

This Land is Our Land? This Land is Your Land: The Decolonizing Journeys of White Outdoor Environmental Educators

Emily Root, Lakehead University, Canada

Abstract

Across Canada, many Aboriginal peoples and communities are actively resisting environmental destruction and communicating to settler-Canadians traditions of respect for the land. Moreover, some Indigenous scholars and educators are calling for a foregrounding of Indigenous ways of knowing in environmental education for all students. However, Western and Indigenous worldviews differ significantly, and settler-Canadian educators have much to learn from Aboriginal peoples who are already re-imagining a fundamentally different approach to education that pays attention to land, relationships, traditions, Elder knowledge, and place. Yet, it is difficult for White environmental educators to find effective and respectful roles as they learn from and work with Aboriginal peoples. This study seeks to understand the complexities of decolonizing journeys of White outdoor environmental educators. Findings of the study examine participant conceptualizations of decolonizing, recognition of Eurocentrism and White privilege, feelings of fear and anxiety, and experiences that facilitate decolonizing journeys. Major themes include: relationships with Aboriginal peoples, exposure to Aboriginal culture, relationships with non-Aboriginal peoples, cultural self-awareness, and time on the land.

Résumé

Partout au Canada, de nombreux citoyens et collectivités autochtones résistent activement à la destruction de l'environnement, et font valoir les traditions de respect de la terre des colons canadiens. De plus, certains universitaires et éducateurs autochtones réclament la mise en avant de connaissances et de méthodes « autochtones » dans l'éducation environnements auprès de tous les élèves et étudiants. Cependant, les conceptions occidentale et autochtone du monde divergent considérablement, et les éducateurs préconisant l'approche des colons canadiens ont beaucoup à apprendre des Premières Nations, qui elles sont en train de reconcevoir une approche fondamentalement différente de l'éducation, une approche qui tient compte de la terre, des relations, des traditions, des connaissances ancestrales et des lieux physiques. Il est toutefois difficile pour les éducateurs en environnement blancs de trouver un rôle efficace et respectueux dans leur apprentissage et leur collaboration avec les Premières Nations. L'étude vise une compréhension des complexités inhérentes à l'évolution vers la

décolonisation suivis par des éducateurs en environnement blancs. Les conclusions de l'étude présentent les conceptions chez les participants de la décolonisation, de la reconnaissance de l'eurocentrisme et des prérogatives des Blancs, de la peur et de l'anxiété, et d'expériences facilitant l'évolution vers la décolonisation. Les principaux thèmes sont, notamment : les relations avec les autochtones, l'exposition à la culture autochtone, les relations avec les non autochtones, la conscience de sa propre culture et la durée du temps dans la nature.

Keywords: decolonizing, outdoor environmental education, Indigenous education, Aboriginal-settler relations, place-based education

Situating Myself

My name is Emily Root. I am White and Euro-Canadian. I grew up in a small eastern Ontario town located on the traditional territory of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan. Currently I am a graduate student at Lakehead University living in Thunder Bay, which is located on Anishnaabe land, the traditional territory of the Fort William First Nation. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience the beauty of both of these places and I am grateful to those who have been their caretakers.

Prior to pursuing graduate studies, I struggled in my own teaching practice with the task of being a White, outdoor environmental educator teaching Aboriginal content in Canadian history courses, and at times working with Aboriginal students. An even more difficult task was the issue of how to teach high school students about the concept of *identity*, particularly in the face of typically Euro-Western individualistic beliefs of our mainly White students. During the past two years I have had the opportunity to begin to more fully understand the challenges I encountered by exploring the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism and colonial attitudes in contemporary society and in my own practice. I have built relationships with and learned from Aboriginal peoples. I have come to acknowledge the people on whose traditional territories I live and work and I have tried to understand a more honest version of the current and historic social politics of those lands.

In this paper I argue that there is a great need to decolonize the largely White, Western field of environmental education. First, I examine Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and the interconnections between colonization of people and colonization of the land. Next, I highlight efforts in environmental education to integrate social and ecological justice. Third, I posit that environmental education needs to pay greater attention to Aboriginal education discourses and Indigenous ways of knowing. Fourth, I outline the complexities of decolonizing for White Euro-Canadians and I identify the need for further conceptualizations of this process. Finally, I provide a brief overview of my research which seeks to understand the nature of “decolonizing moments” in the lives of four White

outdoor environmental educators. It addresses the overarching questions: *What is the nature of the decolonizing journeys of White outdoor environmental educators? And what life experiences facilitate this process?* I discuss the findings of the study, which include participant conceptualizations of decolonizing, feelings of fear and anxiety, and experiences that facilitate decolonizing journeys. Major themes include relationships with Aboriginal peoples, exposure to Aboriginal culture, relationships with non-Aboriginal peoples, cultural self-awareness, and time on the land.

Understanding “Western” and “Indigenous” Worldviews

Diversity amongst Western and Indigenous cultures makes it problematic to label worldviews as singular, monolithic categories. While my intent is not to do so here, numerous respected scholars do identify common underlying forms of Western worldviews as contrasted to Indigenous worldviews (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2005; Cajete, 1999; Graveline, 1998).

There are many words used to refer to the dominant worldview; “White,” “Western,” “Colonial,” and “Eurocentric” are used variously in the discourses of Indigenous studies, decolonization, critical pedagogy, and socially critical environmental movements (Battiste, 2005; Graveline, 1998). Aspects of Western worldviews that have led to the social and environmental crises that we face in the 21st century include capitalism, rampant consumption of natural “resources,” anthropocentrism, individualism, hierarchical power distribution, and “progress” (Adams, 1999; Bowers, 2007; Rasmussen, 2001).

Clear literature also exists describing Indigenous ways of knowing. English terms used in the discourses of Decolonization, Native Studies, and Indigenous Education commonly include “Indigenous knowledges,” “traditional knowledges,” “Indigenous ways of knowing,” and “Indigenous worldviews” (Battiste, 2005; Graveline, 1998; McGregor, 2004; Simpson, 2002, 2004). Marie Battiste (2005) reminds us to be cautious when trying to explain conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledges because they do not fit well into Western frameworks or English translations; however, she does provide the following explanation:

All Indigenous knowledge flows from the same source: the relationship of Indigenous peoples with the global flux, their kinship with other living creatures, the life energies as embodied in their environments, and their kinship with the spirit forces of the earth. (p. 128)

This paper will draw on conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledges as processes: living ways of knowing that are embedded in interconnected relationships rather than a set of discrete facts.

Colonization of People and the Land

To encounter Indigenous ways of knowing compels environmental educators to grapple with the legacy of colonization, particularly since patterns of colonization have always exploited both *people* and the *land* (Graveline, 1998; Settee, 2000; Simpson, 2002). Fyre Graveline (1998) writes, “Our degradation as humans is vitally interconnected with the continuing destruction of our Mother Earth, upon who our existence depends” (p. 7). Initially, colonization displaced Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands, which were in turn cleared for settlement and resource exploitation to feed rapidly growing populations and the consumptive desires of Imperial Europe (Rasmussen, 2001). As the lands were stolen, Indigenous peoples often became disconnected from the land in which their cultures, traditional knowledges, and languages were rooted. The devastation of the land jeopardized the traditional ways (hunting, fishing, gathering, travel) in which they had sustained themselves for thousands of years (Adams, 1999).

Today, as Aboriginal peoples actively seek justice through efforts such as land claims, self-government, self-determination, Aboriginal education, residential school healing initiatives, language revitalization, and Indigenous research, there is concern about the ongoing impact of neo-colonialism on people and the environment. Ann Ryan (2008) explains that neo-colonialism seeks to create a world based on Western values by imposing Eurocentric languages and cultural meanings on societies with cultural beliefs other than the dominant norm. She states that neo-colonialism is:

a process that undermines the cultural values of a society through economic power and control over resources ... a destructive cultural invasion of a society thought to be inferior to the invaders' society ... the imposition of the invaders' worldview on the invaded culture, perpetrated by those who have a disregard for the people of the invaded culture. (p. 673)

Leanne Simpson (2002) also identifies ongoing colonialism and argues that “the root of many of the environmental issues facing Aboriginal communities lies in the process of colonization and subsequent colonial policies that continue to grip our Nations in contemporary times” (p. 1). Neo-colonization and environmental degradation continue, inextricably intertwined, and create the settings of contemporary outdoor environmental education. Yet I argue that many environmental education theories and practices do not adequately consider the implications of colonial-environmental interconnections.

Integrating Socio-Ecological Perspectives and Foregrounding Indigenous Knowledge

Many research traditions in the field of environmental education do work to integrate critical social and ecological perspectives (Gruenewald, 2008; Kahn &

Humes, 2009; Russell, Bell, & Fawcett, 2000). David Gruenewald (2008) names ecofeminism, environmental justice, ecojustice, social ecology, and Indigenous education as fields that recognize poverty and violence as environmental problems and the interconnections of the social and the environmental. I would add environmental ethics, ecopolitics, and ecophilosophy to this list. Yet despite these integrative efforts, disappointingly, most environmental education literature and pedagogical frameworks do not include Indigenous perspectives. Gregory Cajete (1999) notes the importance of recognizing the Indigenous roots of many contemporary approaches to outdoor environmental education which “parallel the traditional practices of indigenous societies” (p. 190). He states that, “Recognition of these parallels is appropriate since indigenous peoples around the world have much to share” (p. 190).

Indigenous education often disrupts both the social and ecological injustices of colonialism while emphasizing the inherent value of all beings, the importance of traditional and intergenerational knowledge renewal, and the contextualization of knowledge in particular communities and geographic places (Marker, 2006). Furthermore, many Indigenous scholars are calling for a foregrounding of Indigenous ways of knowing in an education for all students. Ray Barnhardt and Yupiak scholar Oscar Kawagley (2005) emphasize that, “Indigenous knowledge rooted in the long inhabitation of a particular place offer lessons that can benefit everyone, from educator to scientist, as we search for a more satisfying and sustainable way to live on the planet” (p. 9).

Encouragingly, there has been some movement towards decolonizing/Indigenizing the field of Western environmental education. Recent examples include the publishing of work by Aboriginal scholars in the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* and in the edited collection, *Fields of Green* (McKenzie, Hart, Bai, & Jickling, 2009). Furthermore, the 5th World Environmental Education Congress included Aboriginal keynote speakers and an Indigenous Peoples niche. However, I argue that outdoor environmental education remains Eurocentric, often ignoring important Indigenous discourse, and in practice is not always culturally responsive to the needs of Aboriginal students (Lowan, 2009). Many settler-Canadian environmental educators have much more work to do in considering, *specifically*, their own Eurocentric colonizing lens.

Complexities of Decolonizing for White Educators

Little has been written about the decolonizing processes of White Euro-Canadian educators. Often positioned as colonizers, these educators face challenges in finding respectful roles in decolonizing education. Celia Haig-Brown (in Fitznor, Haig-Brown, & Moses, 2000) describes the challenge she faces as a White researcher:

As a white woman I continually question the possibility of working respectfully ... Ever conscious of the risk of merely "colonizing better," I ponder the possibilities of decolonizing: the interstices of appropriation and learning, of reciprocity and exploitation. (p. 76)

I too continue to grapple with this dilemma. Yet, while White Euro-Canadian educators do need to be mindful of the pitfalls of cultural appropriation and the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism and White privilege, it is equally important for us not to retreat from the colonial problem. As colonizers, our minds are also colonized and we can learn to disrupt oppressive worldviews. As Battiste (2000) states, "Eurocentrism is a consciousness in which all of us have been marinated" (p. 124).

Another complexity for White educators is that the decolonizing movement is situated mainly within Aboriginal scholarly discourse that attempts to illuminate the social and political contexts of Aboriginal experiences, confront systemic injustices, revitalize culture, and centre Aboriginal knowledges as credible. Consequently, most conceptualizations of decolonization have been written by and for Aboriginal peoples and do not make sense in the contexts of non-Aboriginal educators. Graveline (1998) writes that decolonizing involves resistance and survival, cultural renaissance, self-determination, empowerment, healing, revitalization, and reclamation of voice. She explains that, "we are ... providing another lens through which Eurocentric educators may view themselves" (p. 41). Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) describes decolonization as political, spiritual, social, and psychological, and conceptualizes it as part of a complex and widespread Indigenous social movement that "involves a revitalization and reformulation of culture and tradition, an increased participation in and articulate rejection of Western institutions, a focus on strategic relations and alliances with non-Indigenous groups" (p. 110). While Graveline's and Tuhiwai-Smith's conceptualizations speak mainly to Aboriginal peoples, they do point towards the role of non-Indigenous peoples to become allies in the decolonization process.

There are a number of key traits that make it difficult for White people to deconstruct their own Eurocentrism. When White Western culture is reflected all around us, we often hold deeply rooted assumptions that the "White, mainstream" way is "right" or "normal," which leads to our inability to recognize our own culture as distinct and our own privilege (Trowsse, 2007). As well, many White people approach multiculturalism with a learned "colour-blindness," meaning they choose to pretend not to notice another person's culture as distinct (Trowsse, 2007), which often sends the offensive message that others should pretend to be White.

Joanne Tompkins (2002) states that, "Part of the challenge of doing anti-racist work with White educators is the task of leading people to see what they have, up to this point in their lives, been unable to see" (p. 409). She posits that

this process involves intrapersonal and interpersonal work that validates emotions as part of knowledge and that creates an atmosphere of trust and openness. Other parts of the process that she identifies are naming power and privilege, hearing voices seldom heard, and building relationships. She also highlights that the process requires taking risks and positioning oneself as a continual learner.

Gradually I have come to recognize ways in which the teaching experiences faced by my White environmental educator colleagues and me are related to our Euro-Canadian cultural worldviews, and I have become increasingly curious about the nature of our journeys towards culturally responsive teaching. Upon finding that little research exists about the decolonizing processes of White educators, I decided to undertake the following study.

Research Design

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated in a decolonizing framework. Decolonizing approaches to research honour Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. They acknowledge the interconnectedness of all beings and recognize the social, political, and historical experiences that continue to shape the lives of Aboriginal peoples (Steinhauer, 2002). Typically, decolonizing research might involve Indigenous peoples and communities directly. My research focuses on White environmental educators who have worked on the land—the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples—and with Aboriginal peoples. However, since the research is meant to contribute to the decolonization of environmental education and foregrounding of Indigenous ways of knowing, it has been imperative for me to maintain a decolonizing lens throughout the research, and to reflexively interrogate this process throughout.

Paula Saukko (2005) writes that self-reflexivity involves “thinking through how the research itself...influences the processes it is studying” (p. 344). In the context of this study, researcher and participant self-reflexivity is about embracing the research process as an opportunity to help each other refine our decolonizing lenses and further decolonize our teaching “praxis” (action informed by reflexive inquiry) (Freire, 1970/1993). It also involves trying to recognize, acknowledge, and disrupt any Eurocentrism or colonial attitudes inadvertently embedded in the research process.

I envision this study as a necessary contribution to preparing White educators to participate in a much larger dialogue that, without a doubt, must include Aboriginal voices. I hope that greater self-awareness might help prepare White environmental educators to learn with and from Indigenous peoples.

Participants

The participants in this study include four individuals (two male, two female), ranging in age from late twenties to early thirties, who self-identify as White Euro-Canadians and outdoor environmental educators. They are familiar with the concept of decolonizing and have been somehow involved in the process of disrupting Eurocentrism and engaging with Aboriginal peoples. Pseudonyms for the four participants are “Kim,” “John,” “Luke,” and “Mary.”

My intent is not to distinguish this group of White educators for having “successfully decolonized themselves” or for being somehow “enlightened” amidst a culture of Eurocentrism. Rather, participants in this study are aware of their own implication in the colonial project and consciously attempt to shift their worldview and enact a decolonizing praxis. They recognize that the process of decolonizing is lifelong and deeply layered.

Methodology and Methods

This study is guided by narrative inquiry, which rests on the assumption that through the telling of stories we come to understand (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Prior to the first main interview, participants were asked to create visual representations of their ongoing decolonizing journeys, using a variety of art materials. They were encouraged to try to identify moments or influences in their lives that may have been part of their decolonizing process, as well as to remember the “places” (people and landscapes) where these moments/influences occurred. They were also invited to assemble “artefacts” of decolonizing life events: photos, maps, letters, emails, journals, a paddle, or any other object that would help to elicit memories and enrich the narrative. Andrea Fontana and James Frey (2005) describe this process as “creative interviewing.” Next, participants engaged in open-ended, one-on-one interviews that were subsequently transcribed and analyzed for cross-cutting themes.

Findings

The findings of the study comprise three main parts: participants’ conceptualizations of decolonizing, complexities of decolonizing (including fear, anxiety, and vulnerability), and finally experiences that facilitate decolonizing journeys.

Conceptualizing Decolonizing Journeys

For the most part, participants share similar understandings of decolonizing. Kim’s rich description denotes many of the themes that are common amongst participants:

[My decolonizing journey] is directly related to my experiences of Aboriginal culture and relationships with Aboriginal peoples ... my process involves undoing my biases, undoing my ignorance or lack of knowledge ... I'm trying to increase my knowledge of Aboriginal culture ... I also think it's recognizing my privilege in certain situations. It's also being able to ask new and different questions and the ability to recognize when I'm making an assumption ... and try to make [fewer] assumptions.

I feel very fortunate. It has been a complete emotional roller coaster, very upsetting and very enlightening. I feel much more introspective now ... The journey never ends. It's not a lazy process. It takes a lot of work and it's exhausting and it's emotional.

Kim's testimony exemplifies two extremes of her process, the deep challenges and the rewards.

As participant narratives unfold, a structure emerges that seems to suggest the existence of some common forms of the decolonizing journeys of White outdoor environmental educators. Generally, the decolonizing journeys of the participants in this study can be characterized by three distinct phases: (1) experiences that set the stage for the decolonizing journey, (2) an unconscious decolonizing journey, and (3) a conscious or intentional decolonizing journey.

Guided by the narratives that participants chose to share, this study focuses on the second two stages outlined above. The unconscious decolonizing journeys that participants describe seem to be characterized by shared experiences with Aboriginal peoples, immersion in Aboriginal communities, exposure to Indigenous worldviews and culture, and an openness to learning throughout. The shift by participants to a conscious phase of the decolonizing journey seems to have been catalyzed by exposure to conceptualizations of decolonization, introduction to a language with which to describe and name their decolonizing experiences, and the recognition of (and desire to disrupt) their own ignorance and Eurocentrism. This includes making acknowledgement that the land where they live and teach is Aboriginal traditional territory, where deep interrelationships amongst Aboriginal peoples, their languages, and the land have existed for thousands of years.

Eurocentrism, White Privilege, and the Fear of Making Mistakes

Another common aspect of participants' decolonizing journeys are feelings of anxiety and fear of making harmful mistakes and exposing their own ignorance. John states:

[I]t was a struggle ... I didn't know the best way to teach [Aboriginal perspectives] ... what do I do? ... I'm still in that place of not knowing how to best proceed ... There are things that I don't think about because I haven't even gotten to the point of questioning it yet ... but I know those things are there ... how do you start that conversation? There's that uneasiness ... and I often wonder, "Is this appropriate?" or "Should I even say this?" and, "If I say this am I really illustrating my ignorance or am I being insensitive or insulting?"

Such anxious sentiments often coincide with participants' increasing capacity to recognize subtle examples of Eurocentrism.

Howard Adams (1999) describes Eurocentrism as the notion that European peoples are superior to all other peoples of the world. Part of the decolonizing process is to gradually refine one's ability to recognize, admit, and disrupt manifestations of Eurocentrism and ignorance (Battiste, 2005; Graveline, 1998; Tompkins, 2002; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). For the participants, this process requires openness to learning. As participants become better able to recognize more subtle examples of Eurocentrism, their retrospective perceptions of past experiences shift and help them to see the great extent to which colonial attitudes exist.

Participants state that despite the fear and anxiety that some White educators may feel, a willingness to embrace vulnerability and learn from one's mistakes is an important part of the decolonizing process. Susan Dion (2009) argues that many White educators claim ignorance and therefore disconnection from Aboriginal issues and peoples, and simply avoid the challenging topics about Aboriginal-settler relationships in Canada. She asserts that this is not a respectful way to teach. The question remains: What experiences can help White educators overcome these anxieties and build respectful inter-cultural relationships?

Experiences that Facilitate Decolonizing Journeys

Participants' decolonizing journeys are facilitated by three main factors: relationships with Aboriginal peoples and exposure to Aboriginal culture, relationships with allied and resistant non-Aboriginal people, and time on the land.

Relationships with Aboriginal peoples and exposure to Aboriginal cultural strength.

The participants' narratives make it clear that their relationships with Aboriginal people, especially ones characterized by trust, mutual respect, and open honest dialogue, lead to the deepest learning. Three participants specify their relationships with Aboriginal co-instructors on wilderness education trips and with their Aboriginal students in both classroom and outdoor settings. For example, Mary states:

[H]e is just so fired up and in touch with his culture, but also so open to talking about it ... we just had a really neat relationship ... we had these huge long conversations about First Nations culture and I felt like I could ask any question at all.

Similarly, Kim's relationship with an Aboriginal student was impactful because mutual trust and respect had allowed Kim to be honest about her own feelings of discomfort:

I was super conscious all the time of how we were doing things in our classroom ... I remember talking with Suzie about one of the lessons I was going to do ... I remember saying, "I'm uncomfortable on how to approach this, can you help me?" and "How can we approach this in a respectful way?"

This anecdote sparked conversation during the interview about the pitfalls of relying on perceived expertise of Aboriginal students. Dion (2009) reminds educators not to expect students to be experts about their culture or other Aboriginal cultures. It is the responsibility of teachers to educate themselves so that they can teach respectfully about Aboriginal history, politics, and culture, while at the same time creating an inclusive atmosphere that welcomes Aboriginal perspectives when students do wish to share.

Not all of the experiences that participants had with their students were built on mutual trust and respect. John describes the powerful impact of being perceived as the stereotyped “other”:

[The White instructors] were in a position of authority and that was something that [the students] really weren't willing to accept ... it [seemed] they were not just rebelling against us but rebelling against the whole White culture ... That was definitely one element of that experience that was pretty powerful for me ... having that us-them dynamic and really feeling ... labelled as or stuck as the White guy and the White man.

This experience for John seems to have impacted him as strongly as his other mutually-respectful relationships with Aboriginal students. Having experienced what it might be like to be stereotyped and being able to recognize oneself as implicated in a colonial legacy encourages John to contemplate the source of deep resentment conveyed by Aboriginal students.

The participants' relationships with Aboriginal co-instructors and students have occurred mainly in the Euro-Western setting of an outdoor education organization's wilderness trips. However, opportunities to visit or live in Aboriginal communities have also allowed participants to learn about Aboriginal culture and witness the environmental injustices they face. Mary describes the impact of visiting an Aboriginal community that had been displaced due to the damming of the Rupert River and subsequent flooding of their homeland:

[I]t was awareness and exposure ... being in a community ... It provided some understanding about government and community interactions and just how it is ... complicated. Now when I hear about anything happening in that area, my interest is captured so much more because I was there.

In Mary's example, by visiting the community directly, she came to realize the complexity of Aboriginal land issues. She had the opportunity to meet Aboriginal people living in relation to their land and hear first hand how their lives were affected by environmental destruction. Mary's story demonstrates that introducing students to Aboriginal land justice issues in the local communities where they live and go to school can serve as a decolonizing experience.

In contrast to remote northern communities, urban academic settings also support decolonizing for most participants. Kim, Mary, and Luke all speak about the decolonizing impact of engaging with Aboriginal peoples, pedagogies,

literature, and film in academic settings. There they have listened to Aboriginal student colleagues. They have come to appreciate cultural ceremonies and pedagogies that Aboriginal professors shared with the class, such as smudging, singing, and circle work. They have experienced a sense of community and trust. At the 2009 Lakehead University Faculty of Education Graduate Student Conference, Joanne Tompkins and Susan Dion both articulated that within decolonizing processes it is appropriate, at times, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to work separately and at other times for them to engage in decolonizing work together. Graveline (1998) distinguishes the different purposes of working at times together and at other times separately: “While homogeneity may encourage self-disclosure, heterogeneity in the group allows the experience of difference necessary to challenge hegemony” (p. 90).

Finally, when acknowledging the atrocities that Aboriginal peoples have endured, a common pitfall is for White Euro-Canadians to position Aboriginal peoples as oppressed or victimized (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Such misrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples as weak serves only to perpetuate attitudes of Euro-Western superiority. White Euro-Canadians should also turn their attention to the myriad examples of the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples. Participants do note Aboriginal cultural strength, including an increase of Aboriginal students and professors in academia; the celebration of cultural traditions by youth, such as drumming, dancing and music; greater Aboriginal leadership in outdoor education organizations; and renowned writers, artists, and filmmakers, to name just a few.

Relationships with non-Aboriginal people and cultural self awareness. While exposure to Aboriginal culture and relationships with Aboriginal peoples is no doubt an imperative of decolonizing journeys, the role of relationships with non-Aboriginal peoples is equally important. Since decolonizing processes can raise difficult emotions, opportunities to speak with others who understand the extent of these emotions are important. Such relationships may provide an outlet to talk about embarrassing mistakes, work through contradictory ideas, and gain new knowledge.

While participants seem to be in search of mentors, they also serve as role models. Participants are impacted by a sense of respons/ability to confront Euro-centrism and teach other non-Aboriginal people about respectful relationships with Aboriginal people. Kim describes how she was confronted by ignorant, offensive behaviour of a visitor to a college in the Northwest Territories:

This other [Euro-Canadian] woman came to join us [in a Nordic walking fitness program at the college] ... She jumped in and pretended to drum dance ... A lot of the students were really uncomfortable ... I quickly changed the activity ... and I went and talked to her afterwards. I had asked the teachers to do it ... but they were so busy ... but they also knew that it would be important to tell her. And so I talked to her and she cried ... I thought that's a part of my decolonization too ... not letting things slide and not being afraid to tell people.

Reflecting on this experience helped Kim to realize that Aboriginal people must not be made responsible to teach White people how to act respectfully. Kim recognizes that part of her decolonizing journey is to speak up in the face of Eurocentrism and explain to other White Canadians what it means to be culturally respectful.

It can be quite tempting to create monolithic categories of what it means to be White/Western/Euro-Canadian or what it means to be Aboriginal. White people, as they decolonize, learn to recognize the multiplicities that exist within Aboriginal cultures. Yet, the refinement of their critical decolonizing lens can obscure the fact that multiplicities exist as well in Western culture. Sometimes it is necessary to relearn that not “all things Western” are bad. Kim describes her own cultural awakening:

I feel very pulled to my home and my traditions ... and my family and my culture now ... [Being in an Aboriginal community] made me very proud of being Polish. When I do a presentation I always say who I am, where I'm from, and where my parents are from ... I definitely learned to do that here, because people are so proud of their culture here.

It is important to build relationships with friends and family that help us to celebrate our own cultural rituals, be they traditions from a particular ethnic heritage or those created within one's immediate family.

Time on the land. Finally, spending time on the land *with* Aboriginal people and acknowledging that the land on which we live, travel, and teach is Aboriginal traditional territory serves as significant decolonizing experiences for participants. This acknowledgement may be the key catalyst for outdoor environmental educators to recognize the Eurocentrism of their field and begin to decolonize their practice.

Invariably, participants understand their interconnectedness as humans to the rest of nature, their dependence on the Earth for life sustenance, and their ecological impact as a human being living in contemporary North American society in the 21st century. While certainly not all Aboriginal peoples live an ecologically harmonious life, many Aboriginal peoples do describe Indigenous worldviews as recognizing and honouring the interconnectedness of all beings. Battiste (2005) provides the following definition:

Knowledge of Indigenous peoples is embodied in dynamic languages that reflect the sounds of the specific ecosystems where they live and maintain continuous relationships. (p. 128)

While I do not mean to insinuate that participants themselves hold Aboriginal worldviews, it may be that the participants' reverence for the natural world and their understandings of humans as “inseparable from the land” creates a point of resonance between the micro-culture of outdoor environmental

educators and the worldviews of many Aboriginal cultures, which in turn could be one of the reasons why participants seem to be particularly receptive to de-colonizing moments.

Despite their reverence for the land, environmental educators are often not aware of, or choose to ignore, historic and contemporary social politics that impact the traditional people of the land, and by extension, the land itself. It often seems easy for White folks to “love” the land but difficult for them to “love” the people of that land (Korteweg, 2008, personal communication). Luke explains:

[I]f there's no acknowledgement that the land we're teaching on is stolen, then the teaching isn't really as valid or it's like there's a lie attached to that. [There needs to be] honest acknowledgement that the place where we live wasn't always ours.

The above quotation makes the important point that environmental educators do need to learn and teach an honest version of Canada's colonial history. While Luke is evidently attempting to move towards a less Eurocentric understanding of historic and contemporary human-land relationships, interestingly, his second statement also illuminates the Eurocentric assumption commonly held by settler-Canadians that the land now belongs exclusively to “us.”

Participant narratives illuminate a paradox. On one hand, there is often a strong commitment in outdoor and environmental education to community building and the sort of interpersonal and intrapersonal work that was described by Tompkins (2002) and Graveline (1998) as central to decolonizing. As well, they feel a strong connectedness to the natural world, which resonates to a certain extent with Aboriginal peoples' worldviews. These two factors might make outdoor environmental education a fertile site for the project of decolonizing White Euro-Canadians. On the other hand, the missing link, which could be key to understanding why outdoor environmental education remains fundamentally Eurocentric, is the lack of acknowledgement by the wider population of White outdoor environmental educators about the interconnectedness of the land and the traditional people of the land, including the historic and contemporary politics of the land. Battiste (2000) reminds us that Aboriginal worldviews consider Aboriginal people, their language, and knowledge systems as deeply interconnected with the land: to show respect to the land requires respecting the traditional people of the land.

Conclusion

All lands in Canada are the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples. This is appropriate and respectful for environmental educators to acknowledge. While outdoor environmental education has increasingly recognized the interconnections between socio-cultural issues and environmental crises, I argue that scholars and educators in the field still need to pay greater attention to issues of

Aboriginal social and land justice. By building allied relationships with Aboriginal peoples and communities and learning about Aboriginal history, cultural traditions, and epistemologies, settler-Canadians may start to acknowledge that current environmental controversies are also Aboriginal controversies.

However, decolonizing journeys for White educators are complex. This study found that decolonizing is a gradual process of deep change, where educators grapple with recognizing the pervasiveness of Eurocentric colonial attitudes in contemporary social institutions and in their own assumptions and practices, recognizing privilege, overcoming anxiety, and learning to act respectfully. It includes building relationships and alliances with Aboriginal communities by acknowledging that we live and teach on Aboriginal traditional territory, by studying Aboriginal history and contemporary politics, by acknowledging and working for Aboriginal traditional rights, and by recognizing traditional knowledge as legitimate knowledge and Aboriginal worldviews as distinct and equal in value to Euro-Western worldviews. Furthermore, it can be characterized by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that can be overcome by embracing vulnerability and seeking the support of others who are also on decolonizing journeys.

I hope that environmental educators who are engaged in reintegrating socio-cultural and environmental education will increasingly look towards models of Indigenous education. I encourage settler-Canadian outdoor environmental educators to decolonize their own pedagogical approaches by turning their attention to Indigenous directions for culturally responsible ways of teaching in/of the land with Aboriginal peoples. As Battiste (2005) poignantly states: “You can’t be the global doctor if you’re the colonial disease” (p. 1)!

Notes on Contributor

Emily Root is a PhD student in Social/Cultural/Political Contexts of Education at Lakehead University, Canada. Her doctoral work focuses on decolonizing outdoor and environmental education and the nature of respectful, allied, intercultural relationships. As a long-time outdoor and environmental educator, her academic work continues to be nourished by time spent out of doors. **Contact:** eroot@lakeheadu.ca

References

- Adams, H. (1999). *Tortured people: The politics of colonization*. Penticton, BC: Theytus Books.
- Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8-23.
- Battiste, M. (2000). *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Battiste, M. (2005). You can’t be the global doctor if you’re the colonial disease. In P. Tripp & L.

- Muzzin (Eds.), *Teaching as activism* (pp. 121-133). Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.
- Bowers, C. A. (2007). A response to McLaren's revisionist interpretation of Freire. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 18(1), 109-118.
- Cajete, G. (1999). Reclaiming biophilia: Lessons from Indigenous peoples. In G. Smith & D. Williams (Eds.), *Ecological education in action: On weaving education, culture and the environment* (pp. 180-206). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27, 44-54.
- Clandinin, D.J., Pushor, D., & Orr, A. M. (2007). Navigating sites for narrative inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 21-35.
- Dion, S. (2009). *Braiding histories: Learning from Aboriginal peoples' experiences and perspectives*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Fitznor, L., Haig-Brown, C., & Moses, L. (2000). Editorial: (De)colonizing academe: Knowing our relations. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 24(2), 75-81.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2005). The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 695-728). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Freire, P. (1970/1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Graveline, F. J. (1998). *Circle works: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Halifax: Fernwood.
- Gruenewald, D. (2008). Place-based education: Grounding culturally responsive teaching in geographical diversity. In D. Gruenewald & G. Smith (Eds.), *Place-based education in the global age: Local diversity* (pp. 137-153). New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Kahn, R., & Humes, B. (2009). Marching out from ultima thule: Critical counterstories of emancipatory educators working at the intersections of human rights, animal rights, and planetary sustainability. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14, 179-195.
- Lowan, G. (2009). Exploring place from an Aboriginal perspective: Considerations of outdoor and environmental education. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14, 42-58.
- Marker, M. (2006). After the Makah whale hunt: Indigenous knowledge and limits to multicultural discourse. *Urban Education*, 41(5), 482-505.
- McKenzie, M., Hart, P., Bai, H., & Jickling, B. (2009). *Fields of green: Restoring culture, environment, and education*. New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- McGregor, D. (2004). Coming full circle: Indigenous knowledge, environment, and our future. *The American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3), 385-410.
- Rasmussen, D. (2001). Qallunology: A pedagogy for the oppressor. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 105-116.
- Russell, C. L., Bell, A. C., & Fawcett, L. (2000). Navigating the waters of Canadian environmental education. In T. Goldstein & D. Selby (Eds.), *Weaving connections: Educating for peace, social and environmental justice* (pp. 796-217). Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Ryan, A. (2008). Indigenous knowledge in the science curriculum: Avoiding neo-colonialism. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 3(3), 663-702.
- Saukko, P. (2005). Methodologies for cultural studies: An integrative approach. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 343-356). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Settee, P. (2000). The issue of biodiversity, intellectual property rights, and Indigenous rights. In R. F. Laliberte, P. Settee, J. Waldram, R. Innes, B. Macdougall, L. McBain, & F. L. Barron

- (Eds.), *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies* (pp. 459-488). Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan Extension Press.
- Simpson, L. (2002). Indigenous environmental education for survival. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 7(1), 13-24.
- Simpson, L. (2004). Anticolonial strategies for the recovery and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge. *The American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3), 373-384.
- Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on Indigenous research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 69-81.
- Tompkins, J. (2002). Learning to see what they can't: Decolonizing perspectives on Indigenous education. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(3), 405-422.
- Trowsse, F. (2007). *Making meaning of Whiteness: Explorations by White community college faculty*. Unpublished master's thesis, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON.
- Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books.