Editorial

Telling Our Stories

The papers in this special issue were all presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication. This meeting was held in Whitehorse, Yukon, during the summer of 2001. Its theme was "telling our stories."

Whitehorse seems to have been a fitting place for such an event; storytelling has always been important to northern peoples. The narrative voice is being rediscovered and shared by many educators seeking more authentic ways of speaking, doing, and living their work; the northern people and landscape nurtured this meeting. I know a little about this. They have nurtured me, too, during more than two decades dwelling in the Yukon.

Mrs. Lucy Wren became one of my teachers when she came to school in the tiny Yukon community of Carcross, and told stories to the children in my classes. The stories were as intriguing as they were beautiful. And they helped me to begin seeing the world anew. However, I learned most from these stories when I left Carcross and moved to "town."

In Whitehorse my students were introduced to more stories, some from my own culture's legacy. And here I first appreciated how stories can shape our perceptions of the world—even more than that—our being in the world. Mrs. Wren's stories became a mirror, reflecting images of my culture that I'd not seen before. To me, and this is where my own tale begins, our stories were different. Mrs. Wren's stories weren't fairy tales; they told of landscapes, of hard lives and difficult times, and of struggles to find right relationships between humans and their animal relations—or so they seemed to me. In my culture's stories, dragons were not animal *relations*.

So it began for me, this interest in stories. And it continues with this issue, "Telling Our Stories."

Yet, for those of us who have walked solidly on the ground of rationalist traditions, it can be one thing to have an inkling about storied possibilities—as mirrors, relationships, nuanced experience, and lived lives—it is another thing to stand on the fertile earth of story. We hope that the stories in this issue will help us all to find better footing—and our story voice.

When I say "we," I mean the authors, reviewers, and editors of this volume. But, I also mean all those others that shaped the stories presented here. I mean the meeting organizers, volunteer assistants, and other conference participants who shared stories, too—some were oral and meant to remain that way, some were performative, some were generous acts of hospitality, and some are still in progress. I mean the Yukon Elders Roddy and Bessy Blackjack, Paddy and Stella Jim, and Ronald Bill who gave generously of their experiences. And, I mean Meta Williams and Harold Johnson who

hosted participants at Kwaday Dan Kenji (Long Ago Peoples' Place). Their voices shaped these stories in ten thousand ways. Thank you.

Stories are never, it seems, about just one thing, or one idea; they are more interesting—and exciting—than that. So ordering, or grouping, stories in a collection, such as this, cannot be just right. To borrow a thought from Robert Bringhurst's beautiful opening paper, stories tend to "sprawl all over each other."

So, ordering is tentative—is, at best, a heuristic to assist in discovering the stories. Not more. With this in mind, the first papers are "telling stories." These are themselves stories, about relationships between stories, place, voice, mind, and landscape—stories about stories.

The collection begins with Robert Bringhurst's "ecological linguistic work." Inspired by a decade of reading and translating nineteenth century Haida poetry, he takes us into the breath of stories; he invites us to reflect on the ecology of stories, mind, and landscape. The next story, richly informed by her own poetry and prose, is Rishma Dunlop's search for a "tawny grammar" that evokes eros. For her, eros is fundamental to scholarship, and is a passionate desire to connect with others and with the natural world. Lisa Guenther's stories are also about connection, but also the requisite distance required for an ethics of "dwelling." To dwell responsibly is to make room for others by dwelling within limits. Stories come in many forms and Louise Profeit-LeBlanc introduces storied breadth in her "four faces of story." For her, stories have different purposes and are presented in different forms.

This section concludes with two further stories. Edmund O'Sullivan, drawing richly from his own experiences, speaks about university education and argues that it should be re-invented and framed within the universe story. On the other hand, Andrew Brookes explores the nature of naturalist knowledge and cautions against generalizing, and the globalizing tendencies, of knowledge systems. He reminds us that even local knowledge is not monolithic.

The second selection of papers, "What stories tell" have been grouped because, amongst other things, they speak about narrative inquiry—things to think about if we are to conduct, and present, research through story. These papers begin with Jim Cheney's "moral epistemology of First Nations stories." In introducing "principles of epistemological method," he invites readers to re-evaluate the nature of truth claims and their own most fundamental orientations towards research. Heila Lotz-Sisitka, weaves a story about her own research, reflections, and the methodological questions. Like Cheney, she invites readers to consider fundamental research challenges in "contexts of transformation." These are, for her, challenges to develop contextually relevant research frameworks while avoiding unreflective, "industrial" adoption of newly constructed frameworks. Similarly, Leesa Fawcett reflects on her research, and the methodological decisions made along the way. Placed in

the context of "children's wild animal stories," Fawcett also speaks about Western culture's tendency to divorce children from their "animalness."

Paul Hart follows with a thorough review of "narrative, knowing, and emerging methodologies in environmental education research." Throughout, he invites us to consider issues of research quality. Ronald Johnston's stories, or case studies, about "changing landscapes" invite readers, and researchers, to be mindful of both scientific and cultural perspectives. In the final paper of this section, Janet Moore presents her story as an emerging scholar seeking to place her research within a framework for understanding the nature of environmental education.

The third selection is about "Doing Stories." It is about the practice of environmental education. For Joe Sheridan, doing is walking. He advocates a massive walkout from conventional schooling practice. For Sheridan the sedentary nature of present educational practices serves to "break the physicality of the human body" and this "is akin to breaking horses." From a different standpoint, Robbie Nicol seeks to infuse outdoor education with more theoretical perspectives. For Nicol, being outside is not enough; and, we might well seek to transcend a traditional focus on inter-human relationships to include relationships with the environment.

The next two papers pay close attention to communication. The first invites us to employ a "landscape approach" to interpretive planning. Here, Lesley Curthoys and Brent Cuthbertson present interpretive principles informed by ecology, bioregionalism, and deep ecology. Like Curthoys and Cuthbertson, Traci Warkentin believes that language plays a fundamental role in our relationship with the animate landscape. For Warkentin, "it's not just what you say, but how you say it" that counts. She explores the potential of metaphor in fostering biocentric ethics.

The final two papers in this section present practitioner stories. Patricia Joyce Fontes recounts the stories of teachers trained in community-action-based environmental education. These stories, based in northern Portugal, describe experiences of women (and one male) teachers in their journey towards understanding and practicing "action competence" approaches in environmental education. And, in "snail trails and science tales," Richard Ponzio and Michael Marzolla describe their work with "youth experiences in science" in non-formal settings.

The volume concludes with a panel presentation speaking to the question, "What stories shall we tell?" A number of conference participants were asked to reflect on the Whitehorse meeting, and to comment on the "tough work" ahead in environmental education. The thoughts and reflections of these panelists are recorded.

Fittingly, it seems, the final words of the panel, and of this volume, are those from David Abram's grandmother, and an old Jewish proverb. "Why," she said, "did God create the world, David? Do you know? Because he loves stories."