d'égal à égal avec le monde extrahumain est justement de faire appel à un langage qui considère les êtres non humains comme des sujets plutôt que des objets. Pour bien situer les voies d'apprentissage expérientiel qui cadrent avec les pédagogies de la nature, le présent article aborde principalement deux de ses pierres d'assise : 1) la capacité d'agir et le rôle de la nature comme co-enseignant; 2) la rencontre avec la nature. En explorant la possibilité de cocréer nos trames narratives avec la nature, nous nous sentirons plus proche du monde extrahumain, ce qui nous ouvrira à faire l'expérience de notre soi inclusif et écologique.

Keywords: ecological self, wild pedagogies, language, narrative, nature

Mots-clés : soi écologique, pédagogies de la nature, langage, trame narrative, nature

"Each of us knows in our bones that the world is not a machine"
(Drengson, 1995, p. 85).

The Need for Wild Pedagogies

The profound level of interconnectedness of humans with each other and with the more-than-human world has been brought into stark relief since the early months of 2020. Addressing complex problems such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, racism, mental health, overpopulation, sustainability, economic disparity, and the loss of biodiversity has often been undertaken through the highly specialized channels that characterize traditional education and research. However, the abovementioned problems are closely interconnected. Indeed, these issues may be understood as different aspects of one crisis, which is largely a crisis of how we have come to view the world and the narratives that ensue from this (Macy & Brown, 2014). Within this current milieu, my work as a clinical counsellor has made me increasingly aware of the need for a more integrative and experiential approach to psychological health.

As a psychotherapist, I have been brought into conversation with many young people who are able to speak candidly and with considerable insight about the problems they and their generation must address. Those faced with the task of tackling the converging and increasingly urgent crises in our society experience, understandably, a wide range of emotional responses. Many voice a sense of loss of hope for a predictable future and express frustration at systemic injustices that perpetuate oppression and environmental destruction. It is my sense that the modern Western perception of humans as lone actors who are surrounded by a world of objects has both contributed to, and continues to reinforce, many people's growing experiences of isolation and hopelessness. How might a renewed sense of interconnectedness, fostered by the recognition that we are part of the larger, conscious Earth community, shift our sense of self and transform the way we live our lives? As Macy and Brown (2014) maintain, a shift to a more unifying, life-sustaining story is ultimately necessary for human and planetary thriving.

One of the paths toward rediscovering a sense of interconnectedness with the more-than-human world is through wild pedagogies. Wild pedagogies is a practice that offers ways of envisioning relationships and ecological identity that appear new to many people; however, they are actually "old" modes of relationality that many of us in industrialized Western society must (re)discover (Morse et al., 2018). Entering into wild pedagogies requires a shift in habitual ways of thinking, including an invitation to be open to what the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1995) refers to as the ecological self. This sense of self expands beyond a narrow anthropocentric vision of the isolated ego, and beyond my identification with human relationships, to encompass all of life. Nurturing an ecological self facilitates the recognition that my own self-realization is dependent on the integrity and well-being of the living Earth (Devall, 1995; Seed

et al., 1988). Through wild pedagogies, I may begin to see myself as constituted by a web of relationships and to recognize myself as intimately connected and co-extensive with the world around me (Devall, 1995).

In fostering this sense of self, I increasingly see myself as "in, and of, nature from the very beginning of [myself]" (Næss , 1995, p. 82). This awareness of interconnectedness undermines the dominant expansionist worldview and colonial thinking that have operated to exploit people and the environment based on a subject–object relationships (Taylor & Segal, 2015). Indeed, I have begun to discover that a rejection of the human-in-environment framework that has dominated industrialized society has allowed me to begin to enter into what is sometimes referred to as a kincentric worldview (Turner, 2005). Internationally renowned ethnobotanist, Nancy Turner explains that a kincentric worldview can be understood as a way of seeing all of Earth's beings as family in a variety of forms, where there is no sharp divide between people, plants, animals, water, and land (2014). In turn, all natural systems are seen as having a level of sentience, and are related to each other—like humans within a family (Turner, 2014). Connecting with my ecological self and embracing a kincentric worldview may be antithetical to current mainstream society's concept of selfhood, but it has deep roots in many Indigenous cosmologies and spiritual traditions around the world (Turner, 2014). Wild pedagogies is a promising tool to apply to the work of rediscovering the interdependence of, and sense of kinship with, the more-than-human world.

Exploring Reflective Touchstones

An international community of scholars has been working to establish six touchstones for engaging with wild pedagogies (Jickling, 2018). While the overlap between these touchstones is substantial, this paper will focus on two of them to provide a framework and rationale for introducing concepts from narrative therapy into this conversation. These two touchstones are: 1) agency and role of nature as co-teacher; and 2) locating the wild (Jickling et al., 2018). By exploring the powerful potential of narratives, as well as their practical applications, I will highlight how these touchstones can be deepened through creating and sharing different uses of language and stories.

Agency and Role of Nature as Co-Teacher

The touchstone of "agency and role of nature as co-teacher" shifts learning from the prescriptive to the relational. Nature is no longer a passive backdrop, acted upon by humans; instead, nature also acts upon and through us (Morse et al., 2018). Wild pedagogies seeks to resist the domestication of education, instead drawing us back into the spontaneous, creative, and untamed life forces that characterize wildness (Jickling, 2018). In such a framework, the typical

subject–object and self–other divides become more permeable. When I begin to see this quality of wildness in all life forms, I move away from experiencing myself as the subject acting in a world of objects and toward a world of interactions with other conscious beings (Abram, 1996). I feel a deep respect, even reverence, for the more-than-human world, that is inherent in such an approach. Suddenly I am not alone, with only my fellow humans, to figure out what life is about. Instead, I am engaged in a world of agency and meaning, and I am open to the possibility of interspecies communication (Tarnas, 2016).

Such a shift in perspective requires the fostering of imagination and new stories to help us perceive the bridge that spans the divide between rational mind and physical world (Macy, 2007). Zen master and writer, Thich Nhat Hanh (1993), captures this idea beautifully when he explains the Buddhist principle of inter-being, which reveals that I am "already inside" (p. 138). This concept maintains that the individual manifestations of consciousness, made visible in time and space, point to a deeper implicit unity from which they have arisen and to which they will return. In presenting such an argument, Nhat Hanh challenges the dominant Western view of the self as contained within physical bodies, urging instead the recognition that I am co-extensive with the rest of the cosmos. When I start to recognize and speak about nature as kin and a source of wisdom, I can begin to hear the more-than-human world and co-create stories that are informed by all our knowledges (Abram, 1996; Kimmerer, 2013). Moreover, by adopting the humble stance of a student, I can begin to allow nature to guide me, change me, and give new language to my stories.

Locating the Wild

The "locating the wild" touchstone challenges Western notions of nature as a commodity, instead offering a lens that helps me re-centre my ideas of "wilderness" and "wild." This shift in thinking requires me to cultivate the continual recognition that my connection with the more-than-human world has the potential to develop anywhere (Jickling et al., 2018). In other words, the wild that I am speaking of is not to be confused with narrow conceptions of wilderness that are often shaped, at least in part, by political histories, and which can too easily be dismissed as some distant, untouched place (Jickling, 2018). While immersive remote wilderness experiences can be powerfully transformative, the availability and accessibility of such experiences are becoming increasingly small (Louv, 2005). However, wild pedagogies is not confined to the wilderness; Arne Næss identifies the limitless potential for wild pedagogical approaches to deep ecology when he states, "[w]e can do it in cities. ... Everywhere there is something that is essentially nature" (as cited in Jickling & Næss , 2000, p. 54). Or as Henry David Thoreau expresses it, "in Wildness is the preservation of the world ... [l]ife consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest" (1991, pp. 94-96). The wild is the undomesticated life force, what Plotkin (2013) describes as one's "original wholeness," which is

not dominated or controlled by current societal norms or human intervention (p. 2). These statements call me forth, not just to some unexplored landscape, but to a reconnection with an unfettered freedom and vitality that lie within all living biophysical systems. In this sense, I am not separate from nature and wildness: I am *part* of nature. This is a vastly different story than the one I have long been told.

I also see the "locating the wild" touchstone as an invitation to examine existing colonial ideas about wilderness by carefully listening to landscapes and Indigenous peoples. The dominant Western view of what is wild has often failed to recognize the many Indigenous peoples who have lived on and stewarded the land that was considered "empty" wilderness by settlers. Further, the Judeo-Christian concept of "dominion over" nature has created a separation of people from their surrounding ecology and can feed the industrialized Western view of the wild as a resource to be extracted (Harper et al., 2019). These destructive understandings of wild can seep into the way I see and engage with the more-than-human world if I am not conscious of them. By noticing the wild beings and spaces around me at every moment and engaging with narratives that acknowledge the depth of these relationships, I may begin to transform my daily experiences of myself in relation to the world around me. However, bringing these touchstones into practice is no simple task, especially within mainstream education's focus on theory, abstraction, and efficiency often comes at the expense of empathy and relationships (Orr, 1994). It is at this learning edge that narrative therapeutic concepts can open new spaces for exploring the ecological self and can provide opportunities for transformative learning with the more-than-human world.

My Own Narrative

As a psychotherapist who loves to explore and connect with the ecosystems of southern Vancouver Island, it has become increasingly clear to me through these explorations that education is not confined to formal Westernized educational systems. Rather, most of my learning occurs in informal, relational, and exploratory sites. Indeed, the type of education that may lead to transformative change and deeper levels of self-realization rarely happens when seated in neat rows of desks, memorizing information that is detached from experience and presented in a way that often serves to further sever our connection with the more-than-human world (O'Neil, 2018; Sheridan, 2002). Instead, engaging with the surrounding ecology and applying narrative therapy tools to the learning can be part of a wild pedagogy that facilitates a kincentric worldview and helps to develop the ecological self. These alternative narratives have the potential to transform both the individual and the world around us.

My journey into deeper intimacy with the more-than-human world has been catalyzed by uncovering my own layers of anxiety and grief about our world.

Yet, by opening myself to new narratives and ways of speaking, I have found a path to a more balanced and larger ecological self. Countless hours of walking and biking around my coastal city of Victoria, BC has offered a daily opportunity for dialogue with my non-human family, which is sometimes internal and sometimes spoken aloud. Seeing the plants, animals, water, and soil who share my home as other sentient beings with their own interiority and with whom I am interdependent has profoundly changed the way I move through the world. This process has been rewarding and painful, and continues to be painful, as I allow myself to feel how the suffering and destruction of our world is also my own suffering and my broader family's suffering.

That said, I do not only experience pain. By contrast, this growing realization about interconnectedness feels like a coming home to a deeper sense of self that I had once known but had forgotten. I am reminded here of Rachel Carson's (1965) statement that, "[t]hose who dwell ... among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life" (p. 88). And so, in my journey, I have found a new depth of community and belonging and an enlivened sense of activism, knowing that conservation is also self-defence (Devall, 1995). When one takes seriously the realization that the world is completely interdependent, one comes to the conclusion that our own well-being depends on the well-being of our more-than-human family. That is, we cannot heal ourselves without also healing our planet (Plotkin, 2013). It is from this place that I humbly take on the role of fellow learner as I strive to reintroduce nature as our teacher to those who are disconnected from wildness.

A Narrative Approach

> "It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story"
>
> (Berry, 1988, p. 123).

An "Old" Story

Storytelling has always been essential to every culture. It is a way of shaping and understanding identities and making sense of the world (Blackie, 2018). In ecological storytelling, we are offered a rich history of languages and practices that offer alternative perspectives to the current English grammar and vocabulary, both of which tend to separate, divide, and objectify (Roszak, 1995). Though English has not always described the natural world in such a mechanistic way, the meanings and uses of many words that emphasized our connection to the more-than-human world have either shifted from their earlier meanings or been erased from our lexicon. Additionally, our access to a vocabulary that facilitates an articulation of a deeply interdependent ecological worldview has been compromised (Barfield, 1967). However, languages and cosmologies that take a kincentric worldview can still be found within many traditions and people groups across the world (Turner, 2014)

For example, the Rarámuri people of Northern Mexico and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth of the west coast of Vancouver Island both use language to describe a worldview that encompasses a kincentric ecology (Turner, 2005). Influential spiritual figures who hold this perspective can also be found within major world religions, such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Saint Francis of Assisi, as well as in the traditions and practices of many Indigenous peoples (Berry, 1988; Nhat Hanh, 1993). Drawing on these perspectives, we can find an alternative way of speaking about and engaging with the more-than-human world (Scofield & Margulis, 2012).

It is all too easy to make the mistake of appropriating Indigenous cultural practices. I recognize the dangers of doing so and, at the same time, feel grateful for the profound wisdom and guidance in relational ontologies that come from many traditional teachings (Fisher, 2012). As I navigate this complex terrain, I am inspired by Indigenous law scholar and member of the Chippewas of the Nawash First Nation in Ontario, John Borrows (2018), who notes that accessing a different way of relating to Earth does not come from any single tradition or group of people but rather from the Earth herself. While Indigenous peoples have lived sustainably for thousands of years and their knowledges are critical, an ethic of care is not solely Indigenous, nor is it an inheritance; rather, it must be cultivated (Borrows, 2018). In this sense, ecologically-based languages and the peoples who generously share their knowledges can help to reawaken in us a deeper reality. But ultimately this journey is one's own. When we engage in ways of speaking and practices that open us up to different impressions and deeper connections to the more-than-human world, we may begin to experience ourselves as members of a kincentric and profoundly interconnected community.

Challenging the Narrative

Though storytelling can take many non-verbal forms, new language is one way in which we can shift out of our habitual view of the world (Conn & Conn, 2009). Narrative therapists often point to the importance of the words we choose in making sense of our experiences, accessing meaning, imagining, and re-imagining our perceived role in a particular situation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A narrative approach to therapy sees humans as storytellers, whose identities are formed out of the creation and sharing of these stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Like other therapeutic approaches, it challenges individuals to reframe existing perceptions and biases, as well as to examine conceptual assumptions that may narrow our vision of ourselves and others (Payne, 2006). Our experiences can be limited by our vocabulary, the categorizations available to us through the language or languages we know, and how we are taught to use words (Hammack, 2008). In recognizing that we are often rehearsing one story among many possibilities, and not just seeing a situation "the way it is," we may soften ourselves to alternative narratives. However, the influence of stories on the storytellers and the listeners is not always immediately apparent. Often words carry with them both implied and explicit meanings, evaluative elements, and

repetitive patterns that can deeply ingrain a particular narrative (Andrews, 2018; Larson, 2011). Language is full of culturally and historically shaped meanings, many of which we are unaware (Payne, 2006). In the dominant Western culture, the narrative about the place humans hold in the world has been shaped by language that often reduces the non-human world to a collection of inanimate objects, thereby indicating that humans are the sole conscious inhabitants and the sources of meaning (Abram, 1996; Blackie, 2018). Through this lens, the world around us—including living creatures—remains devoid of its own personal experiences, emotions, and consciousness. Despite a growing body of research pointing to the sentience and complex communication abilities of plants and animals, our language and actions have not caught up with the research and have also failed to acknowledge what many Indigenous peoples across the world have attested to for thousands of years (Boyd, 2017; Simard, 2015). And yet, this language of domination and separation from nature, reinforced as it is in our mainstream religious, educational, and cultural contexts, is all that many of us have ever known (Scofield & Margulis, 2012). Because of this, our early childhood intuitions about the aliveness of the world must be reawakened if we are to free ourselves from these limiting stories, both for our personal integration and for the well-being of the larger social and biophysical world in which we live.

Subtle Shifts Create Big Changes

I am honoured to witness the radical transformations that can come through subtle shifts in language. By expanding our lexicon and stepping outside familiar language patterns, we can begin to see the world differently. We have a powerful ability to change our perception of an experience by changing the stories we tell ourselves. This was illustrated in my clinical work by an individual who was grappling with questions of spirituality and identity. A seemingly simple shift from addressing her image of the transcendent as "He" to experimenting with speaking to the divine as "She" opened up her awareness of a larger ecological self. The image in her mind transformed from an angry, distant male figure left over from the religious tradition of her youth, to a mother from whom all of life emanates and who continuously nurtures all her children. Though such profound change would certainly not occur for every person in this situation, this example aims to illustrate how words may keep us trapped in painful narratives, memories, and beliefs that no longer serve our growing sense of wholeness and integration with the larger web of life.

Another client described how she deepened an already powerful experience of what she described as a "rebirth" in nature, partly by adopting kincentric language and recognizing more-than-human beings as intimately and personally connected to her. She described feeling protection from the eagles that circled overhead during a recent wilderness retreat, and receiving nurturing love from a deer she encountered while hiking. These shifts in perception were more than symbolic; the deer and eagle became, in her eyes, part of her wider community,

with their own subjectivity, conscious awareness, and relationships to her. This powerful sense of unity with other beings has had lasting effects on her level of connection and communion with the world around her.

Indigenous ethnobotanist and writer, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2017), offers an inspiring example of connecting with the more-than-human world through the kincentric Potowatomi language. She explains how her traditional language is made up primarily of verbs and therefore reveals an ever-changing world of living interactions and relationships (Kimmerer, 2017). The world through this lens is characterized as being alive, aware, and autonomous and therefore made up of beings worthy of respect (Kimmerer, 2017; Borrows, 2018). Non-human beings, such as wolves, trees, and rivers, are spoken of with the same grammar used for speaking about people (Kimmerer, 2018). In the third-person pronouns of English, applying these ideas would likely translate to speaking about the more-than-human world as "he," "she," or "they." This is different than current English grammar, which refers to rocks, plants, water, ecosystems, and even animals as objects using "it," or "they." Kimmerer points out how objectifying language sets up a barrier and a hierarchy of value between us and the rest of the world (2013).

Robert Macfarlane (2015) documents a similar loss of intimacy with nature that had previously been apparent in early Anglo-Saxon languages and dialects, as words that arose from experiences with particular landscapes fell out of use. David Abram (1996) also traces the increasing abstraction and codification of language, from words/phrases that signify an animate world to the Westernized language of today which indicates that humans are separate from, and superior to, nature. These changes and differences in languages result in shifts in worldview and reveal changes and differences in our relationships with the more-than-human world (Barfield, 1967).

Learning what Kimmerer (2013) calls the "grammar of animacy" would likely change not only the way we speak about the world but also the way we see, feel, and relate with the world (p. 48). She notes that we would be more inclined to protect the rights of nature, and that we might also begin to recognize our other-than-human neighbours as wise teachers and collaborators in the construction of a harmonious future (Kimmerer, 2013). Imagine speaking to and about other species, mountains, water, and soil with the same language we use to talk about our friends and families. Our concept of community and our moral responsibilities would likely grow to be much more inclusive (Abram, 1996). It is important to note that the relationship between language and cultural practices is not a directly causal one, yet philosophers of language have recognized a connection between descriptive and normative statements (Merchant, 1980). As a language changes, the culture and its values often change too (Abram, 1996). Finally, there are exceptions; as examples, not every Indigenous language reflects a kincentric worldview, and some languages that contain more animistic elements do not necessarily result in drastically different behaviour in those speakers compared to speakers of modern English

(Kimmerer, 2017). Despite the exceptions, there is evidence of overwhelming cross-cultural similarities that reflect an ancient wisdom and a deep sense of interconnectedness experienced by people around the world, which the current scientific, mechanistic understanding of the universe has, in many regions, only relatively recently replaced (Merchant, 1980; Turner, 2014).

While grammar alone is not some panacea, the significance of a change in the pronouns from "it" to "he" or "she" must not be underestimated, for it can shine a light into the wild corners of our imaginations, helping to re-awaken parts of our psyches that have long been asleep. As Kimmerer (2017) states, "[g]rammar, especially our use of pronouns, is the way we chart relationships in language and, as it happens, how we relate to each other and to the natural world."

Stories are Co-Created in Relationship

Every day, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we are all engaged in the work of listening to, shaping, and sharing stories. When it comes to applying narrative tools to help us understand our place within the complex web of life, our interactions with the more-than-human world depend on the language we bring to these interactions and our openness to re-authoring in response to these interactions (Abram, 1996; Harper et al., 2019; Kimmerer, 2018). Stories are so often about identity. Indeed, developing and understanding identities through narratives is an interactional process, as we learn to tell stories within the context of different groups and environmental settings (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Moreover, when we are open to it, ecology can begin to inform language (Borrows, 2018). An example of this can be found in Borrows's traditional language of Anishinaabe, which reflects an understanding of the world that is deeply relational. Some Anishinaabe language speakers describe a "langscape" (language and landscape), where physical space interacts with human observation to shape language (Borrows, 2018, p. 51). This is an example of a language of reconnection that both Kimmerer and Borrows argue can help to heal a world where so many of our problems are related to separation and dislocation from the more-than-human world.

Possible Tools and Pathways

The following practices, drawn from narrative therapy concepts, may offer practical starting points for reconnecting with our ecological selves and reimagining our relationship with the more-than-human world.

Experiment with grammar: Setting aside a period of time to intentionally recognize, address, and dialogue with the more-than-human world, using non-objectifying language can help us improve our feeling of interconnectedness. Though the gendered language of English can be problematic, the effort to address other species as members of our family can shake our habitual level of

consciousness and challenge the current vocabulary and grammar that divide us from the more-than-human world. As Borrows (2018) suggests, if we begin to speak and think about the more-than-human world as fellow beings with agency, then our sense of responsibility and ethical stance toward the natural world is more likely to shift to encompass these beings.

Adopt participatory language: Rediscovering what Morris Berman (1981) calls "participating consciousness" requires us to challenge our sense of separation between internal subjectivity and external phenomena. Ecotherapists Lane Conn and Sarah Conn (2009) encourage a stance of curiosity and a willingness to experience the unfamiliar by adopting a beginner's mind. Part of this practice is to use language that puts us into a different relational frame, moving from a stance of controlling nature to participating with it. Rather than acting upon nature, we adopt a receptive stance, priming ourselves to "be touched" rather than "to touch," or "to be chosen" rather than "to choose" our interactions with non-human beings (Conn & Conn, 2009). Australian philosopher and panpsychist, Freya Mathews (2003), describes such an approach to the more-than-human world as one that anticipates encounters with other responsive beings who also have intrinsic value and their own interiority. In this practice, we are relinquishing our sense of control, instead allowing for beings in the world to meet and communicate with us on their own terms.

Write a letter, engage in conversation: Writing a love letter to Mother Earth or a letter to any being in the more-than-human world can be the foundation for an intimate conversation with nature, no matter where you are or how urban your setting is (Nhat Hanh, 2013). By engaging with a form of writing that is *for* and *with* nature, rather than just being *about* nature, we enter into a more relational ontology (Burns, 2018). Further, we can begin to take language from a largely intellectual space to a somatic one by bringing audible voice and movement to our words (Morrison, 2009). There is a resonance between our bodies and words when we engage our diaphragm, lungs, vocal cords, tongue, and lips to bring sensory awareness to our stories. In her book entitled *The Enchantment of Everyday Life*, psychotherapist Sharon Blackie encourages us to, "[t]ell stories to stones, sing to trees, start conversations with birds. Build relationships" (2018, p.303).

Explore nature metaphors: Transferring meaning from one thing to another, in this case sharing meaning making elements with the more-than-human world, can help us begin to identify with it more readily. In their work on nature-based therapy, Harper et al. (2019) identify nature metaphors as a powerful way to connect individuals with nature as a non-judgemental co-teacher. Through their work, they have discovered that metaphors may provide words for experiences that are often hard to explain directly. By slowing down and observing the natural world, we may begin to notice how nature reflects aspects of our own life and what that could mean for us. For example, a tangle of branches may be seen to represent a period of turmoil in one's life, and a young spring bud may be reflective of hope for growth and new life that comes out of struggle.

Participate in The Council of All Beings: Spending time, either imaginatively or literally, with a non-human being such as a rock, tree, or pond, fosters empathy and a deeper identification with the biophysical world (Schultz, 2000). This practice was developed by John Seed, Joanna Macy, Arne Næss , and Pat Fleming to help people "become" a part of nature and give voice to the experience of another being (Seed et al., 1988). Participants, speaking on behalf of a non-human being, can explore what is happening for this being, what they may feel like, what their daily life experiences are like, what their longings are, and what wisdom this council member has to offer. Shared with a group in the form of a council, this practice is both imaginative and experiential, as we are offered the space to expand our moral imaginations as well as the dignifying experience of being heard and respected by others in the council (Macy, 2007).

Conclusion

The idea of opening ourselves up to new narratives and new language is both simple and complex. On the one hand, such a practice can be as straightforward as changing our grammar and vocabulary. On the other hand, if we look below the surface of these changes, we recognize this idea also means changing our worldview. Such a transformation may impact the status quo because it challenges the current dominant perception of humans as separate from nature—a view which too often leads to justifying the commodification and exploitation of nature and which serves to prop up our existing lifestyle (Larson, 2011).

Macy (2007) draws on Buddhist teachings and her own extensive body of work to show how reframing our narratives can present a challenge to the narrow, egotistical view of the self by opening us to emotional realities and levels of consciousness we may not have previously experienced. When we embrace these ideas, dualisms are replaced by mutually interacting relationships, identification, and compassion. Changing our narratives to acknowledge and express the ecological self is a counter-cultural shift in power dynamics from "power over" to "communion with." Engaging with wild pedagogies is about recognizing and enacting ideas and intuitions that are both "old" and new. By bringing timeless wisdom into our modern context, we are seeking pathways to "rewild" the psyche (Andrews, 2018). It is by listening to Earth's guidance that we begin to experience a different depth of relationality. What is more, it is in the language we bring to our interactions that we reshape our perceptions of the more-than-human world. As storytelling creatures, at every moment we have the opportunity to imagine and share a different story: a story that reconnects.

Note on Contributor

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