COHERENCE, CONSISTENCY, CONTRADICTION:
PORTRAITS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATORS SEEKING ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to inquire into, critically explore, and share thoughtful possibilities for teaching and living with ecological integrity. Ecological integrity is defined as the ideal of coherence between one’s actual, day-to-day habits of mind and body, and one’s ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals. Ecological educators often sense contradiction between their ecological ideals and their day-to-day lives. Recognizing that many ecological injustices have their roots in socio-cultural patterns of instrumentalism and anthropocentrism, they see how the educational institutions in which they work reflect and reproduce the injustices they aim to counteract. In this research, I study how three respected, ecological, postsecondary educators negotiate their resistance to and reinscription of ecologically problematic norms. While this research does not intend to preach, oversimplify, serve as a “recipe,” or glorify these educators, it does suggest that there are lessons, challenges and inspirations to be had from sharing stories of the aspirations and actualities of these educators’ lives. The question at the forefront of this research asks: How do respected educators who recognize and critique the ways in which dominant, modern, institutionalized education contributes to ecological concerns, work toward and conceptualize ecological integrity within their personal and professional lives?

Using a combination of narrative and ethnographic inquiry called “portraiture,” I explored participants’ professional educational practice and their personal home and community lives, inquiring into their varied conceptions and enactments of ecological integrity. As part of this inquiry, I engaged with participants during week-long site visits, pre- and post-visit interviews, and reviews of their publications. Theme- and aesthetic-based analyses were
conducted to create three deeply detailed stories of participants. While the stories themselves represent much of the “results” of the research, the dissertation also analyzes participants’ varied conceptions of contradiction and complicity, their chosen commitments, their decisions to “opt out” of certain practices, and their self assessments of ecological integrity, each of which carry both personal and collaborative dimensions. In conclusion, this research does not suggest one, final definition of ecological integrity, but rather offers readers a range of interpretations upon which they can reflect and build their own.
Preface

I designed the research described in this dissertation, guided by my supervisory committee. I was responsible entirely for all stages of the research process, including (but not limited to) participant identification and recruitment, design of data collection guidelines, execution of fieldwork, document research, data analysis, and writing of the research representation. No parts of the thesis have been previously published.

This research required and received approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The certificate number for the ethics approval is H09-03051.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the future of two trees: Bridger’s tree, the Western Red Cedar that drapes our Eastern windows in folds of green all year, and Will’s tree, the Green Ash that flamed yellow just after he was born and guides our family’s sense of the seasons. It is my sincere hope that these trees live long lives, dying of their own accord when ready, that for the two children who claim them as “theirs” and who may not remember them as we transition to a new place, these trees are still there for me to show my children once they have become adults. In the face of UBC’s current “development” plans, such a future might serve as one small example of ecological integrity in what is becoming an increasingly large accumulation of ecological indifference. May the future of these trees tell stories of people’s choices to live with appreciation, reverence, reciprocity, and respect with all our relations.
Chapter 1: The preview: Introduction to the dissertation

In graceful swoops and air-light tumbles, the falling leaf made its way to the earth. I picked it up again and threw it high, remaining quiet, showing my amazement through wide eyes and wondering grins. Four eyes fixed upon that fanciful descent, my then two-year old son watched the leaf with me, and as it landed, our gaze met in an unspoken, mutual praise of its beauty. The next several minutes were filled with falling leaves: red, yellow, orange, incredible blends of all these. Bridger would choose one, toss it up, and as it reached the ground, I would follow. We took turns, sharing our simple delight in smiles and giggles.

In these few moments of tossing up and watching leaves with Bridger, I found some harmony between the ways in which I endeavor to live and the ways in which I actually do live. However, more often than not, I find this “harmony” is not in place.

I was born, nurtured, have been highly “successful,” and continue to participate within an instrumental, Western culture\(^1\) that often treats and/or understands the entire ecological world as peripheral, backgrounded “stuff,” separate from the “higher” concerns of human life. Entire social institutions, cultural norms, and patterns of life are built upon these assumptions. In their wake lie ecological disasters and injustices around the world, so many by now that they have become taken-for-granted (Bai, 2009; Greenwood, 2010b; Orr, 2004). Further, the dominant, instrumental culture frowns upon the kinds of knowledge, skills, or ways of life that draw closer connections between humans and the natural world, rendering them as underprivileged,

\(^1\) By “instrumental, Western culture,” I refer to the complex mix of cultural and sociological structures founded dominantly upon industrialism, imperialism, and human-centric worldviews. Plumwood (1993) writes that those who hold instrumental beliefs conceive of themselves as “stand[ing] apart from an alien other and den[y]ing their own relationship to and dependency on this other” (p. 142). She further characterizes instrumentalism of nature “…as the kind of use of an earth other which treats it as entirely a means to another’s ends, as one whose being creates no limits on use and which can be entirely shaped to ends not its own” (p. 142).
undesirable, and/or “dirty” (Bowers, 2001; 2003; Berry, 1990; Prakash & Stuchul, 2004; Prakash & Esteva, 2008; Shiva, 2005).

Despite my growing awareness of the many socially and ecologically problematic aspects of my cultural background—the ways, for example, profits are prioritized over people, and Earth’s complexity and diversity are considered mere “resources” for human use—I am in many ways a “product” and beneficiary of that culture. The habitual thought and behaviour patterns that guide my life as a PhD student, mother of two, partner, friend, community member, and educator—while I do not deny personal responsibility for them—are too often tied up within the ecologically problematic and instrumental aspects of Western societies and culture. Deeply rooted in anthropocentrism—the long, persistent history of positionting humans as separate from and superior to all our relations—these habitual patterns are difficult not only to change, but also to fully recognize. Even defining and putting words to a robust and realistic vision of ecological justice is difficult for me, as I am not well versed in an appropriate language, nor do I have a wealth of ecologically conscious, intergenerational traditions from which to draw. Having grown into adulthood within this cultural context, it is no wonder that I find myself at a loss to wholly envision, much less enact, a more ecologically just way of life. I know enough to want to change and to feel justified in my critique; however, to know where and how to proceed from there can be tremendously difficult. As Wes Jackson (1994) says,

Even when we try to think about other possibilities, other worldviews, the powerful assumptions stirring within us reassert themselves in unexpected and often undetected ways. So our modern thinking is itself resistant to critique and change, even as the end of the fossil fuel epoch comes in sight. (p. 105)

This is the difficulty that lies at the centre of this dissertation: an exploration and inquiry into how to reconcile the critiques, visions, and realities of lives lived in open awareness of their own ecological contradiction and complicity.
Around the time I started teaching my eldest son his first words, this difficulty of trying to reconcile my day-to-day life with my (albeit shifting and sometimes unclear) vision for how things should be, became acutely important. I had been reading David Jardine’s (1998) work at the time in which he laments our perceived disconnection from all our relations. In particular, his ideas about the benefits of ambiguity and potentially negative consequences of our categorization of the complex “fabric” of life into discreet things struck me as important. Having read this at the same time as my son began (with my aid) isolating trees from ivy, and fully embarked upon the naming of “things,” the categorization of the world according to the English language, I also realized, with a sense of frightened humility, just how much I was teaching him—things that I did not want him to learn: instrumental and anthropocentric cultural patterns, relationships, assumptions. I could clearly see a contradiction between the particular values or relationships I wanted to teach Bridger and my actual, habitual patterns of thinking, acting, envisioning, or relating to all our relations that I was teaching him. Beyond seeing that contradiction, I felt it as well; not as just an unfortunate or inevitable part of life, but as an acute pain, something I needed to grab a hold of and wrestle with, perhaps indefinitely.

These examples from my life point toward how I experience and frame notions of (ecological) contradiction and integrity. Contradiction is understood in many ways. For the purpose of this dissertation, I am using the term to explain the lack of congruence between one’s *ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals* and one’s *actual, day-to-day* patterns of thinking, acting, knowing, valuing, and relating with/in the world. One example of this incongruence is the contradiction between what I *wanted* to teach Bridger and what I *was* teaching him, simply by “being who I am.” The moments of “harmony,” where I find that there is coherence and consistency between the ecological morals, principles, or ethical ideals, and the
actual, day-to-day aspects of my life, I refer to as ecological integrity. While these moments—like the leaf tossing with Bridger—may remain fleeting, not completely whole, triumphant, or final, the iterative search for them has material and political consequences (Pelias, 2005). Thus premising the personal as political, I suggest that one’s personal understandings of and searches for ecological integrity are situated within a dynamic socio-cultural context that firstly influences these understandings and searches, and secondly shifts and changes in response to them. As such, my dissertation explores in greater depth, and through story, conceptions and experiences of contradiction and ecological integrity within the context of the modern-day “Anthropocene.” Although I begin by situating this dissertation very personally in relation to my role as a parent-educator, I have chosen to do research with postsecondary educators who teach for/with/about eco/environmental justice.

I look to postsecondary educators for several reasons. First, because postsecondary educators are both theorists and practitioners of education, they are uniquely positioned to engage in a reflective practice that aims to ask questions about how their lives do and do not reflect their knowledge, values, and/or visions. Second, I understand educators to be complexly positioned in this struggle to seek ecological integrity because they frequently hold incredibly robust, critical, and creative visions for their ethical ideals, yet work and live within large-scale, privileged social institutions that are often at odds with those same visions. Third, while some attention has been given to elementary and secondary teachers’ thinking in environmental education (Hart, 2003), little has been devoted to postsecondary educators.

Through the narrative and ethnographic approach of “portraiture” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997), I use story to explore the ecological philosophies, pedagogies, and conceptions of contradiction within three postsecondary eco/environmental educators’ personal
and professional lives. In the following sections of this opening chapter, I elaborate on the questions guiding this research, the types of interpretations it makes, its overall purpose and significance, and I provide a brief outline of the subsequent chapters in the dissertation.

Before proceeding, however, I want to make a note on terminology. As one tiny step toward integrating my own value of knowing and relating to the entire world as alive, mysterious, and existing with purpose outside of any human utility, I have chosen to use language in this dissertation that reflects a less oppressive way of understanding what is often otherwise referred to as “nature” or “the environment.” Inspired by Abram’s (1996) similar efforts and resulting term, “the more-than-human,” I have chosen the First Nations’ phrase “all our relations” for several reasons. First, it positions relationality, connection, and animation at the forefront, asserting that “the world” is not a singular “thing,” but is instead a vast array of complex, subjective entities with whom we all are in relationships. Akin to Naess (2005), my understanding of “all our relations” includes not only the commonly acknowledged flora and fauna of the world, but also entities that are sometimes considered non-living: “rivers (watersheds), landscapes, cultures, ecosystems, the living earth” (p. 69). Second, using this phrase actively changes my writing such that I use verbs, nouns, and articles in ways that denote subjectivity among all our relations. These changes in my writing remind myself and readers that lives lived with purpose, meaning, and value are not only human lives. Evoking the phrase, “all my relations” has thus been a transformational process for myself as a writer, and one that opens that possibility for readers as well. Finally, while I am wary of cultural appropriation, I also aim to honour and acknowledge the learning that I have done from and with First Nations peoples

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2 In saying “we,” I will sometimes (as in this instance) refer to humans generally, as a species. However, most often, when I use the term “we,” I refer to educators, who also, like myself, are predominantly tied to habits of mind and body that have their roots in instrumental worldviews.
while studying and living in Vancouver, British Columbia, on unceded Musqueam territory. Having augmented my university education with a personal practice of learning in ceremony with my Métis, Algonquin Elder, Sandy LaFramboise, writing “all my relations” acknowledges the significance of these lessons for my academic work.

1.1 The questions: Searching out and sketching stories of “goodness”

Thus motivated by my own experiences of contradiction, I undertook my doctoral research. In this section, I explain the questions I ask, the methods used to inquire into those questions, and to whom they were asked.

The central question of this research project is: “How do respected educators who recognize and critique the ways in which dominant, modern, institutionalized education contributes to ecological concerns, work toward and conceptualize ecological integrity within their personal and professional lives?” Within this larger question is a series of other sub-questions: What are participants’ conceptions of ecological integrity: what are their “visions,” and how do their personal and professional actions and commitments reflect (or not) those visions? What stories and moments demonstrate educators’ attempts to find ecological integrity; where do they search for it (or not); and, how do they evaluate these attempts?

Feeling unsure and often lost in what I felt as the contradictions in my own life, I began this project wanting to learn about how others in similar situations work through and with their own contradictions. Whereas there are many valid critiques of education in eco/environmental education literature, the publications that consider positive possibilities do so from curricular or programmatic angles rather than examining how educators (including eco/environmental educators) address those critiques within their own lives. Accordingly, I chose to use portraiture, a methodological approach that primarily seeks to learn from and with respected others through the creation of in-depth relationships, and in turn share those lessons through literary, non-
fictional narratives. As explained further in the Methodology Chapter, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) call this stance toward research a “search for goodness.” In explaining this stance, they write:

The portraitist’s stance is one of acceptance and discernment, generosity and challenge… She sees the actors as knowledge bearers, as rich resources, as the best authorities on their own experience. She is interested in examining the roots of their knowledge, the character and quality of their experiences, and the range of their perspectives. In supporting the expression of strengths, the portraitist also seeks to create a dialogue that allows for the expression of vulnerability, weakness, prejudice, and anxiety—characteristics possessed to some extent by all human beings, and qualities best expressed in counterpoint with the actors’ strengths. (p. 141)

Accordingly, portraiture offered a way for me to pursue many dimensions of the conception and enactment of ecological integrity. Learning from respected eco/environmental educators expanded my range of visions for what desirable ecological ideals could be and how educators work for and toward them. Beginning from this place of appreciative learning enabled me to establish enough trust to openly and honestly explore experiences of struggle, contradiction, and ongoing work toward ecological integrity with my participants.

Portraiture draws from ethnographic and narrative research traditions. It is ethnographic in the sense that it focuses on participants’ lived daily experience, attending in particular to places where the participants themselves find the most meaning in their lives. It is narrative in its emphasis on sharing stories, both between the researcher and the participant, and in terms of the representation, which takes shape as literary, accessible stories, or “portraits” of the participants.

I recruited three academics working in the field of education for the research: Ray Barnhardt, Professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks; David Greenwood, Associate Professor and Environmental Education Canada Research Chair at Lakehead University; and

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3 Although David is currently working for Lakehead University, the data collection phase of the research occurred during the transition between his current position and previous professorship at Washington State University.
Madhu Prakash, Professor at Penn State University. These professors were chosen according to a
series of criteria I developed for the project (discussed in Chapter Three); their interest and
availability for the research; and an effort to encounter educators with diverse philosophies and
identities. Initially, I researched the history of participants’ publications and their institutional
and bioregional context. Primary data collection emerged by way of a week-long “shadowing”
during which the participants and I had many formal and informal talks, visited important people
and places, attended classes, and shared meals with one another. During this time, I explored and
inquired into participants’ beliefs, commitments, teaching practices, ecological homes/places,
personal lives, institutional structures, and the relationships between these. My formal
engagement with the participants concluded with a follow up phone interview during the
preliminary analysis, and the participants’ review of their drafted portraits.

After both narrative and ethnographic analyses of the data, I wrote four portraits, one of
each educator, and one collective portrait of the commonalities between them. As representations
of my main “findings” for the research, these portraits are rich and detailed narratives that tell
stories about these educators as they relate to their personal and professional work toward
ecological integrity. However, while the stories have the participants as their main subjects, and
they attempt to represent participants authentically, they are my interpretations, written in my
voice, for my own purposes. In the same way that a visual artist’s portrait is reflective of both
herself and the subject, the narrative portraits in this dissertation tell as many stories about
myself as they do about the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

1.2 The meaning: Interpretations, purpose, and significance

When some educational researchers engage in research we are inclined, not toward the
securing of even a semi-permanent truth, but, in a playful, exploratory spirit, toward
uncovering and expressing alternate (sometimes even conflicting) interpretations of the
phenomena under scrutiny. (Barone, 2001, p. 24)
In his description of arts-based literary research approaches, Barone highlights how aesthetic research practices can increase opportunities for varied interpretation among readers. While my research is informed by aesthetic research and does indeed intend to express alternate or conflicting interpretations of ecological integrity, it also takes place within the larger structure of a doctoral dissertation that documents my learning and growth as a student and new scholar. I therefore present an offering of “answers” to the research questions I have posed. In this section, I briefly explain “the meaning” of this dissertation: my interpretation of the portraits, the purpose of this work, and its potential for significance to others.

1.2.1 Interpretation

This dissertation explores multiple dimensions of a dynamic, nebulous concept: ecological integrity. In interpreting what this concept means, how it is at work in the lives of the research participants, and which stories of those lives will have meaning and resonance for readers, I have asked myself a few key questions. My interpretation thus focuses on how participants define and seek out their ecological, ethical ideals in the first place, how they conceptualize contradiction or struggle in their lives in relation to those ideals, what they do as a result, and how they assess their efforts. Throughout, I seek out aspects of these stories that “work,” places in participants’ lives where their negotiation of the reinscription and resistance to ecologically problematic norms is productive and provocative. However, I do so while also giving due attention to the many moments in which “success” is not found, where participants either do not know what to do or find themselves doing things they wish they would not.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, I put forth my own interpretation of ecological integrity based on what I have learned throughout this research process. Rather than suggesting
that the interpretations I share in these final sections are generalizably accurate based on the
research, I frame them instead as offerings upon which readers can reflect toward their own ends.

1.2.2 Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to inquire into, critically explore, and share thoughtful
possibilities for teaching and living with ecological integrity. The portraits and my analysis of
them thus aim to provide detailed illustrations of multiple paths toward and conceptions of
ecological integrity that have been helpful in guiding educators’ day-to-day choices and
commitments. This research does not intend to preach, oversimplify, or serve as a “recipe,”
assuming that there is one correct “what,” “why,” or “how” of ecological education and/or
integrity. Instead, I hope to offer a space for educators to reflect on their lives and practice, as
Barone (2000) suggests, to conspire with participants’ stories. He explains:

Conspiracy can be a profoundly ethical and moral undertaking. “Conspiracy: combination or union of persons for a single purpose or end” (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary). From the Latin, “con plus spiare, to breathe together,” or better, from the
Old French, “conspire, a learned borrowing” (World Book Dictionary). A conspiracy, thus, is a conversation about the relationship between present and future worlds. The
reader, a historically situated self, learns from the re-created Others in the text to see
features of a social reality that may have gone previously unnoticed. … There is a
“breathing together,” a sharing of ideas and ideals for the purposes of an improved
reality. (pp. 145-146)

Using story as a medium to explore the intricacies of educators’ experiences and ideas,
this dissertation suggests that amongst all the unknowns and challenges, educators are
nevertheless doing some amazing, radical, thoughtful, and innovative work. And likewise,
amongst the amazing, radical, thoughtful, and innovative work, educators remain human, full of
imperfections, uncertainties, and contradictions. As I continue to learn incredible lessons from
this research, I aim to reciprocate by offering the opportunity for reflection, learning, and growth
to the participants and to a broader community of educators.
A PhD dissertation is not generally an extremely influential document in terms of socio-political change. Rather, a dissertation can work alongside and in concert with various social movements. I align myself with those who strive for cultural change such that it is less anthropocentric and more ecologically engaged, respectful, responsible, and reciprocal, specifically working for these changes within postsecondary educational institutions. I am well aware of my own contradictions of working within the institution that I myself so readily critique in this dissertation, employing so many of the habits of mind and body that I argue against. Regardless, a second reason that I have engaged in this research is to be part of efforts to create change even within these ecologically problematic institutions and amidst the many remaining ties to anthropocentric ways of being and thinking.

1.2.3 Significance

As shown in the next chapter, research and conversations in eco/environmental education continue to be dominated by positivist assumptions and behaviour-focused goals. Common are studies that attempt to quantify eco/environmental knowledge or experience and subsequently correlate these to behaviour change. However, research and writing that counter these dominant approaches with broader social, cultural, and philosophical analyses of language, politics, globalization, oppression, etcetera, are increasing. Among these (and as mentioned above), many studies focus on what is not working, and when they do turn toward positive possibilities, they tend to be about programs or curricula rather than educators’ personal and professional lives. My dissertation thus adds a unique perspective to this growing conversation through its storied honouring of the efforts postsecondary educators make to live with ecological integrity. Attending to detailed decisions, ideas, relationships, and actions, the stories shared herein are interested in how large, sweeping societal and educational critiques manifest in the personal and
professional day-to-day lives of educators. While this study is situated within the eco/environmental field, the challenges educators face in reconciling theory with their lived lives are certainly not limited to this field. As such, this research has the potential to hold significance for any educator trying to reconcile the connections, layers, implications, and conflicts we face as part of our work.

Methodologically, this research offers a unique approach on two accounts. First, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) suggest, the typical trend in social science research is to pathologize individuals, identify problems, and prescribe solutions. This is especially common in eco/environmental education literature, and this dissertation differs from those approaches by taking a humble stance from the outset that aims to learn from participants rather than find what is missing or “broken” and needs to be “fixed.” Second, many eco/environmental educators have noted the contradictions between the methodological approach and the theoretical framing of much of eco/environmental education research (Russell, 2005). While this dissertation is a long way from attaining any kind of “ecological research ideal,” it does move toward aesthetic and storied forms that have the potential to be more coherent with ecological educational theory (Timmerman & Piersol, 2013).

Beyond speaking to any kind of “gaps” in the literature, however, the stories themselves carry significance (Barone, 2000; Clough, 2002; Vokey, 2001). Blenkinsop and Judson (2010) write, “When we learn something in story form, our emotions and imaginations are evoked and we come to feel something about what is being learned. … [Stories] make knowledge meaningful and, when done well, memorable for the listener” (p. 176). The stories presented in this dissertation not only allow, but also seek out the complexity of educators’ struggles toward/with ecological integrity. Confirming the personal as political, Pelias (2005) writes that
especially in the context of academic life, where vulnerability, ignorance, and ambiguity is often shunned, performative writing (i.e., storytelling) has significance:

By confessing, by exposing, and by witnessing, … what might have remained hidden is made public, what might have stayed buried is put under examination, what might have been kept as personal commitment becomes public testimony. Such efforts often ask readers to respond, not just at the level of ideas but as one person who has become connected to another. (p. 421)

These methodological aspects of the dissertation are described in greater detail in Chapter Three.

1.3 The “road map:” An outline of chapters

In this introductory chapter, I shared with readers my personal and academic motivation for this study, and why it is important in the context of a general movement toward socio-ecological justice. After explaining these motivations, I introduced the research questions asked herein and summarized how they were addressed, concluding with a statement on the interpretations, purpose, and significance of this work.

In Chapter Two, I enter into a deeper discussion on the theoretical framing of the dissertation and I review relevant literature. This chapter introduces the notion of anthropocentrism specifically, and centric thinking more broadly. Briefly describing the characteristics and history of these ways of thinking, I frame the dominant, North American socio-ecological context, and how it affects educators and educational institutions. Second, given the challenges described, I identify instances in eco/environmental education literature where educators experience contradiction, complicity, and hypocrisy. This review reveals only a small amount of literature investigating this topic, particularly through story and with a holistic view of educators. I thus finish the chapter by offering my notion of ecological integrity as a starting place for inquiring into how postsecondary educators might approach and reconcile their experiences and/or perceptions of contradiction.
Chapter Three describes the research methodology, detailing the theoretical overlap between portraiture and eco/environmental education research, including portraiture’s limitations. Following this, I outline the criteria for how participants were chosen, the methods used to answer the research questions, and the mode of representation. A portraiture-specific understanding of the validity of this research concludes the chapter.

Transitioning from the more typical dissertation chapters, Chapter Four provides a brief bridge to the portraits, explaining how they are written and how readers ought to be prepared to encounter them. Chapters Five through Seven are portraits of the participants (appearing in the same order as my site visits with them), beginning with David Greenwood, then Madhu Prakash, and lastly, Ray Barnhardt. Chapter Eight is a series of collective snapshots that focus on a combination of all three participants and the theory informing this dissertation. In so doing, I discuss the research question more directly through an analysis of several practices, conceptions, and judgments that participants make in their work toward ecological integrity.

The dissertation concludes with Chapter Nine. In this final chapter, I re-evaluate my understanding of ecological integrity. Afterwards, I describe this dissertation’s limitations and potential pathways for future research, and I conclude the dissertation with a personal narrative that returns to my initial motivation for this study and suggests how I will carry lessons from it into upcoming work.
Chapter 2: The setting: Theoretical framing and literature review

On the bus. It’s 8:30am and the air is heavy with the exhales of fifty or more people, standing, sitting, lurching their way through the starts and stops of their morning commute. My neighbour reads over my shoulder and asks if I’m a student. “Yes, I study at UBC.” Sooner or later, the question always comes… “So, what are you studying?” Despite the frequency with which I have faced the question, I find myself searching for the right words every time… “um, ecological education… it’s kind of like environmental education.” And then the obligatory approval: “Wow, that’s great. Good for you. That’s so important these days… gotta teach those kids about the environment! … You know, I’ve been recycling for years…”

Hidden within the good intentions of my neighbouring passenger are several assumptions that characterize dominant Western notions of “education” and “the environment.” First, he assumes that “education” means the schooling of young children; and second, that teaching “about the environment” is equivalent to teaching about a series of behavioural solutions to recognized problems, like recycling materials to reduce landfill. In subtle but important ways, these assumptions are linked to an underlying belief system that carries many anthropocentric tendencies. Anthropocentrism describes the ideological and material positioning of humans at the centre, radically othering, subordinating, and denying the existence and/or inherent value of all our relations. In the case with my neighbour on the bus, traces of anthropocentrism show through in his assumptions around the what, how, and why of education “for the environment.” I agree with him that education is important—it has profound effects on people’s beliefs about the nature of the world, the kinds of knowledge that are most important to pursue, and the ethical norms that should govern collective action (Bai, 2001). No matter the intention or stated goals, all aspects of education teach us about who we are as human beings and who we are in relation to
all life on this planet. As David Orr (1992) puts it: “all education is environmental education” (p. 90). However, I also recognize how institutionalized education perpetuates many ecologically problematic understandings and lifestyles (Orr, 2004; Prakash & Esteva, 2008; Sheridan, 2002; Weston, 1996). Even at times when—like my neighbour—educators have good intentions to teach about/for the “environment,” these intentions are primarily considered peripheral to the main purpose of education, structured in a tokenistic and simplistic “problem/solution” framework, and they continue to perpetuate an understanding of “environment” as separate from one’s self, relations, or culture (Evernden, 1985/1993).

Yet, even while I may find room to critique my neighbour’s assumptions, I too am entrenched within the same culture that gave rise to them. Anthropocentrism is so infused throughout my own habitual ways of being, knowing, and valuing, that I find it difficult to envision and enact less ecologically harmful alternatives. As I wrote in Chapter One, “I know enough to want to change and to feel justified in my critique; however, to know where and how to proceed from there can be tremendously difficult.” In attempting to learn how to “proceed,” I sought out others who had a similar recognition of education’s complicity in ecological concerns, hoping to learn from their processes of reconciliation. As the study’s main research question asks, “How do respected educators who recognize and critique the ways in which dominant, modern, institutionalized education contributes to ecological concerns, work toward and conceptualize ecological integrity within their personal and professional lives?”

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4 Although “all education” may be “environmental education” in the sense that Orr refers to, I use the phrase “eco/environmental education” in this dissertation to denote educational philosophies and pedagogies that are conscious of their own relationship to all our relations. Variously referred to as environmental, ecological, place-based, eco-justice, sustainability, ecopedagogy, or ecoliteracy (among others) education, my terminology “eco/environmental education” is intended to speak to broad trends across these different approaches.
To address this main research question, I found it is first necessary to look deeper into how exactly educators are “recognizing and critiquing the ways in which dominant, institutionalized education contributes to ecological concerns.” What does that really mean? Why and how is education “ecologically concerning?” In the first half of this chapter, I explore these questions. I describe some of the “ecological concerns” that characterize our present-day arrival at the “Anthropocene,” and discuss the centric logic—particularly anthropocentric—that underlies them. Subsequently, I discuss how dominant approaches to education both reflect and perpetuate anthropocentrism at socio-cultural, experiential, and relational levels.

Given the ecologically problematic aspects of education and their deep roots within pervasive, anthropocentric and/or centric norms outlined in the first half of the chapter, the second half considers how educators with strong ecological, ethical ideals experience contradiction, complicity, and hypocrisy within such a context. I thus review eco/environmental education literature that addresses how educators experience and reconcile contradiction. This review demonstrates that little has been written in the eco/environmental education field that considers how educators understand, experience, and reconcile contradiction in their lives. In response, I offer a preliminary explanation of ecological integrity as one path by which to examine these outstanding questions. Finally, I conclude this chapter by summarizing the theory and literature reviewed herein and detailing the several remaining questions that this research strives to address and that will add to a so-far limited discussion in the field.

2.1 Arrival at the Anthropocene

Planet Earth 2009, population and industrial explosions, perpetual war, mass extinctions, billions of us striving for better and more, the unthinkable suffering of others. … No one knows the full scale of the problem of empire, its spiral of unintended consequences, and the degree of our own complicity: the way we are part of the problem we fail to understand, the way we fail to understand our part in it. (Greenwood, 2010b, p. 14)
Four years after David Greenwood wrote these words, and with anywhere between another 40,000 to 520,000 more species extinct, our planet remains “in peril” (Greenwood & McKenzie, 2009, p. 5; Species extinction, n.d.; World Wildlife Fund, n.d.). As I write this dissertation, the socio-ecological context framing its motivation and relevance continues to paint a grim picture. We persist in destroying our own habitat (Shepard, 1982) and that of millions of other species. Fossil-fuel dependency leads to blasting off the tops of mountains, billions of gallons of spilled oil in oceans, the earth’s climate changed; industrial agriculture leads to soil erosion, unthinkable living conditions for animals, and nearly 200,000 farmer suicides in India (McKibben, 2011; Sainath, 2010; Shiva, 2005); mass urbanization leads to poverty and homelessness, continued cultural colonization, and the de-skilling of millions who no longer have the language or knowledge of how to live with the earth (Berry, 1990; Esteva & Prakash, 1998). On top of the profound effects we have on all our relations, we as oppressors suffer the results of our actions emotionally, mentally and spiritually in our resultant inability to fully feel or connect with all our relations (Bai, 2009; Beringer, 2006; Cajete, 1994; Greenwood, 2010b; Jardine, 1998). Sadly, this small set of words describes but a fraction of the injustices of our time. So much have we humans changed the earth that geologists are strongly considering atmospheric scientist and Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen’s proposal that we have moved from the epoch of the Holocene into the “Anthropocene” (Stromberg, 2013).

2.2 Anchored in anthropocentrism

In thinking through how to address these injustices, Neil Evernden (1985/1993) says that “we must begin… with the recognition that the source of the environmental crisis lies not without but within, not in industrial effluent but in assumptions so casually held as to be virtually invisible” (p. xii). These “casually held,” “invisible” assumptions to which Evernden refers are
often described by various scholars as “anthropocentric” (Bell & Russell, 2000; Fawcett, Bell & Russell, 2002; Fox, 1993; Martusewicz, Edmundson & Lupinacci, 2011; Plumwood, 1997; 1999; Villanueva Gardner & Riley, 2007). Literally meaning to place humans at the centre, anthropocentrism refers to the ways in which humans have ideologically and materially positioned themselves as superior to, separate from, and dominantly foregrounded in relation to all else that is not human. More and more, anthropocentrism has become an unquestioned norm that guides collective and individual thought and behaviour within dominant, industrialized cultures (Bowers, 2001). Ecofeminist Val Plumwood (1997) lists the following as five defining characteristics of anthropocentric thought and behaviour:

1) Radical exclusion (“nature as radically other and humans as separated from nature and from animals”),
2) Homogenization (“nature and animals… as all alike in their absence of consciousness”),
3) Backgrounding, denial (“nature is massively denied as the unconsidered background to technological society”),
4) Incorporation (“nature is… devalued as an absence of qualities appropriated for the human (‘rationality’)”, and
5) Instrumentalism (“nature can only have purpose and value when it is made to serve the human”). (pp. 340-341)

While the above characteristics are applied in this instance to the relationship between humans and “nature,” Plumwood (1993; 1994; 1997; 1999) and many others suggest that oppressive relationships between other dualistically separated groups share these same characteristics (Bai, 2001; 2009; Fawcett, Bell, & Russell, 2002; Li, 2007; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011; Merchant, 2005; Salleh, 2008; Spretnak, 1997; Warren, 1997a, 1997b). In other words, the assumptions and logic that allow for us to consider humans as separate from and superior to “nature” are the same as those that allow for androcentrism or ethnocentrism to occur. Li (2007) explains that centric thinking is legitimated within a hierarchical social structure that presumes domination, and is founded upon a dualistic ideology
that “stresses separation, polarization, and detachment between sexes, classes, and human and nonhuman beings” (p. 353). Rather than implying solely “the state of being dual or consisting of two parts” (Webster’s 1992, p. 412), the ideological dualisms at the heart of centric thinking also imply power differentials (Spretnak, 1997). Plumwood (1993) suggests that these power differentials result from a sense of alienation from the perceived other. She writes, “a dualism… results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other” (p. 42). In this “alienated form of differentiation,” she writes, “power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm” (p. 42). All that to say, perceiving all our relations as dualistic, radical others allows for value hierarchies in which that other is considered less-than.

Historically, centric thinking is linked back to various philosophers and religions. While certainly not all alike, Descartes, Bacon, Newton, Galileo, and Plato are cited most frequently as key contributors to centric—particularly anthropocentric—thinking on the basis that they saw the world as objective rather than animistic, as dualistically separate from humans, and they prioritized (and again, dualistically separated) humans’ intellect over our sensory body (Bai, 2009; Blenkinsop & Egan, 2009; Merchant, 1980; Sale, 1985). Judeo-Christian religions are also commonly referenced as contributors to centric thinking (Plumwood, 1993). Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci (2011) summarize this religious influence as follows:

The role of Christianity, and in fact the entire Judeo-Christian heritage of Western thought… cannot be underestimated. Not only was Man (the gender-specific term here is intentional) given “dominion over the earth” by God in Genesis, but the covenants of the Old and New Testaments identified those who were God’s “Chosen” and those who would be granted access to the Kingdom of Heaven. (p. 162)

While some of the writing ascribed to these historic philosophers and religious texts may seem outdated now, the hierarchical, dualistic assumptions pervading their work are still active today. However, centric thinking and the dualisms and hierarchies upon which it is built, do not
merely play out in the realm of history and philosophy; they have very real political and material consequences. Even while we may recognize that the separation of “humans” from “nature” is a false dualism, there are differences between humans and “nature” that can be found in daily enactments of oppression and cannot be ignored. “Domination must be seen as material and cultural, not as happening just at the level of ideas” (Plumwood, 1994, p. 212). Plumwood’s statement further echoes Evernden’s (1985/1993) notion that we must begin with our base level assumptions to try and understand why and how we have arrived at the Anthropocene, at a time of so many ecological injustices. Thinking through the material and cultural effects of anthropocentrism, I am drawn back to the discussion of my children in Chapter One. Not only are the effects of anthropocentrism seen in a litany of ecological destruction, but they are also found within the minute, mundane day-to-day interactions between people; they are passed on as part of a culture; and they shape our children’s conceptions of life itself: what it is, what it can be, and what it should be.

One common critical response to theories of anthropocentrism suggests that anthropocentrism is inevitable because there is no alternative to understanding the world from a human perspective when one is, after all, human. However, Plumwood (1997, 1999) answers this criticism by clarifying that anthropocentrism is not a matter of the inevitable human standpoint from which we know the world. It is rather a systematic “othering” of that which is not human. Those who argue that anthropocentrism is inevitable because humans can never be rid of seeing the world through human perspectives, interests, or eyes, are missing the point. While it is impossible to be rid of one’s own perspective, it is possible and desirable to act with “sensitivity, sympathy, and consideration” for the welfare of (non-human) others (Plumwood, 1997, p. 331).

For this dissertation, I draw upon these notions of anthropocentrism and centric thinking.
They give me a language by which I can identify the underlying roots of the many socio-ecological injustices in this epoch of the Anthropocene. Having thus described these roots, I next consider what implications they have for dominant educational institutions and the educators working within them. Specifically, as asserted within the research question, I explore the ways in which dominant educational contexts contribute to ecological concerns, limiting and challenging eco/environmental educators’ efforts to live according to their ecologically based morals, principles and/or ethical ideals.

2.3 Education’s ecologically problematic norms

In the last three decades, the conversation around how education contributes to ecological concerns has taken what I see as three intertwining paths. The first focuses on larger-scale questions of how dominant educational systems are products and producers of anthropocentric, instrumental culture. Stemming from socio-cultural theory and philosophy, these conversations tend to make the argument that education contributes to ecologically problematic worldviews, underlying assumptions, cultural habits, and so forth. A second grouping of arguments focuses on more day-to-day contexts, critiquing the ecologically problematic aspects of curricula, pedagogy, and (physical) educational structures. Lastly, a third path looks to inter- and intra-personal relationships, suggesting that dominant forms of education do not nurture the capacities for relationship with one’s own (whole, bodily, animalistic) self nor with all our relations.

2.3.1 Educational systems and socio-cultural norms

As a social institution, education both reflects and reproduces culture. For those living in anthropocentric societies, education is, accordingly, a significant player in the continued re-creation of anthropocentrism. Educators who work within educational institutions are often at least somewhat implicated in this kind of re-creation, and furthermore, have likely been
previously “schooled” themselves to largely adopt anthropocentric norms and habits of mind and body. In this sub-section, I review these challenges at a broad, socio-cultural, systemic scale. Specifically, I explore how 1) dominant knowledge systems, 2) progressive notions of time, and 3) disproportional emphasis upon individuals in education are ecologically problematic.

Assumptions about what constitutes knowledge in the first place, and within that, which kinds of knowledge are most valuable, reveal important cultural priorities. In instrumental, Western societies, anthropocentric assumptions that dualistically separate objective from subjective knowledge, intellectual from embodied knowledge, scientific from mythical knowledge, and/or generalizable from situated knowledge are common (Bai, 2001; 2009; Berry, 1987; 1990; Bowers, 2001; 2003; Jackson, 1994; Plumwood, 1993; Weston, 1999). As Plumwood (1993; 1994) explains, dualisms do not only serve to separate and categorize, but they also serve to privilege, and consequently, particular conceptions of what knowledge is (and is not) and what knowledge is valuable (or not) are defined.

Postsecondary institutions tend to privilege scientific, objective, and mechanistic understandings of knowledge (Bowers, 1997; 2001; Evernden, 1985/1993; Jackson, 1994; Jardine, 1998). In so doing, a humble stance toward all our relations that acknowledges the mystery, complexity, and subjectivity in the world is replaced by simplistic, reductionist understandings, giving the false impression that,

the world is made up of parts, just like a car. And, knowing the nature of those parts and the way they are put together, man can not only understand but also control nature. The revelation of ‘the way the world is’ is part of the hidden curriculum of the educational systems of the industrialized West. (Evernden, 1985/1993, p. 14)

Naming these epistemic tendencies in postsecondary settings as “high status knowledge,” Bowers (2001) sees scientific mechanism as running counter to the qualities that underlie “ecologically centered cultures” (p. 4). For example, in ecologically centered cultures, Bowers
argues, “low-status knowledge” is garnered through intergenerational and experiential forms of learning that are marginalized in most postsecondary settings. Mechanistic conceptions of knowledge also shape understandings of who teachers are or can be in ways that silence or ignore all our relations. That is, when such a vast array of animals, plants, and ecosystems are understood as objective matter, there is no room to consider how all our relations are subjective entities that hold and teach knowledge of their own (Creeping Snowberry & Blenkinsop, 2010; Evernden, 1985/1993; Greenwood, 2010b; LeGuin, 2004; Russell, 2005; Sheridan & Longboat, 2006; Timmerman & Ostertag, 2011).

Tied up with “high status” forms of knowledge are progressive assumptions about the nature of “human development” and educational pursuits (Bowers, 2001; Martusewicz, 2005; Orr, 2004). As a reflection of a larger societal value (namely, “endless” economic progress and growth), the notion of progress in education can be seen in everything from theories of cognitive, social, and cultural “development” in students, to underlying discourses of knowledge building in university research agendas. Discourses of progress automatically position the newer as better and implicitly suggest that as long as time keeps marching “forward,” so will we (humans), along with our technologies, our knowledge base, our customs and cultures (Orr, 2004). Not only are we assumed to become better with time, but also an underlying discourse of progress positions humans “at the pinnacle of evolution” (Fawcett, 1989, p. 14). These assumptions validate cultural and ecological colonization, framing it as a form of “development” from “savage” to “civil” cultures and “wild” to “managed” land (Esteva & Prakash, 1998). Shiva (2005) writes, “In each age of enclosures and displacement, progress is invoked to sell a project in which the elite usurp the resources and livelihoods of the poor as the inevitable next step in human evolution” (p. 50).
Underlying assumptions of progress thus privilege anthropocentric cultures and societies as the most advanced and desirable. Bowers (2001) suggests that those who live within instrumental, Western societies can sometimes falsely assume that they have “progressed beyond” cultural traditions entirely, creating a population that is “largely unaware of [their] own cultural traditions” (Bowers, 2001, p. 81). Indeed, the word “tradition” often carries a strongly negative connotation in many academic circles. While this may be justified in cases where historical patterns are oppressive, the blanketing of “traditional” knowledge and ways of living as “outmoded, backward, and inefficient” (p. 9), is inappropriate and unhelpful. Particularly within Indigenous communities, traditions are often intergenerational cultural touchstones for learning about acceptable and responsible relationships with all our relations (Cajete, 1994, 1999; Hampton, 1995). Prakash and others further explain that such assumptions of universal progress position education as a way to “raise” oneself up above the “traditional” soil-based cultures (Bai, 2009; Prakash, 2011; Prakash & Esteva, 2008). This type of positioning creates a hierarchical relationship in which those that are (perceived as being) closer to the Earth are of less value compared to “higher” forms of education or employment.

Further to the privileging of “high status” knowledge and notions of progress, the overwhelming tendency to situate the purpose and means of education in the individual is also ecologically problematic (Bowers, 2001; Ng-A-Fook, 2010). Instrumental Western culture is generally individualistic; the needs and desires of individuals are often prioritized over the needs and desires of communities (Berry, 1987, 1990; Jackson, 1994; Sale, 1985). In education, individuals have most commonly been considered the locus for learning: learning happens within the minds of individuals and for the development of individuals (Jardine, 1998). Hampton (1995) explains, “the competitive success of the individual is an implicit value of Western schools” (p.
21). The competition of individuals working toward their own individual desires leaves behind most sense of belonging and responsibility among human and more-than-human communities.

This emphasis upon the individual is further critiqued on the basis that it is ultimately in service to the global economy. That is, some suggest that educational choices that promote the competitive advancement of individuals are in place to prepare those individuals to contribute to the global economy which is well documented as being ecologically indifferent (Greenwood, 2010a; Orr, 2004; Prakash & Esteva, 2008). As Jackson (1994) says, “The universities now offer only one serious major: upward mobility” (p. 3) for its individual “consumers.” Most often seeking to replace land-based knowledge, skills, language, spirituality, and ethics with those that support the global economy, dominant national and international discourses on education proclaim it as a universal good or right (Prakash, 2011; Prakash & Stuchul, 2004). Even with a recent increase in state-mandated curriculum for environmental education, Greenwood (2010a) argues that these efforts pale in comparison to the state’s larger project of economic growth, a project that forms the very foundational structures of education, rather than the curricular “add-on” to which most environmental education is relegated (Morton, 2011).

In summary, postsecondary educators are challenged and limited in their efforts to live in coherence with many ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals given the dominant understandings of what education is about and for. With such anthropocentric conceptions of knowledge, progress, and individualism at the root of socio-cultural, educational norms, there is no space for all our relations except if they are conceived of as instrumental resources to be utilized or objectively studied.
2.3.2 Day-to-day experiences in schools

Although I discuss them separately, the socio-cultural analyses above are interwoven with eco/environmental critiques of curriculum and pedagogy; they inform one another. This sub-section focuses on curriculum and pedagogy, specifically discussing how experiences of abstracted, disciplined curricula, and experiences within the abstracted spaces and places of dominant forms of education can contribute to and reflect ecologically problematic norms.

How often do students, teachers, or administrators concern themselves with the plants, animals, or watersheds that hum with life right outside their windows? All our relations (particularly when it comes to those right outside the window) are largely ignored by educational curricula and pedagogy, considered merely the “setting” for our own (more important and independent) human activity (Creeping Snowberry & Blenkinsop, 2010). Even in courses where the intended focus of study is the natural world, instructors often keep their students indoors in front of electronic screens or textbooks that reduce the complexity of all our relations to a series of sentences, illustrations, and flow charts. As Evernden (1985/1993) writes, “a common complaint from [ecology] students after they enter university is that they seldom encounter a living creature. The animal is replaced with abstractions” (p. 15).

While abstract thinking is certainly not problematic in and of itself, it is the resultant inability or lack of interest in the locally, immediately, or experientially relevant aspects of students, teachers, and administrators’ lives that concerns many eco/environmental scholars. The removal of reference points to students’ day-to-day experiences and relationships implicitly denies their importance (Barnhardt, 2002; 2008a; Cameron, 2008; Timmerman & Ostertag, 2011). When we do not teach students experientially about the natural and cultural histories in their own backyards, the capacity to care for and develop relationships with those places is
significantly impaired (Greenwood, 2008; 2010b; Louv, 2006; Smith, 2004; Sobel, 2005). As Gaard (2009) writes, “Research shows that children who learn about nature from an intellectual standpoint don’t change their behaviors and don’t remember the information several months after the class lessons” (p. 332).

Furthermore, Orr (2004) writes: “We do not organize education the way we sense the world. If we did, we would have departments of Sky, Landscape, Water, Wind, Sounds, Time, Seashores, Swamps, Rivers, Dirt, Trees, Animals, and perhaps one of Ecstasy” (p. 94). Orr’s assertion of a disconnect between the human sensory experience of and our education about the world suggests that one way in which educational institutions participate in the curricular and pedagogical abstraction of knowledge is by categorizing it into what appear to be mutually exclusive disciplines. Within this disciplinary structure, attention to all our relations tends to be found within the science disciplines: biology, ecology, geography, geology, zoology, and so on (Bowers, 2001; Evernden, 1985/1993; Orr, 2004). While there are notable exceptions (e.g., ecocriticism in English (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996)), and some efforts to integrate “sustainability education” across the curriculum (e.g., Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008), the relegation of “nature education” to the sciences suggests that nature is not pervasive, but is rather a set of discrete “things” that can be understood through objective, scientific inquiry. Aside from the relegation of the study of all our relations to the sciences, Orr (2004) suggests that the disciplinary structure itself can lead students to believe that “the world really is as disconnected as the divisions, disciplines, and subdisciplines of the typical curriculum” suggest. He continues, “Students come to believe that there is such a thing as politics separate from ecology or that economics has nothing to do with physics” (p. 23). In these ways, the assumptions behind the disciplinary structures of conventional education, and specifically within the science disciplines, confirm the
“incorporation,” “radical exclusion,” and “backgrounding” of all our relations that Plumwood (1997) discusses as primary characteristics of anthropocentrism.

Several other scholars turn their attention to how school grounds and buildings themselves are abstracted, adding to an underlying sense of dominance. Describing a typical “school-in-a box, set on a flat, deforested, denuded, ‘anywhere’ field,” Creeping Snowberry & Blenkinsop (2010) argue that most schools are “oblivious to [their] surroundings, to the place[s] and stories upon which [they are] erected… proclaiming a sense of human dominion over the pre-existing natural space” (p. 52). Generally creating a sense of formal boundaries between the “indoors” and the “outdoors,” common curricula and pedagogy operating within these spaces assume that the most important learning happens indoors (Creeping Snowberry & Blenkinsop, 2010; Louv, 2006; Sobel, 2005; Weston, 2004). Sheridan (2002) explains, “the indoors is conventional education’s formal milieu and has become an especially dangerous place of forced conversation for outdoors people and the cultural heritage of environmental education” (p. 2). Noting how the indoor spaces of most schools are largely absent of other creatures, “rigorously geometrized, unlike the organic shapes of natural things… highly simplified… and insistently filled with wholly human sounds,” Weston (2004) also asserts how classrooms convey “a sense of the world itself as profoundly human-centered” (p. 33). Often (cons)training students’ and teachers’ bodies to sit quietly for hours on end in hard chairs behind hard desks, the physical space of a classroom continues the anthropocentric work of dualistically separating and privileging mind over body, humans over all our relations (Jardine, 1998).

The spaces and places in which “education happens” are not passive; they are teachers in and of themselves. These critiques thus call attention not only to the “what” and “how” of dominant curricular and pedagogical approaches, but also to what is left unsaid or undone. It is
often these absences that deny our connection to, the importance of, and sometimes even the existence of, all our relations from our periphery of vision in education. Creeping Snowberry and Blenkinsop (2010) explain:

What is present [in a typical school building] to our sense of smell, hearing, touch, sight and taste? And more importantly perhaps, what is absent? A sensual world of wonder and pungency disappears into the background as unimportant, not worthy of our attention and whole ways of making sense of the world are lost. (p. 53)

The curricular and pedagogical aspects of dominant forms of education explained in this sub-section are real challenges to educators who have visions of a less ecologically harmful educational approach. In the next sub-section, I discuss a third set of challenges to educators’ efforts for ecological integrity, shifting the focus to relationships between self and other.

2.3.3 Inter- and intra-personal relationships

Given the socio-cultural and experiential context described above, students and teachers within mainstream educational institutions are governed by a set of socio-cultural conventions that limit their relationships and interpersonal skills to those that are appropriate for participation within a society that does not value or recognize ecological dependencies and interconnection. The inter- and intra-personal capabilities and understandings needed for sustainable, flourishing, non-oppressive relationships with all our relations are not generally taught or valued in schools. Instead, this sub-section outlines how educational institutions can often unintentionally nurture relationships of hierarchy, disconnection, and denial, making it yet more challenging for eco/environmental educators to enact their ecological, ethical ideals.

The relationships modeled and expected for children and adults throughout various educational environments reinforce hierarchies through the authority of student-teacher relations, staff-administrator relations, and school-state relations (Greenwood, 2010a; Creeping Snowberry & Blenkinsop, 2010; Villanueva Gardner & Riley, 2007). Each is accountable to the other in a
uni-directional manner, with the language of accountability and standardization on the rise (Jubas, 2012; Kawalilak, 2012; Robert, 2012). For example, Harvester and Blenkinsop (2010) suggest that commonplace “assessment practices epitomize power over relations between teacher and student” (p. 128), and moreover, these kinds of assessment and power-over relationships are evident throughout educational systems, not only teacher-student relationships. Additionally, between students themselves, meritocratic competition guides student (and sometimes teacher) interaction rather than collaboration or cooperation (Kaza, 1999; Moore, 2005). Instead of learning and working within communities and contributing to something larger than themselves, students internalize their own personal “ambition, self-gratification, power and control as purposes for learning” (Cajete, 1994, as cited in Hallen, 2000, p. 156). This creates contexts in which educators seeking alternatives are caught in the tension between their desires to create non-hierarchical relationships in classrooms and programs on the one hand and, on the other, the pressure they feel from institutional mandates to maintain status quo power-over relationships through assessment and/or supervision. On the whole, Bowers (2001) confirms that “the knowledge, skills, and patterns of social interaction that contribute to participation in intergenerationally connected and morally responsible communities are not learned in public school and university classrooms” (p. 20).

With no internalized sense of connection to all our relations in either the dominant purpose or means of education, students are also denied opportunities to understand and act as what Leopold (1966) calls “biotic citizens.” In fact, more than being denied the opportunity, some scholars suggest that schools actively suppress or teach students to deny their roles as biotic citizens (Bai, 2009; LeGuin, 2004; Russell, 2005; Timmerman & Ostertag, 2011). Fawcett (2002) writes, “It is a common belief in Western culture that human maturity involves a critical
separation from the animal part of us” (p. 133). Once aided in those “maturation” processes by schooling, we may forget or deny our animal selves, or our role as biotic citizens. Yet, Jardine (1998) reminds us, “below the distended head we carry like a crown, we live there still, we live there now, entrails wound around trees and down into Earth’s moist substance” (p. 136).

Having lost or forgotten the cultural knowledge and sets of skills that support reciprocal connections with all our relations, it is difficult for people to re-gain them. Even among those who are more recently interested in “communication” with all our relations, there remains an anthropocentric tendency to understand the actions and happenstances of all our relations as existing for our benefit or knowledge. In a fictional short story, Gessner’s (2012) protagonist characterizes this tendency well in his inner dialogue about a visiting nature poet and documentarian:

She was one of this new type who brought her baggage into the woods with her, as if every squirrel or rabbit were a therapist. … They went into the woods to learn “lessons,” and so they found them. This wasn’t so bad in itself, he supposed. It was just that the lessons were always about themselves, not what they saw. “Nature as self-help book,” he said out loud … Too many people these days wrote about nature as a cover to write about themselves. Every pine cone a mirror and all that. Oh look, a twig, and, by the way, here’s my life story. (pp. 51-55)

In summary, the dominant trend in instrumental, Western societies (and their educational institutions) is to lose sight of existing inter- and intra-personal connections to all our relations (human and non-human) and the abilities to nurture them. More broadly, and as demonstrated in other sections above, dominant postsecondary approaches to the purpose, value, curriculum, and pedagogy of education reflect and reinforce ecologically problematic norms. By perpetuating dualisms between humans and all our relations, we find ourselves deeply implicated in a vision and practice of education that radically excludes and marginalizes the vast ecological world upon
which we depend and with which we are intimately interconnected. We might well wonder how educators can begin to address these deeply seeded issues. As Bai (2009) asks,

How can we reanimate our numbed perceptual consciousness so that the earth appears to us in full sentience and presence? How shall we recover the sensations and feelings in our numbed psyche so that we see, hear, feel the joy and pain, wonder and despair, in experiencing the earth and all its biotic communities? (p. 136)

In the next section of this chapter, I broaden Bai’s question in an inquiry that looks not just at how educators can “reanimate our numbed perceptual consciousness,” but also at how we (particularly as educators and models for others) can generally live an ecologically good life. Focusing these questions on the notion of ecological integrity, I explore how other eco/environmental educators have approached this work to date.

2.4 Ecological integrity in education

Given the ecologically problematic tendencies of dominant educational institutions outlined above, educators working within them are doubly implicated. On the one hand, we recognize the ways in which we inadvertently reproduce anthropocentrism (Bell & Russell, 2000; Blenkinsop & Egan, 2009; Li, 2007; Martusewicz, Edmundson & Lupinacci, 2011; McElroy, 1997). Whether through the assignment of numbered values to student “progress,” afternoons spent indoors in front of computers, or the production of enough “top-ranked” publications to warrant promotion, postsecondary eco/environmental educators have expressed how their day-to-day practices often feel unrelated to or at odds with their visions for ecological education (Bowers, 2008; Harvester & Blenkinsop, 2010; Sheridan, 2002; Weston, 1996). This difficulty spans educators’ whole lives. As Palmer (1998) reminds us, “unlike many professions, teaching is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life” (p. 17). Thus, reflecting the sense of contradiction I explained in Chapter One, there is a lack of congruence
between educators’ ecological, ethical ideals and their actual, dominant, and/or habitual patterns of thinking, acting, knowing, valuing, and relating with/in the world.

On the other hand, many educators view their work as transformational and understand educational institutions to be important places of socio-ecological change. Jardine (1998) invokes Arendt’s concept of natality to suggest that education as a whole is about renewal, and it gives us chance after chance after chance to resist anthropocentrism (among other “centrisms”) by teaching something else to the continually coming generations.

We, in education, may be especially responsible for the questions we do not ask, standing as we do at the cusp of the emergence of new life in our midst, able to bring forth these questions, but perhaps unwilling to speak our real indebtedness to ‘this precious Earth’ without embarrassment. (Jardine, 1998, p. 84)

In this way, even as we recognize the ways in which education can perpetuate anthropocentric ecologically problematic norms, it also offers opportunities to teach something new or different. In this study’s main research question, I ask how educators work toward and conceptualize ecological integrity. As a starting place, I defined ecological integrity in Chapter One as “coherence and consistency between the ecological, ethical ideals and the actual, day-to-day aspects of my life.” This section expands on the notion of ecological integrity by reviewing eco/environmental education scholarship that has also asked questions about how educators holistically (personally and professionally) reconcile the contradictions in their lives. I begin this review by first exploring the different ways in which scholars understand the notion of contradiction. While contradiction is sometimes understood as ubiquitous, what kinds of experiences and recognitions of contradiction concern eco/environmental educators? Of those, which have been explored? And then, “what next?” That is, given the contradictions, how do educators go about trying to reconcile them? In putting this question to eco/environmental education literature, I find that not many scholars have ventured into exploring answers to this
question as it pertains to the whole lives of educators. While many scholars have suggestions for particular practices, interrogations, or rememberings, no one has yet devoted research or theory to exploring the personal and professional lives of eco/environmental educators experiencing contradiction and attempting to live with integrity.

2.4.1 Recognizing and responding to contradiction, complicity, and hypocrisy

Denial is not just a way of avoiding the future, it is also a way to avoid discussing our own complicity in the larger problems of our time. . . . we continue to live comfortably by robbing the poor and diminishing the prospects of our children. . . . All of us [academics] are part of this system. We are well paid. We have sabbaticals and time off to do research. We fly to exotic places to discuss how to save the world thereby adding to the problem of climate change. Relative to the vast majority of people, we have a good thing going. And our standard of living and our enlightenment, too, demands that the theft continue. (Orr, 1999, pp. 221-222)

Commonly labeled “hypocrites,” environmentalists are used to being called out on their inconsistencies. Climate activist Bill McKibben (2013) recently wrote, “I’ve heard it ten thousand times myself—how can you complain about climate change and drive a car/have a house/turn on a light/raise a child?” (p. 15). Among the eco/environmental scholars who discuss their contradictions in published work, the discussion takes several different shapes. Orr’s (1998/1999) quote above paints a picture of the contradiction between people trying to work for social and ecological justice while those same efforts rest on the shoulders of the injustices they work against. It is an analysis that simultaneously conjures socio-cultural structures of hierarchy and oppression alongside individual, psychological forces of denial and deception. In response, Orr’s quote points toward what many eco/environmental educators suggest ought to be the first response to hypocrisy, contradiction, and/or complicity: recognition and awareness of it.

Premising that one cannot change what one does not know, a large amount of eco/environmental education literature studies “environmental awareness.” Although “environmental awareness” may be conceived of in broad terms, my interest here is in the
recognition and awareness of ideas, patterns, and structures that contribute to one’s sense of contradiction, complicity or hypocrisy. Reminded again of my neighbour on the bus, I focus on environmental awareness less as a superficial knowledge of “do’s and don’ts” and more as an iterative, critical reflection and/or examination of one’s life and its relationship to socio-ecological contexts. Yet, even within this more narrow focus, there is a range of understandings of what it means to become aware and the associated practices for achieving that awareness. Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci (2011) demonstrate an awareness of contradiction in relation to self and society as follows:

> Even though the feminist movement has done a lot to name and interrupt the way patriarchy plays out in our families, work contexts and larger community relationships, androcentrism continues to weave its way into our patterns of belief and behavior. *It is important to be aware and willing to identify* [emphasis added] how this and other forms of hierarchized thinking play out in our lives. (p. 284)

Blenkinsop (2006) turns to Foucault’s notion of “hyper-active pessimism” to further describe efforts to become aware of hidden ideas or patterns in a “distrust of the taken-for-granted” (p. 158). In addition to being aware of one’s current contradictions or complicities, it is also arguably important to raise awareness of what has been or what could be (Bowers, 2001; 2003; Greenwood, 2010b). Jackson (1994) thus writes, “maybe the problem before us has to do with the tiresome job of learning to see what is before us and what the possibilities are” (p. 109). Arguably, all of these forms of awareness, although expressed somewhat differently, are important and mutually beneficial for those seeking to negotiate their own contradictions.

In writing about awareness and recognition of contradiction or complicity, eco/environmental scholars sometimes find themselves in difficult territory. Seeking out contradictory ideas, patterns, and structures can suggest that they are definitive and unequivocally “there.” Among those who take up more socially constructed views, this assertion
is problematic. For example, McKenzie’s (2004) work has explored the challenges of “work[ing] within a tension between a poststructural view of the world as shifting, messy, and fictional, and a desire for very real social change” (p. 180). I appreciate a “both/and” perspective on the narratives at play in interpreting our lives as socially-constructive without being arbitrary or relative. They are constrained by the realities of our actual, ecological lives including such experiences as suffering, loss, joy, and ambivalence.

If recognition and awareness of one’s own contradictions and complicities are important, how do scholars suggest that one gains such recognition or awareness? Many point toward autobiographical inquiry as one path. The argument is that inquiring into one’s cultural background, value systems, foundational beliefs, types of language used, and so forth, can open the door to discover potential contradictions or complicities. While many autobiographical practices are framed as student exercises (e.g. Brandt, 2004; Thomashow, 1992, 1996), a few scholars include their own autobiographical writing in publications, demonstrating their varied paths toward awareness or recognition (Bai, Elza, Kovacs, & Romanycia, 2010; Blenkinsop, 2006; Hart, 2002; Martusewicz, 2001; Ng-a-fook, 2010). For example, in Jardine’s (1998) story about eating fresh strawberries in February, his autobiographical writing illuminates his sense of contradiction:

> These Alberta winter strawberries are only in the most odd of senses _here_ in my hands, even though, clearly, _there they are_. . . . They are commodities lifted off the Earth and floating above it, taking me with them. As they begin to float up into detached commodification alone, I, too, begin to float, detached, unearthly. . . . Too many things, of necessity, must be like winter strawberries, like me, unable exactly to _live_ here, even though _here we are_. (pp. 147-148)

Beyond autobiographical inquiry, others suggest that—for the “typical” alienated, modern urbanite—finding ways of recognizing our connections with/in all our relations is key (Bai, 2001; 2009; Hallen, 2000; Harvester & Blenkinsop, 2010; Sheridan, 2002). Only when one
understands the beauty and mystery of all our relations can one “see” how one’s daily participation in anthropocentric structures and norms is problematic and/or contradictory to how one believes it should be. Martusewicz (2001) thus writes that forgetting “our interbeing with all other living things perpetuates an inability to come to terms with the massive harm that our technologies and hyperseparated experiences of ourselves cause” (p. 124).

Practices aimed at ongoing recognition or awareness are thus one way of responding to contradiction, complicity and/or hypocrisy. Yet, it is impossible to be entirely aware. Firstly, many of our assumptions are so deeply held as to be virtually invisible (Evernden, 1985/1993; Jackson, 1994). As Orr’s (1999) quote above suggests, denial is pervasive, and as Jackson (1994) writes, so is a substantial amount of ignorance:

Most of our modern assumptions are so deeply rooted that either we count them as ‘just natural’ or we have no recognition as to what they really are. A major part of that consciousness comes from being raised in a society dominated by science and its technological arrangements . . . Even when we try to think about other possibilities, other worldviews, the powerful assumptions stirring within us reassert themselves in unexpected and often undetected ways. (p. 104)

Secondly, we, and everything of which we are a part, are constantly changing. “We are part of a… creative, dynamic, [and] transformative force that makes final answers impossible” (p. 127), Martusewicz (2001) writes. Accordingly, even if full awareness or recognition were possible (which it is not), the contradictions, complicity, or hypocrisy would remain.

Given that an awareness and recognition of contradiction, complicity or hypocrisy will not make it disappear, what next? What ought eco/environmental educators do with these feelings? While this discussion is limited in mainstream eco/environmental education journals, most who do take it up assert that action must not be forfeited on the grounds of ongoing contradictions. In other words, we must engage collectively in acts of resistance to socio-ecological injustices, even while we may inadvertently re-create them (McKenzie, 2004). As
Hart, McKenzie, Bai and Jickling (2009) suggest, we must “take action knowing that the outcomes might not be ‘truths’ or ‘solutions’ to problems, but that they might be places that are ‘good enough’ to take action” (p. 345). Returning to McKibben’s (2013) story of being accused of hypocrisy, he also concludes that hypocrisy cannot be avoided. In the face of both our own hypocrisies and the ecological concerns of our time, action must be taken, preferably strategic, preferably collective. He writes:

I’m fully aware that we’re embedded in the world that fossil fuel has made, that from the moment I wake up, almost every action I take somehow burns coal and gas and oil. I’ve done my best, at my house, to curtail it . . . [b]ut I try not to confuse myself into thinking that’s helping all that much . . . I’m still using far more than any responsible share of the world’s vital stuff.

And, in a sense, that’s the point. If those of us who are trying really hard are still fully enmeshed in the fossil fuel system, it makes it even clearer that what needs to change are not individuals but precisely that system . . .

If you’re a college president making the argument that you won’t [divest from fossil fuels] until your students stop driving cars, then clearly you’ve failed morally, but you’ve also failed intellectually. Even if you just built an energy-efficient fine arts center, and installed a bike path, and dedicated an acre of land to a college garden, you’ve failed. Even if you drive a Prius, you’ve failed.

Maybe especially if you drive a Prius. Because there’s a certain sense in which Prius-driving can become an out, an excuse for inaction, the twenty-first-century equivalent of “I have a lot of black friends.” . . . It’s become utterly clear that doing the right thing in your personal life, or even on your campus, isn’t going to get the job done in time; and it may be providing you with sufficient psychic comfort that you don’t feel the need to do the hard things it will take to get the job done. It’s in our role as citizens—of campuses, of nations, of the planet—that we’re going to have to solve this problem. We each have our jobs, and none of them is easy. (p. 16)

As McKibben says, “we each have our jobs,” and the actions eco/environmental educators take, even in the face of their acknowledged contradictions, vary widely. Across the many projects and commitments eco/environmental educators have made, they agree that contradiction and complicity will largely remain part of our lives until such time that social-cultural structures can
shift away from centric, hierarchical norms (and by that time—if it does in fact come—people will inevitably have newer, far-off goals).

Overall, the literature review in this sub-section has shown first that eco/environmental educators experience a sense of contradiction, complicity, or hypocrisy in the gap between their actual and ethically ideal ways of being and thinking. Although few scholars write about experiences of such contradiction, those who do consistently suggest striving toward an iterative awareness of one’s continually transforming ideas, patterns, structures, and contexts. Further, eco/environmental scholars assert that the perception of contradiction, complicity or hypocrisy cannot be used as an excuse for inaction. Rather than waiting for some kind of perfection, we must work strategically and collectively to change the larger socio-cultural structures that support and perpetuate ecologically problematic norms. What remains, however, is an in-depth discussion of how eco/environmental educators negotiate their contradictions, complicity, and hypocrisy. How do they become aware of it in the first place, then attempt to rid themselves of some of it, and accept and/or work with the rest? Even though Jardine (1998) talks about his sense of contradiction in eating and enjoying out-of-season strawberries, and McKibben (2013) balances a discussion of his solar, electric car with his remaining complicities, these stories remain small examples for a different conversation. To this point, eco/environmental scholars have not focused research on day-to-day experiences of contradiction and ensuing attempts to reconcile that contradiction in the form of what I call ecological integrity.

2.4.2 Ecological integrity: A response worth exploring

In the above sub-section, I reviewed several examples of how eco/environmental educators frame contradiction, complicity, or hypocrisy. Orr (1999), Jardine (1998), and McKibben’s (2013) examples point toward a contradiction between one’s behaviour and one’s
values. McKenzie’s (2004) example alternatively points to a contradiction between two simultaneously held conceptual frameworks. Bai (2001) also writes about competing ontologies. This diversity shows that there are several aspects of who we are, what we think, and how we behave among which contradictions, complicities, or hypocrisies can be found.

In his work on “ecological identity,” Thomashow (1996) draws together these many different aspects of one’s life from an ecological perspective. He writes, “ecological identity refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self” (p. 3). I borrow from Thomashow’s work to illustrate how educators’ sense of contradiction can be located among many different aspects of their lives. However, I would expand upon Thomashow’s list by adding “relationships” and “commitments” to those ways in which people construe themselves in relationship to the earth. This addition emphasizes how ecological identities are relational, formed and re-formed in concert with all our relations (human and otherwise) and the work we do with/for them.

While scholars confirm that contradiction, complicity, or hypocrisy cannot be entirely avoided, especially when one considers its presence within the many aspects of one’s ecological life outlined above, people still try to work against at least some of them. That is, although contradiction may be in part inevitable, it still might not be desirable. This is a fairly obvious point; if an educator has thoughtfully identified a particular ecological ethic, s/he would want to live in a way that is in harmony with it. Interested in the practical and conceptual aspects of thinking and living through contradictions and working toward living a “good” life (in this instance, in ecological terms), I have offered the term ecological integrity as a starting point. On its own, integrity is a concept that comes from the root “integer,” meaning “whole.” Integrity
thus points toward coherence or consistency as desirable qualities. The term *ecological integrity*, then, refers to the ideal of coherence between one’s actual, day-to-day habits of mind and body, and one’s ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals.

Parker Palmer (1998) has used the term *integrity* in a way that is closely related to my own intentions. In his work to live “divided no more,” he identifies instances in which educators “can no longer live without bringing [their] actions into harmony with [their] inner life,” necessitating that they “find a new center for their li[ves], a center external to the [educational] institution and its demands” (p. 167). He further explains that locating this “centre” is analogous to a search for integrity, an iterative process of deciding “what is integral to [one’s] selfhood, what fits and what does not” (p. 13). While Palmer offers valuable insight into the “inner lives” of educators and the significance of their struggles to live according to their values, his insights only go so far in the context of this research. Palmer’s goals and measures for living with integrity are largely self-referential. Alternatively, I aim to explore more relational notions of ecological integrity that branch out not only to other people, but also to more-than-human communities and/or places.

Having thus found my own starting point for understanding ecological integrity, I am interested in researching how others think about it and how they work toward it. It is not a term currently used in conversations within the eco/environmental education field, with the exception of references to the health or soundness of an ecosystem from a scientific perspective. Yet, despite its explicit absence, eco/environmental educators demonstrate in their writing that it is something they struggle with: how to make sense of our contradictions and work toward reconciling them. In working toward living our lives with ecological integrity, questions remain not only of how to go about this work in the first place, but also of how to assess our efforts.
along the way. As the excerpt from McKibben’s (2013) article above demonstrates, we cannot measure our “success” by how good we feel on the inside. Where, then, can eco/environmental educators turn to know whether their actions, values, relationships, visions, or commitments are “good” or helpful? These are a few of the questions that remain after my review of the literature framing this dissertation. In the follow section, I summarize this chapter by looking back at its initial discussion of anthropocentrism and tracing how I arrived here at these questions.

2.5 Summary of theoretical framing and literature review

Recognizing the many ecological injustices of our time—what may become known as the “Anthropocene”—many scholars suggest that we must look beneath the surface of our day-to-day behaviours to find the roots of our ecologically problematic norms. In so doing, they often identify the roots of ecological injustices as anthropocentric ideological and material systems of thought and behaviour. On this analysis, tendencies toward instrumentalism, centrism, dualism, and hierarchy are thus woven throughout Western societies and associated socio-cultural institutions. Specifically in dominant educational institutions, ecologically problematic norms are reinforced through dominant conceptions of the purpose and means of education; through day-to-day educational practices and experiences; and through the ecologically indifferent relationships fostered in education.

Interested in alternatives to these problematic tendencies that infuse not only social institutions, but also our own habits of mind and body, educators sometimes have a sense of inner contradiction, complicity or hypocrisy. In response, many suggest that awareness and recognition of contradiction is a first step. Others suggest connecting to and appreciating all our relations; they surmise that doing so can help reveal how the dominantly unquestioned norms guiding day-to-day experience are anthropocentric in comparison. In general, eco/environmental
scholars agree that certain degrees of contradiction or complicity are inevitable, and that those must not paralyze educators from taking action, even if that action sometimes re-creates what one works against.

In response to the limited eco/environmental education literature on experiences contradiction and efforts to reconcile it, several questions remain. I frame these questions around the notion of ecological integrity, which I have defined as coherence between one’s actual day-to-day habits of mind and body and one’s ecologically-based morals, principles, or ethical ideals. Namely, I wonder what happens after recognition and awareness: What does it look like to simultaneously be aware of contradiction or complicity, work to avoid at least some of it, and also take action in spite of it? Further, whereas much eco/education scholarship describes what educators can do with students, I am interested in learning more about what educators do themselves, in all aspects of their lives. What do educators who feel strongly compelled to change actually do, how do they live, and why? Obviously, there is no one, right way think or act. Arguably, however, there is power in asking the questions themselves, and in turn making visible the struggles that accompany the varied answers to them. In the following chapter, I discuss these questions in greater depth, outlining how they have structured this dissertation and research. In so doing, I explain portraiture as my chosen methodological approach for inquiring into them.
Chapter 3: The process: A methodology of portraiture

During the particularly bright and buoyant space between finishing my comprehensive exams and writing my research proposal, I met with my co-advisor, Sean, on an equally bright and buoyant spring day. I can remember the light bouncing off all the surrounding concrete structures, compelling us to stand and talk, rather than sit on the hard ground. Squinting to focus my eyes and thoughts on the conversation, I distinctly recall when Sean suggested—almost lightheartedly at first—using portraiture for my research. However, as the conversation continued, our thoughts and ideas began winding their way more and more tightly around this core possibility of portraiture. What I could ask, who I could research, what I might write, it all seemed that much more exciting when considered as a portraiture study. “Huh,” he said, pausing. Then, “Yeah, this could really work for what you’re trying to do.” “Yeah,” I said, imagining it... “It really could.”

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot coined the term “portraiture” to describe an approach to research that draws from the more widely recognized methods of ethnography and narrative inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Although ethnography is often associated with whole cultures or communities, portraiture draws from ethnographic research through its immersive, descriptive (versus experimental) fieldwork, its interest in a wide variety of meaningful aspects of participants’ lives (versus only pre-determined foci), and its categorical, thematic forms of analysis (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). It is similar to narrative inquiry in its emphasis on aesthetic, story-based interpretation and representation (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Hart 2002; Richardson, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis have used this approach to bridge “the realms of science and art, merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature” (p. 6).
Portraiture is more than a research method or set of tools for inquiry; it carries with it a particular stance toward the purpose of one’s research, and demands a unique kind of relationship between researcher and participant. My choice to use portraiture for this research was based not only on its alignment with my theoretical framing and research questions, but also on the exciting possibilities it offered for working with some incredible educators. In this chapter, I address my rationale for choosing portraiture in greater depth, explaining its alignment with my theoretical frame. I also identify the details of how I recruited participants and learned about/with them through fieldwork, analysis, and representation. I conclude the chapter with a description of validity as multi-layered resonance.

3.1 Portraiture and “goodness”

Resisting a “typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies,” portraiture instead seeks out “goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 141). Whether in relation to individuals or organizations, the portraitist recognizes multiple understandings of “goodness,” indeed using the research itself to understand better what is “good” within different contexts. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) further qualify that,

By goodness, then, we do not mean an idealized portrayal of human experience or organizational culture, nor do we suggest that the portraitist focus only on good things, look only on the bright side, or give a positive spin to every experience. (p. 141)

Rather, portraiture begins from a more humble place that seeks to learn and appreciate the work of others. Starting from this place of appreciating the strengths can actually allow for a more in-depth exploration of vulnerabilities, weaknesses, or inconsistencies. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis explain:

In supporting the expression of strengths, the portraitist also seeks to create a dialogue that allows for the expression of vulnerability, weakness, prejudice, and anxiety—
characteristics possessed to some extent by all human beings, and qualities best expressed in counterpoint with the actors’ strengths. (p. 141)

Portraiture’s emphasis on “goodness” makes it similar in some ways to appreciative inquiry. However, appreciative inquiry tends to be situated more often within organizational settings and presumes a more static and achievable definition of success or goodness. It focuses on a broad conceptualization of the social good, using research to work toward “a world of hope and possibility” (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000, p. 2). Portraiture differs from appreciative inquiry in that it does not specify an organizational context for research, and it defines and seeks a more context-specific and fluid definition of “good.” That is, portraiture research is intended to open up a discussion on what “good” means (relative to the research questions) with participants, resisting a static definition of “goodness.”

[Portraiture] are concerned with documenting how the subjects or actors in the setting define goodness. The portraitist does not impose her definition of “good” on the inquiry, or assume that there is a singular definition shared by all… Rather the portraitist believes that there are myriad ways in which goodness can be expressed and tries to identify and document the actors’ perspectives. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 9)

In this research, searching for “goodness” and multiple definitions of what that is, takes shape specifically in a search for “ecological integrity” and multiple definitions of what that is.

Resisting a taken-for-granted or pre-determined conception of “goodness” is one way in which this research attempts to critically explore ecological integrity, as suggested within the purpose for this dissertation in Chapter One. I acknowledge that “goodness” and ecological integrity have multiple definitions and that, as a researcher, my interpretation of participants’ stories includes a critical evaluation of where goodness and ecological integrity are found within their lives (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2001). I further look to Barone (2001) who offers two accounts of how narrative ethnographic research can be “critical.” First, he suggests that
“adopt[ing] an openly political stance” (p. 192) is one way. In this dissertation, the research is not presumed to be experimental or objective, but rather (as explained in Chapter One), aligned with a larger, ongoing movement for cultural change that wants educational institutions to become less anthropocentric and more ecologically engaged, respectful, responsible, and reciprocal. Following from this, Barone’s second criterion for critical research suggests that it ought to connect individual experience to a larger set of socio-cultural contexts. I have thus framed contradiction and complicity, and a search for ecological integrity, as not only personal projects, but also as aspects of a life lived within anthropocentric cultural norms and structures.

Of his own storytelling research, Barone writes that it “turned critical [when he attended] to the connections between an individual life and a debilitating sociopolitical milieu” (p. 196).

Although postsecondary educators are undoubtedly privileged in many ways, the stories in this dissertation attempt to examine instances in their lives where they struggle to reconcile their ecological ethical ideals within their (simultaneously) privileged and limiting socio-political-ecological contexts. Similarly drawing connections between individual experience and larger socio-cultural contexts, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) suggests that portraits themselves are acts of “intervention.” Rather than listening to a story, portraitists listen for a story. She explains,

> In the process of creating portraits, we enter people’s lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make an imprint . . . and leave. We engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility. This is provocative work that can disturb the natural rhythms of social reality and encounter; this is exciting work that can instigate positive and productive change. We need to appreciate the benign, generous impact of portraiture, even as we recognize the huge, ethical responsibilities weighing on the portraitist. (p. 12)

Additionally, the notion of criticality is not limited to my own interpretation and stance as a researcher; a large part of the purpose of sharing these stories is to offer opportunities for (critical) reflection among readers. “The critical educational storyteller is out to prick the
consciences of readers by inviting a reexamination of the values and interests undergirding certain discourses, practices, and institutional arrangements found in today’s schools” (Barone, 2001, p. 193). In this regard, it is my hope that readers will encounter the portraits with an openness to reflecting upon how they might speak to their lives: their norms, habits, commitments, and positioning therein.

As outlined in Chapter One, this study’s research questions ask how respected educators understand, work toward, search for, and/or assess ecological integrity, as well as what stories correspond to those understandings, work projects, searches, and assessments. Although this question was initially motivated by my own experiences and concerns regarding contradiction and ecological integrity, it has been shaped and focused by my decision to use portraiture as a methodology. In the same ways that portraiture searches for “goodness,” my research question seeks to create relationships and humbly, yet critically, learn from/with respected educators. And in the same way that portraiture is narrative-ethnographic, my research question seeks out everyday, personal experience and stories as both a means and an end for understanding and representing contradiction and ecological integrity.

3.2 **Portraiture and story**

From the initial stages of participant recruitment through to the final research representation, portraiture enacts a “search for goodness” through the listening to/for and (re-)telling of stories. Many assert that listening for and telling stories is simply what we do, as human beings: “Whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever you do in your life, you’re always busy telling a story. … It’s a continual thing, this telling stories” (Profeit-LeBlanc, 2002, p. 47). In research, even quantitative methods and reports are connected to, or seek to tell, a certain kind of story (Clough, 2002). However, in using portraiture, and placing what Barone
(2000) calls “literary non-fiction” at the centre of my methodology, I am expressly uninterested in dominant, positivist approaches to research in which we are taught to “suppress the so-called subjective responses of the researcher, or at least force these within the frame of a morally indifferent scheme” (Clough, 2002, p. 83). Instead, the story-based exploration, analysis, and representation of my research questions seek to foreground subjectivity, aesthetics, ethics, and contextual complexity (Barone, 2000; Blenkinsop & Judson, 2010; Clough, 2002).

The value of story in educational research is iterated in many terms. Broadly, Clough (2002) suggests that, “it opens up (to its audiences) a deeper view of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. … Stories can provide a means by which those truths, which cannot be otherwise told, are uncovered” (p. 8). Specifically in environmental education research, Hart (2002) similarly says that, “narrative inquiry can help us understand reasons for our actions which are motivated by beliefs, desires, theories, and values” (p. 141).

Narrative-ethnographic approaches to research also suggest that societies, cultures, and individuals’ experiences are shaped by and theorized through story, embedded in places, and co-created within communities. This stance resonates with many of the ecofeminist scholars whose work I use to frame a discussion of anthropocentrism in Chapter Two, who also take up narrative ontological and epistemological positions (Fawcett, 2000; Gaard, 2009; Gough, 1999; Hallen, 2000; Harvester & Blenkinsop, 2010; Merchant, 2005). Richardson (2000) describes how feminists in particular have moved away from understanding theory as architecture, and toward the idea of theory as story. She writes,

In the 1970’s, feminist researchers introduced and acted upon a different metaphor: “Theory is story.” Not only is the personal the political, the personal is the grounding for theory. With the new metaphor for their work, many feminists altered their research and writing practices; women talking about their experience, narrativizing their lives, telling individual and collective stories became understood as women theorizing their lives. (p. 927)
In the sections below, I go into further detail on portraiture’s basic premise of the role of story in our lives, and what value there may be in bringing ethnographic stories into eco/environmental educational research in particular. Specifically, I discuss how story-based approaches to research allow for 1) inclusive conceptions of voice; 2) the creation and renewal of relationships with people and places; 3) holistic representations that honour complexity; and 4) symbiotic connections between aesthetics and ethics. Afterwards, I discuss the limitations of portraiture, including critiques of it, and how those are responded to in this research.

3.2.1 Inclusive conceptions of voice

Portraiture opens the possibility for researchers to consider and include more-than-human voices in research (Timmerman & Piersol, 2013). While Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis (1997) encourage researchers to acknowledge and include a multiplicity of voices, they limit their discussion to human voices and include all our relations only insofar as they are related to participant context. That is, even though they assert the importance of “the environment” in a portrait, it is most often done in a way that frames all our relations as “surrounding” or “backgrounding” for participants. A growing number of researchers are exploring ways to include all our relations in research, if not as active participants, at least as “subjective stakeholders in our work and as beings for whom our research matters” (Oakley et al., 2010, p. 89). Barrett’s (2011) use of animist research likewise acknowledges “not only animals, but… plant, rock, river, and other bodies as subjects and stakeholders in the research process” (p. 136). Russell (2005) and Kuhl (2011) offer narrative, phenomenology, hypertext, arts-based, and sensual research representations as possibilities for including and foregrounding all our relations.

In my research, the portraits are ultimately stories about individual educators, and are not particularly inclusive of all our relations as subjects. However, I did attempt to acknowledge the
primacy of participants’ relationships with all our relations in the portraits, as well as acknowledging how those relationships actively shape participants’ sense of self and conceptions/experiences of ecological integrity. During my site visits, for example, I paid particular attention to participants’ interactions with all our relations generally, asking myself how/whether I see them demonstrating their spoken connection through day-to-day actions (acknowledging, however, that these demonstrations are not always visible, especially to an outsider, such as myself). Another example from the actual research representation is my use of images. Virtually all of the images in the portraits have as their subjects all our relations. These images do not show people in places, they primarily show those places themselves, opening opportunities for readers to consider the significance of those places both in participants’ stories and in their own lives as readers. By way of these examples and several others, I attempted (of my own accord, not participants’) to at least honour the existence and significance of a diversity of voices from all our relations throughout the research process.

3.2.2 Creation and renewal of relationships

The recognition of connection and relationship between what is otherwise commonly separated in a false dualism of “self” and “other” is a central aspect of much environmental education scholarship and is reflected in portraiture as well (Bai, 2003; Plumwood, 1993). Portraitists are required to establish trusting relationships with participants. Especially in this research, where my inquiry crossed personal and professional boundaries in preparation for a non-anonymous portrait, trust was crucial throughout the research process. The trust exchanged between researcher and participant in portraiture is mutual. For example, participants had to trust my intentions and my abilities to engage in their lives respectfully and authentically to consent to being involved at all. Also, because participants sometimes told me about things they do that I
was not able to actually see for myself, I often had to trust their own account of their work.

Connection and relationships are deepened as the research continues. In analyzing and representing participants’ portraits, researchers are challenged to recognize themselves within participants and their places. Working within the messy spaces of interwoven stories, interconnection and relational, co-created knowledge is foregrounded. Further, because the portraits in this research are not anonymous, there is a strong sense of care and responsibility both to participants and to my own experience as a researcher that guides my analysis and writing. Barone (2000) adds that narrative-ethnographic research also has a responsibility to readers: “Once we accept the charge of referring to real events … rather than creating a virtual experience, then the shape of our responsibility to our audience is dramatically altered” (p. 27).

Whereas many research approaches might call for separation between researcher and participant, identifying objectivity as the primary indicator of validity, portraiture instead breeds values of interconnection, responsibility, and care.

3.2.3 Holistic representations, honouring complexity

Honouring the complexity of people and places, portraiture’s combined narrative-ethnographic approach aims for inquiry that attends to the whole person and her/his community in place. Because portraiture centres on the listening to/for and (re-)telling of stories, and those stories are inevitably situated within our complex, relational lives, researchers are called to follow the thread of those stories as they weave their way through categories that might otherwise be used to cut them up into discreet pieces. As one example of how portraits are kept “intact” and holistic, they often retain the actual names of participants, friends, family, and places. Recognizing that knowledge cannot be separated from the people, places, and times with

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5 In this research, I use the term “holistic” to refer to a broad interest in the personal, professional, conceptual, experiential, place-based, and relational characteristics of participants.
which it was created, portraits therefore do not hide, remove, or generalize the particularities of people and places (Cheney, 1989; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). In these ways, portraits push back against the tendency to compartmentalize knowledge in their often-blurred lines between the personal and professional, or the public and private.

In attending holistically to not only the words and actions of the participants, but also to their whole context—to the sights, sounds, smells and textures of their lives, researchers are assisted by the use of story. In instances where a meaningful theme emerges, portraitists can use literary devices—metaphors, tone, and/or flow of writing—to represent that meaning aesthetically. Concepts or experiences that might be otherwise difficult to quantify or evaluate, or are simply ineffable, can be literally brought to life through story. Their weight, intention, and meaning can be conveyed in the simple description of the brush of a hand, a pause, or a tear rather than attempting to find precise words for the actual phenomena itself. In the following sub-section, I further discuss this aesthetic aspect of portraiture and tie it to an assertion of the ethical implications of this narrative-ethnographic form of research.

3.2.4 Primacy of aesthetics and ethics

Aesthetic qualities within portraiture aim to create writing that is literary, enjoyable, and accessible (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). While there are many ways of understanding aesthetics, I use the term here with the same intention as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) to refer to the artistic aspects of the portraits. For example, narrative expressions of “attitudes, feelings, colors, pace, and ambiance” are aesthetic aspects of portraiture; they are features that “do more than refer… to the object of representation, their own properties have significance in themselves” (p. 28). These aesthetic aspects of portraiture are often overlapping and complementary to the ethical aspects of research in a few ways.
First, the literary, enjoyable, and accessible aspects of portraiture frame ethical questions and conversations in compelling prose (Barone, 2000). In other words, as Cole (2004) reflects on her own work, she realized how aesthetically informed research carries a large potential to captivate and compel various audiences on issues of ethical importance:

If I were to make a difference through my work, I could no longer rely on the very limited power of flaccid words and numbers. I needed words plump and dripping with life juice, compelling and evocative images, representations that drew readers and viewers in to experience the research “text.” Readers of research needed to be moved to feel and think and to be inspired in some way by their experience…. Research, like art, could be accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, provocative. (p. 16)

Second, the aesthetic aspects of portraiture result in a research process and product that in and of themselves take an ethical stance. Unashamedly including, and even foregrounding, the otherwise commonly marginalized “evocative, emotional, nonrational, subjective, metaphoric” (Richardson, 1997, p. 39), and sensory qualities of experience, makes an ethical statement about the value of these experiences. Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Oberg, and Leggo (2008) accordingly suggest that, “In performing our subjectivities, we assert the relevance, the legitimacy, indeed the necessity of including the full range of our humanness in our work of re/membering ourselves in/to the world, embracing the world, with all our relations” (p. 68).

Third, and finally, Richardson (1997) goes to great lengths explaining how the process of writing is transformative, with ethical and political ramifications. “Just as theorizing reinscribes and transforms the external world, the theorist’s internal world is reinscribed and transformed by her or his words” (p. 49). Particularly when research is approached through story, the transformation Richardson refers to is not necessarily the rejection of one thing for the incorporation of another. For example, each time a researcher crafts or revises a story, s/he changes. These changes are layered and interwoven. Shagbark Hickory (2004) likewise describes how the diversity of stories that inform and transform our lives as we read and write them are not
necessarily at odds. Alternatively, he suggests that, “Stories in relationship to one another behave more like elements of ecosystems than like arguments squaring off against one another” (p. 71).

### 3.2.5 Limitations of portraiture

Although many aspects of portraiture align with the theoretical frame of this dissertation, it is not without its limitations. In this section, I discuss three limitations to portraiture, namely its reinscription of dualistic conceptions of art and science, its individualistic focus, and its conceptions of “essence.” First, when Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) explain how portraiture blends art and science or objectivity and subjectivity, they do so without challenging the relative concepts themselves. For example, they say that portraiture is a “bridge” that brings together the “two worlds” of art and science, “allowing for both contrast and coexistence, counterpoint and harmony… allowing [us] to see clearly the art in the development of science and the science in the making of art” (p. 3). Continuing to refer to them as two separate “worlds,” Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis thus err on the side of not challenging the dominant associations of science with objectivity and art with subjectivity. Alternatively, I prefer to understand both art and science as subjective and aesthetic in their own right (Clough, 2002; Eisner, 1997; Richardson, 1997). As Barone (2001) illustrates, the differences between the two might be more attributable to their aims; whereas science is more interested in “reducing uncertainty about the truthfulness and usefulness of knowledge claims,” art is more interested in “uncovering and expressing alternate (sometimes even conflicting interpretations of the phenomena under scrutiny” (p. 24).

A second concern with portraiture, and one that is particularly valid in the case of this dissertation, is its focus on individuals. This focus is not implicit in portraiture; there are several scholars who have used portraiture with communities or groups of people (e.g. Davis, Soep,
Maira & Remba, 1993; Pickeral, Hill & Duckenfield, 2003). However, in my case I focus on individual educators. In some ways, it might be more aligned with my theoretical framework for me to look at communities of learners, or generally not highlight the individual in favour of the community. For example, Bowers (2001) argues that, to achieve ecological justice, we must recognize and work against the key assumptions of our instrumental modern society, one of which is “the authority of the individual’s subjective judgment… [and] individual-centered values and forms of expression” (p. 56). With this critique in mind, I attempted to use the holistic aspects of portraiture (that look not only at the individual, but at their families, communities, places as well) to work against some of the limitations of an emphasis on individuals.

Finally, portraiture research, as conceived of by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997), aims to create portraits that express the “authenticity” and “essence” of participants. Even though they fully acknowledge the overwhelming influence of the researcher in shaping the purpose, questions and representation of the project, their goal is for participants to have a “Yes, that’s me!” response when they read the final portraits (p. 247). For several reasons, I find the references to essence challenging (as do others who have critiqued portraiture, e.g., English, 2000 and McKenzie, 2006). First, as I expressed in the opening narrative with Bridger and the leaves in Chapter One, I am continually changing and re-evaluating my thinking and my actions. To think that I (or participants, more specifically) have an essence suggests some kind of finality to a person, a capital-T “truth,” something that does not change with time and experience. Second, even if I were to accept the notion that each person has an essence, who is to say that I have the capacity to sense, identify, translate and represent that essence? In the end, what I take from Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ discussion of essence and authenticity is that it is important not to let the research turn into a self-portrait. There must be a series of
checks and balances to ensure that I do not grossly misrepresent participants’ stories, experiences, and insights. In the validity sub-section below, I further explain these measures. Additionally, what I learn from the critiques of portraiture is the importance of writing portraits in such a way that leaves room for contradiction, ambiguity, and multiple “truths” about participants. One way in which I have attempted to do this is through the use of images and text boxes that explore parallel, alternative, or sometimes conflicting stories about participants.

3.3 Participants and recruitment

As described in Chapter One, I recruited three educators to participate in this research, David Greenwood, Madhu Prakash, and Ray Barnhardt. These educators were chosen for a variety of reasons that I will explain in this sub-section. First, I limited the study to participants in North America and to three educators for practical and financial reasons. Second, I sought out ecological educators in postsecondary institutions, as I was interested in working with participants who had strong, theoretically grounded critiques of education. Within this group, teacher-educators were my particular focus, as they might have insights into both postsecondary and K-12 educational systems. Third, I wrote a set of criteria that guided my initial choice of potential participants (below). Finally, within the group of potential participants, final recruitment into the study was determined according to participant availability and interest, along with my desire to learn from educators with a diverse range of ecological philosophies, ethnic and gender identities, and living with different parts of North America.

Criteria for selecting potential participants were fourfold. First, I searched for educators who had in some way demonstrated efforts toward ecological integrity across personal and professional boundaries. In other words, I was interested in educators who showed that they were seriously attempting to find some kind of cohesion between their ecological theory and day-to-
day lives. This was most often sought after and found in the form of personal stories, anecdotes, or experiences in publications. Secondly, I sought educators who had received recognition for their teaching. I looked for records of teaching awards, exceptional student feedback, honorary degrees, prestigious invited lectures, and/or an exceptional reputation. While attending to this second criterion, I was mindful that not all good educators will be “liked” or will receive “rave reviews” from students or educational institutions, and thus sought out a variety of sources and/or opinions. Third, I wanted to find educators who were engaged in innovative pedagogies that attempted to find creative alternatives to anthropocentrism. By “innovative,” I do not mean something merely new and different, but rather thoughtful, context-specific practices informed by theory and experience in the field. This last point brings up the fourth criterion, which was longevity in the profession. I reasoned that the experiences of long-term professors would offer measured perspectives that have likely seen multiple attempts, successes, and failures personally and professionally. Accordingly, I narrowed my list of potential participants to those who had been working as ecological educators (not just professors) for approximately 10 years or more.

I first contacted potential participants by email to solicit their interest in the project. As some participants agreed and others declined, I shifted my list of who to contact next based on who had previously agreed to try and keep the balance I sought. I aimed for a mix of educators from both Canada and the United States, but unfortunately ended up with all three educators from the United States. However, David has since moved to Canada, and all three participants who agreed were working within very different (geographical) parts of the United States.

3.4 Learning about/with participants through fieldwork

In this sub-section and the two immediately following, I discuss how I learned about and with the participants through fieldwork, analysis, and representation. Although I have separated
these processes into three sub-sections, many scholars of narrative and/or narrative ethnographic forms of research suggest they are interwoven. For example, Clough (2002) illustrates how what we consider “data” in the first place inherently has an analytic aspect to it. He writes, “The separation of ‘data’ and ‘analysis’ troubles me, and it seems to me that in life-history work it is almost a contradiction in terms to ‘give’ a life history and then analyze it when it should be seamlessly self-analytical” (p. 15). Richardson (2000) similarly highlights overlaps between analysis and representation. She explains, “Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world … [it] is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 923). While I continue to use different headings to speak of the fieldwork, analysis, and representation, I do so in awareness of their intersectionality.

With a focus on various conceptions, enactments, and storied experiences of ecological integrity, my research needed to learn from and with participants at a variety of levels. Accordingly, and in line with ethnographic, narrative ethnographic, and creative ethnographic research methodologies, I needed a variety of approaches to gathering information about participants (Barone, 2000; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Richardson, 2000). For example, to understand what participants think and do, I needed to talk with them, read their work, and observe their practice and relationships, among other things. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) also suggest that narrative forms of research need to consider how their investigations will be attentive to the three “commonplaces:” “temporality, sociality, and place” (p. 27). In this way, my fieldwork encompassed not only a current snapshot of participants, but also research into their histories and visions, their relations with others and with myself, and their location within particular places. In the paragraphs below, I describe these processes in detail.
For each portrait, I engaged in three primary inquiries, one before, during, and after each site visit. Before the site visit, I gathered and read many of the participants’ publications, searched online for recognition of their teaching, research, and service, and researched their institutional and bioregional places. In particular, through periodicals and internet searches, I documented the following aspects of participants’ universities: establishment, university and department mission statements, university faculties, departmental concentrations, and other faculty members focusing on eco/environmental education (Appendix A). Regarding their bioregional home, I undertook a similar search and documentation that focused on: municipal demographics, economic history, colonial and First Nations history, common flora and fauna, and geographic characteristics (Appendix B). This initial research helped me understand some of the social, institutional, and bioregional context that informed the work of the educators; it also guided my preparation for the site visit, helping to make me aware of certain areas of particular interest that I wanted to investigate further in-person.

The bulk of my investigation occurred during site visits with participants. I spent three and a half days with David (he did not have much time because of his move), six days with Madhu, and five days with Ray. During that time, I conducted between two to three audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with participants, as well as many informal research-related conversations with participants, their friends, family, and colleagues (Appendix C). Participant and nonparticipant observation and experience were key aspects of the fieldwork, equally if not more important than the interviews because of the insight they provided into what participants actually do (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). I recorded observations and experiences with field notes, sketches, photographs, collected and/or found objects, and reflective audio recordings (Appendix D). The variety of approaches to documenting experiences with participants created a robust set
of memories from which to draw for the portraits. Places or experiences that were difficult to summarize in words were alternatively recalled in other ways by photographs, sketches, or a special found or made object. I primarily chose not to take pictures or draw sketches of people or participants; part of this was logistic: as per my research ethics approval, I would have to get signed approval for use of people’s images. However, I also did not feel it was appropriate to take direct photos of participants or their families; they had already made themselves vulnerable enough, and putting a camera between myself and them felt like it would create distance in our new relationship. I also used my field notebook and audio recorder, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) suggest, to take note of reflections at the end of the day, documenting emerging themes that guided the next day’s research and eventual analysis. During site visits, participants also shared many documents with me (such as books, articles, and course readers) that I turned to for further information.

Finally, after site visits and preliminary analysis, the third phase of fieldwork consisted primarily of a follow-up phone interview with each participant. In lieu of returning for a second or third site visit, these follow-up phone interviews were important for focusing in greater depth on what was meaningful for each participant. As Goetz and LeCompte (1984) suggest, “data collection and analysis are inextricably linked in ethnography because the ethnographer may not know what questions to ask until initial impressions and perceptions have been analyzed and tentative conclusions have been formulated” (p. 165). I also prepared two versions of portraits that participants and their colleagues\(^6\) reviewed. In these reviewing processes, I continued to learn more about participants. Finally, participants continued to send me documents, articles, or

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\(^6\) Only participants’ colleagues who were mentioned by name were contacted after the site visits. These colleagues were asked to review only the section of the portrait that corresponded to their contribution, and I received their approval before I sent the whole portrait to participants’ for their review.
interviews that they thought I would be interested in after the site visits. Engaging with these various texts and in these various ways over three phases attempted to provide a deeply textured insight into the lives of the three participants.

3.5 Learning about/with participants through analysis

As mentioned above, analysis for this project began during site visits when, at the end of each day, I would reflect and analyze emerging trends as well as surprising, “outlying” moments (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). After site visits, I engaged in a second phase of analysis that intertwined ethnographic and narrative traditions. First, I attempted to gather all that I had learned about participants into one place and review it all. In the reviewing process, I decided not to transcribe interviews for several reasons. I did not want to privilege them over other experiences with participants that may have been equally meaningful, but more difficult to put into words. Second, keeping the interviews in primarily audio form kept them more rich and holistic, allowing me to consider participants’ intonation, hawks crying in the background, different kinds of laughter or pauses, and the significance of each of those for our conversation. This was one way for me to attempt to maintain a bit more foregrounding of place, rather than it drifting away into silence through transcription of words onto paper (Timmerman & Piersol, 2013). That being said, as part of gathering all the information I had learned about participants together, I created a document in which I included the following: notes and quotes from each interview; extended stories and reflections based on sketches and notes in my field notebook; quotes and thoughts on participants’ publications; summaries of and quotes from my personal, audio reflections; and summaries and stories associated with the photographs and found objects. I used these documents (one for each participant) as starting points for engaging in the
subsequent phases of analysis, referring back to the “originals” (audio recordings, field notes, photographs, etc.) frequently and as needed.

Next, as Goetz and LeCompte (1984), and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) recommend, I undertook an ethnographic sorting, grouping, and classification of all the information I had gathered. In this phase, I attended to both themes and categories. Themes included emergent ideas or explanations that crossed categorical lines; categories included pre-determined topics or areas of participants’ lives that I studied. For example, “food” was a theme that emerged in Madhu’s portrait across the categories of “educational philosophy” and “home life.” This sorting, grouping, and classification happened several times for each participant until I felt I had established categories and themes that were sufficiently representative. During each reading/listening/looking, and all together at the end, I searched for meaningful themes. There is an important distinction made here between the most meaningful and the most recurrent themes:

The researcher does not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician, but instead to identify the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting. (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 116, as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 190)

In my case, I highlighted and attempted to represent both meaningful and recurrent themes in the analysis and portrait writing processes. Throughout this sorting, grouping, and classification stage of analysis, I made organic use of handwritten concept maps, lists, diagrams, and fluid sorting processes whereby one quote or idea appeared within multiple categories. Some of the analysis categories were static, applied to all three participants (e.g. educational philosophy, general philosophy, educational critique, and reconciliation) to ensure that each portrait spoke to the research question. However, other categories were changeable, adjusted to suit both participants’ differing contexts, and the different types of interactions I had access to in my site visits with them (e.g., home life, teaching observations, etc.).
Equally important to the ethnographic sorting, grouping, and classification was an aesthetically driven analysis and writing that paid attention to the flow, feel, and whole of the portrait. This process took much longer and, arguably, included much more “analysis” than did the ethnographically informed aspects. I wrote and re-wrote at least six or seven drafts of each portrait, each time learning and discovering something new about how to frame, understand, compare, and represent what I had experienced and learned with each participant. Richardson (2000) refers to this as *creative analytic practices* in which “the writing process and the writing product [are] deeply intertwined; both are privileged” (p. 930). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) also find specific language to describe the various aesthetic analyses that shape portraits, described in the sub-section on representation below.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) remind portraitists that in the inevitable sifting and sorting of a vast amount of information into smaller moments or themes, we must “set aside [our] need for control, order, and stability and submit to the complexity and instability of real lived experience” (p. 191). I thus made efforts to acknowledge and keep intact the “complex interplay of voices” (p. 191) through my analysis by (for example) not reducing contradictory ideas or stories down to one “truth,” but rather allowing both versions to exist simultaneously. This practice aligns with Barone’s (2001) statement in Chapter One that some research (this dissertation included) does not aim for one, true answer to the research question, but instead hopes to explore and uncover multiple understandings.

The “complex interplay of voices” and “multiple understandings” also found its way into the portraits through an intermingling between my own inner dialogue as a researcher and the stories I heard from participants. While analyzing in preparation for writing portraits, I found that there was a complex interaction between my own process of searching for a story, as Lawrence-
Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) suggest, and the desire to hear and trust the stories that participants were telling. In other words, I sometimes found that the story I saw was different from the story I was told. Particularly interested in notions of contradiction for this research, yet also seeking out trusting relationships, I sometimes felt I was in a bind, unsure of whether to pursue the contradictions, trusting my “outsider eyes” over the stories told and emphasized by participants. As I created the portraits, I dealt with this difficulty by inserting my own voice into the text in these instances of confusion or contradiction. Rather than presume I knew best by telling the story that I saw over the story that I heard as if it were what participants said, I chose to share with readers my personal thoughts and challenges. This enabled me to bring the confusion and contradiction I saw into view without compromising participants’ stories and trust.

In many research contexts, the analysis described above and used to create the portraits, would be sufficient. However, because this research is part of a doctoral dissertation, it is necessary for me to analyze the portraits themselves. Further, as more than just a technical necessity, Goodley, Lawthom, Clough, and Moore (2004) suggest that the researcher’s analysis of stories is part of their responsibility. In lieu of “leaving [their] stories open to a relativistic audience,” they assert that, “researchers have a responsibility to take further what stories might tell or tacitly acknowledge. … [This phase of the] analysis aims to offer a helping hand in guiding readers to the theoretical significances of a narrative” (p. 149). I thus additionally analyzed the portraits themselves to extend the conclusions I drew from individual participants toward the larger research question about ecological integrity. Through conceptual and written enactments of analysis, I compared, contrasted, critiqued, and generally drew together conversations from the three portraits, the theoretical framework, and the literature review. Chapter Eight of this dissertation represents this final phase of analysis.
3.6 Learning about/with participants through representation

Creating a portrait to represent time spent together, relationships with, and self-reflexive thoughts about research participants is a complicated process. In this section, I attempt to describe the actual formation of the portraits and the variously aesthetic and ethnographic considerations that helped to guide that formation. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) use the metaphor of weaving a tapestry to help describe what it is like to create a portrait. They suggest that this metaphor reflects “the elements of structure, texture, color, design, and the images of spinning a tale, telling a story, shaping a narrative” (p. 247). There are four aspects of this kind of weaving: conception, structure, form and cohesion. The conception of a portrait is the “overarching story” or organizing “skeleton” of the narrative. It is the first step in transferring the research analysis into a representation, using the most dominant emergent themes to create a vision of the whole. In my work, this phase brought together both 1) the static categories I applied to each portrait to ensure it stayed focused on the research question (educational and ecological philosophy, educational critique, and reconciliation of the three), and 2) my sense of the main approach or framing of each participants’ conception of ecological integrity (e.g., my use of the basket maker story to frame Madhu’s understandings and enactments of ecological integrity throughout the portrait).

The second phase of crafting a portrait includes the creation of a structure. Within this structuring, researchers bring the dominant and sub-themes into the larger vision, and organize those themes accordingly. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) write, “If [the first phase of] conception [emphasis added] expresses the overarching vision of the aesthetic whole (the tapestry), then the structure [emphasis added] represents the warp and weft of the weaving” (p. 252). During this phase is where I brought in the unique themes I had identified for each
portrait and worked through how those themes would create an internal structure to the overarching vision. This phase of representation required the most revision and care in my experience. Because there were so many recurrent and meaningful themes, it was difficult to choose which ones would be both the most authentic to each participant and also the most relevant to my research questions. It was only through writing multiple drafts of each portrait and receiving feedback from my committee members and participants that I was able to settle on appropriate and meaningful structures for each portrait.

Third is the development of form in which the researcher utilizes the aspects of analysis that were more concerned with complexity and subtlety. Giving form to the structure turns the portrait from an outline into a narrative. Again, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) explain, “Form—expressed in stories, examples, illustrations, illusion, ironies—gives life and movement to the narrative, providing complexity, subtlety, and nuance to the text, and offering the reader opportunities for feeling identified and drawn into the piece” (p. 254). This phase was also challenging as a writer. The biggest challenge was negotiating instances where participants’ words conveyed one meaning in the context of my fieldwork and another meaning in the context of the written portrait. While it is a common understanding that the same words can mean different things depending on the context, the challenge as a researcher/writer was to gain enough outside perspective to see those instances. In other words, because I knew the original context of participants’ stories, the original meanings associated with those stories was triggered for me as I read their words in my portraits. For readers who did not have that same background knowledge, their interpretations of the same stories differed. Again, it was through feedback from others that I was able to identify some of these instances and subtly adjust the portraits’ form so that I maintained the integrity of participants’ intentions without misquoting them.
Finally, portraitists are asked to attend to coherence. Partly out of an effective combination of the first three steps, and partly out of a final look at the piece as a whole, researchers create coherence by ensuring that the portrait has a proper flow, unity as a whole, and consistency in the researcher’s voice. However, this coherence is not created at the expense of acknowledging and including surprising or contradictory aspects of the portraits. It rather aims to include the complexity of participants’ stories while ensuring that the work is of good literary quality. In particular, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) suggest that this last aspect of coherence is tied to their understanding of validity. While this section summarizes four guides that I used to create portraits (conception, structure, form, and cohesion), the following section discusses appropriate measures of validity for this kind of work.

3.7 Validity: A question of multi-layered resonance

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) turn to ethnographic, arts-based, and narrative researchers to explain their conception of validity for portraiture. They suggest that the validity of a research portrait comes from its resonance with three different audiences:

The portraitist hopes to develop a rich portrayal that will have resonance (in different ways, from different perspectives) with three different audiences: with the actors who will see themselves reflected in the story, with the readers who will see no reason to disbelieve it, and with the portraitist herself, whose deep knowledge of the setting and self-critical stance allow her to see the “truth-value” in her work. (p. 247)

In this final section of the methodology chapter, I explain these three conceptions of resonance, drawing also from other ethnographic, narrative, and arts-based theory, and briefly explaining how I attempted to validate my research in these ways.

First, resonance for “actors” refers to the reactions participants have when reading a draft of their own portraits, whether they recognize themselves within them. This first sense of resonance carries particular significance in this research because participants are not made
anonymous. While Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) are quick to assert that a researcher’s portrayal will (and should) inevitably look quite different from a participant’s own view of self, there is a need to ensure a base level of participant recognition in the work. Referring to Lincoln (1995), Hart (2002) suggests that researchers might establish “reciprocity (vs. hierarchy)” (p. 151) as one criterion for validity in narrative environmental education research. I see portraiture’s desire for resonance with participants as one step in a reciprocal direction rather than a researcher-as-expert-on-others, hierarchical direction.

I asked participants to review two versions of portraits. The first was a short “snapshot” portrait composed for a conference presentation, for which I requested substantive feedback from participants on how these short portraits resonated. During the second review, participants were sent their near-final, full portraits. In this second review, participants were reminded that the portrait would remain my interpretation, and only asked for feedback on whether the portrait had any factual inaccuracies or information/portrayals that could be harmful to them (Hoffmann Davis, personal communication, August 4, 2012). Even so, meaningful dialogues that spoke to participant resonance ensued after this second review. I balanced these conversations with the other two aspects of resonance explained below.

Second, resonance for readers refers to the believability of the portrait for the intended audience. Many narrative and literary arts-based researchers focus on this aspect of validity. Hart (2002) suggests that, “Rather than seeking universal rules through context independence and objective verification, the purpose of most qualitative inquiry is to understand human events, within context, in such a way as to leave room for reflection (perhaps critical reflection) and intersubjective scrutiny” (p. 147). For narrative environmental education research in particular, he further explains that, “we interpret stories from their verisimilitude, their lifelikenesss. … The
narrative interest is in whether it is believable” (p. 147). Similarly, Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) highlight authenticity, adequacy, plausibility, recognizability of the field, and resonance as their criteria for narrative research validity. Researchers seem to focus on resonance based on the assumption that resonance for the audience means believability, which in turn means understanding, which can then in turn mean change. As Clough (2002) writes,

We are not led in the first instance to affirm a piece of research because of any elegance of validation, but by its manifest… ability to speak to our experience… For what is research in educational settings for if it is not to understand; and when we understand, we can change (Bolton, 1981). (p. 83)

In my research, it was largely my supervisory committee who helped to ensure that the portraits had resonance for readers. My co-advisors reviewed two versions of each portrait before they were sent out for initial review to participants. My third committee member reviewed the portraits after I made adjustments to them based on participants’ feedback, and finally, they were sent once again to participants for a final approval.

Resonance for readers can also mean that a researcher is aware of her/his own positionality, both in terms of “personal standpoint judgments,” and in relation to “specific discourse communities” (i.e. academic fields) (Hart, 2002, p. 151). In other words, for a portrait to resonate with readers, researchers must be self-reflexively aware of how their own standpoint influences their writing in relation to the particular audience likely to read their work. This second interpretation of resonance for the audience blends together with the third criterion of validity for portraiture: resonance for the portraitist.

The third aspect of portraiture validity, resonance for the portraitist, describes a process of critical discernment whereby researchers engage in a self-criticism of the portraits, imagining what some of the most salient challenges would be, and working through them (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). As described above, this kind of resonance requires that
researchers examine their own values, assumptions, and privilege (Hart, 2002). Having done so does not imply that they will then be able to take on a more objective or accurate stance, but rather that they can be aware of instances where their own positionality normalizes aspects of the portraits, and accordingly, where others might find room to challenge these same aspects from an alternate position. I aimed toward this third type of resonance through a combination of processes. Multiple revisions of each portrait were essential, as was sufficient time away from those versions to give me the distance needed to bring a critical, challenging eye toward them. Further, the commentary and questions from my supervisory committee were again helpful here in highlighting unnoticed assumptions or potential challenges to consider against my knowledge of and experiences with participants.

At face value, it might seem that these three searches for resonance could lead researchers (consciously or not) to write portraits that will please the participants, readers, and portraitist, and use logical, simplistic story lines. Indeed, I found it difficult to negotiate this tendency, particularly given the “novice-expert,” “junior-senior” dynamic of my relationship as a PhD student to three respected, professor participants. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) quote from Miles and Huberman’s (1984) work to describe these tendencies as follows:

- *Holistic fallacy*: interpreting events as more patterned and congruent than they really are, lopping off the many loose ends of which social life is made. …
- *Going native*: losing your perspective … being coopted into the perceptions and explanations of local informants [p. 263]. (p. 246)

Barone (2001) offers literary-style arts-based researchers an additional criterion for validity that helps to counter a portraitist’s potential desire to please and slip into a “holistic fallacy,” which is “the presence of a heightened degree of ambiguity” (p. 25). Similarly, Richardson’s (2000) metaphor of crystallization rather than triangulation for validity can help researchers avoid both “holistic fallacy” and “going native.” She writes, “Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not
amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions” (p. 934). As I referred to above in discussing the analysis for this research, part of the way that I countered a tendency toward holistic fallacy, going native, or generally writing to please participants was by more directly inserting my own voice into portraits at certain times. (My interpretations, of course, shaped all aspects of the portraits, but I am referring here to instances where I directly referenced myself and my thoughts in portraits.) Doing so allowed for ambiguity in that readers could hear multiple stories within a portrait, mine and the participants.’ Moreover, in situations where I felt ambiguity myself, but participants did not, the inclusion of multiple stories/voices allowed me to honour both experiences and interpretations.

Within these range of considerations on validity, my work in this dissertation has attempted to consider and create a multi-layered resonance. It is my hope that the portraits resonate with participants while also opening up new ways of understanding and framing their views of self. In term of readers, I aim to create a resonance that evokes generous identification and understanding while also leaving room for constructive criticism and self-reflection. Finally, I hope that in my own critical appraisal of the portraits, I sense a resonance between the writing and my experiences with and knowledge of participants, as well as an openness to ambiguity, complexity, and as yet unknown interpretations, readings, and/or critiques.

At this point in the dissertation, I have described the motivation, theoretical framing, relevant research and literature, and methodological approach used herein. In the chapters that follow, I first briefly position readers so that they are aware of the contexts in which I encountered participants before they read their portraits. Following this are the portraits of each participant, my discussion of those, and the overall conclusions drawn from this study.
Chapter 4: The bridge: Transitioning to portraits

In the previous three chapters, I have written about the motivation for this research, its theoretical frame, the questions and purpose behind it, the literature supporting it, and the methodology guiding its form. In the coming three chapters (5-7), the writing style shifts as I present to the reader rich, detailed, and narrative portraits of the participants. Following the individual participant portraits are two more chapters that bring ideas and experiences from each of the three participants into conversation with one another and relevant literature. Chapter Eight provides a collective snapshot in which I focus on several key aspects of participants’ practices of searching for ecological integrity. Chapter Nine re-visits the core concepts of ecological integrity and contradiction, as well as outlining the limitations, paths for future research, and final summary of the dissertation.

In the three participant portraits that follow, they stand alone as pieces in and of themselves. I do not often make explicit ties to academic literature within them, but rather structure their form and content according to the goals of conception, structure, form, and cohesion, as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) and outlined in the previous chapter. Each portrait is structured somewhat differently, rather than applying a standard format for each. These differences reflect my varied experiences with each participant. However, among the differences in structure, they all relate to the study’s main research question by addressing participants’ 1. critiques of education; 2. educational philosophy; 3. ecological philosophy; and 4. conceptions of contradiction and descriptions of and paths toward ecological integrity.

Among the many differences, there is one in particular that I must mention explicitly. When I visited each participant, they were each busy with very different aspects of their lives.
David was transitioning from one job and university to another. As such, he was not teaching classes nor yet supervising but a few students. His time was devoted to planning, reflecting, and packing. Alternatively, Madhu was in the middle of teaching two pre-service teacher courses in philosophy of education. She had just returned from a conference the week prior and was planning for a new, almost 200-student course in the spring. Her thoughts and energy were thus refreshed by the conference, and tuned toward her teaching. Finally, I visited Ray during the largest First Alaskan conference of the year, which was held in his hometown. He organized and facilitated a PhD student retreat, shuttled Elders and visiting scholars to and from various destinations, made appearances at several events, and led a distance-education course. In contrast to the longer, more numerous conversations I had with Madhu, and to some extent with David, my time one-on-one with Ray was limited and always bookended by other obligations.

The reason I address these differences here is to emphasize to readers how the contexts in which I encountered participants shape my learning about/with them and my representations of them. Had I encountered David or Madhu at a conference, for example, what we talked about would have been substantially different, as would my impressions of who they are as people and what they think is important. Therefore, I want to encourage readers to understand these narrative portraits as just that: brief stories of different people in different contexts at different times. While there are certainly multiple layers of resonance within each, there is much, much more left unsaid, unseen, and unknown.

David’s portrait is first, followed by Madhu, then Ray. The order was determined primarily by the order in which I visited the participants, but it also reflects the relative age of the participants and the different stages they are at in their careers. That is, David is youngest and
has been a professor for the least amount of time, Madhu is in the middle, and Ray is oldest and most experienced. I discuss potential implications for these differences in the final chapter.

Finally, I want to emphasize again my gratitude to David, Ray, and Madhu for opening their homes, offices, thoughts, and walks to me and to my questions. By participating in this research, they have not only devoted time and energy to the project, but have made themselves vulnerable for the sake of helping me (and hopefully others) to learn, reflecting on their own practice, and ultimately, sharing in a collective effort toward further understanding ecological education. As the reader embarks on the next three chapters, I ask that s/he please respect this vulnerability, approach participants’ stories with appreciation, and remember that the framing, sorting, and selecting of these stories ultimately lies with me, rendering any inaccuracy my own, not participants’.
Chapter 5: A portrait of David Greenwood

5.1 A Faustian bargain

A short three-minute walk up the country road in front of David Greenwood’s house brings us to Greenwood Cemetery. Continuing only one minute more would take us to the wheat fields. Before we get to the wheat and turn onto the winding road that skirts the Palouse River, David walks up to a gravestone. It is simple: gray, rectangular, horizontally set, typical at first sight. As I read the epitaph for the second time, however, I puzzle over its meaning. “Victim of corporation greed,” it says. Recalling the details from a local, historical publication, David shares the story . . .

In the early 1900s, Palouse was the hub of booming logging, mining, and railroad industries working as fast as they could to make as much money as they could from the land. The man whose grave we stood upon worked for Northern Pacific Railroad. One day, while filling an oil can near the repair tracks, a “door from a ballast car swung out and caught young Brown, crushing him against the building where he was at work, breaking the pelvis bone and inflicting internal injuries” (Kiessling, 1999, p. 23). Especially tragic as he had only a few days prior decided to “take up some less hazardous line of work” (p. 24) in light of his upcoming marriage, Bert Leon Brown died at age 24 of internal injuries, “victim of corporation greed.” His parents, who had just barely made it to the hospital to spend his last 40 minutes of life with him, were irate with the injustice of their son’s death and chose these words to adorn his gravestone lest the people of the Palouse forget.
When planning my visit, David Greenwood suggested we should “be spontaneous . . . just hang out and be challenged.” Despite not overly-planning our time together, David generously and carefully thought out several appropriate places to visit, people to meet, and walks to be had, the first of which was our visit to Bert’s gravestone. Talking and walking together this fall morning, I encountered David during the “calm before the storm” of a significant life transition. Professionally, he was shifting from an Associate Professor position at Washington State University, where he had been for seven years, to a new position as Canada Research Chair in Environmental Education at Lakehead University. Personally, the move from Palouse, Washington to Thunder Bay, Ontario saw his family of five riding an emotional rollercoaster as they worked through the uprooting of patterns and ties to one place, and the search for opportunities to fill them in another.

As David finishes this story, he says that sometimes living at this point in time, in the Anthropocene, the epoch in which humans have so changed the surface and atmosphere of the planet that their “centrality” has become more than an ideological stance, it feels like we are all (humans, forests, birds, frogs, and rivers, the Earth itself) victims. Privileging output over worker safety, Bert’s death is symptomatic of a culture of instrumentalism, a culture of what, in reference to Hardt and Negri’s (2000) work, David calls “empire.” He writes,

> Like globalization, empire describes the political economy of the planet: the new imperialism, colonization, development, free trade. Empire—a system of domination and resistance, a bio-political power that is exercised, internalized, and shaped by networks of human cultures worldwide. A system of authority and control enacted by all of us, motivated by habit, addiction, desire, necessity, dreams of a better life, fantasies of endless economic growth . . . the subject of empire is the commodity; the object is the consumer. All of us are its soldiers. (2010b, p. 14)

In the wake of empire are countless victims, some worse off than others, and some more complicit than others. David offers a quote from Wendell Berry (2012) in agreement that empire
is “indifferent… It [does] not intend to victimize its victims. It simply follow[s] its single purpose of the highest possible profit, and ignore[s] the ‘side effects’” (para. 21).

The same can be seen in institutions of education. They, too, are often dictated by the powers and goals of empire. David thus critiques dominant curricular and pedagogical approaches on many accounts. He suggests that there is a significant disconnect between what students experience and where meaning is held inside versus outside of school, between the everyday experiences of family, friendship, and place-based meaning, and the abstracted, reductionistic, and—frankly—boring, curricula and pedagogy of most educational operations. Institutionalized education functions as if it were floating above places, disconnected and ambivalent to what happened there previously, what is happening there now, and what should happen there in the future. He writes, “The home world of meaning, relevance, and nurturance is exchanged for an alien, mechanical environment that fails to connect, fails to acknowledge what is missing, and, what is worse, destroys the child’s ability to reenter the world of meaning left behind” (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 292). And later, “the lecture or schoolroom is too often a sterile, artificial environment where the latest official version of learning—whether we call it transmission or sugar it with constructivism—is legitimized, even glorified, at the expense of actual experience with the ‘mystical moist’ stuff of life” (p. 281).

Image 2. The mystical moist night-air

In several publications, David illustrates the “enclosure of bodies” with Whitman’s “When I heard the learn’d astronomer:”

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look’d up in perfect silence at the stars. (Whitman 1955, 226)
Part of the lack of contact with the “mystical moist stuff of life” comes from schooling largely taking place indoors, what David also critiques as an “egregious absence of contact with the land from dominant educational discourses and practices” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 41). Even more subtly, though, it is not only the enclosure of bodies indoors, but it is the emphasis on so-called “measurable,” standardized knowledge that works away at erasing the importance of the ambiguous, immeasurable aspects of relationships to place and the more-than-human. In an essay called Resistance, Reinhabitation, and Regime Change, David explains, “Ivan Illich wrote, ‘People who have been schooled down to size let unmeasured experience slip out of their hands.’ This is what I think is happening in education—we’re being assimilated, we’re being schooled down to size. Unmeasured experience is slipping out of our hands as a result, and this slippage is what needs to be resisted” (Gruenewald, 2006, p. 3).

David’s published critiques of institutional education often point to their ecologically problematic norms and the corresponding negative impacts on students, teachers, administrators, and all our relations. When I talk with him in person, we have the opportunity to explore his own personal experiences and sense of frustration within the institution. In such discussions, he begins by recognizing the relatively mild nature of the hardships and frustrations he experiences, given his privileged location. Also, he does not shy away from acknowledging his complicity in reproducing those institutional norms. All that notwithstanding, it is clear that their negative effects are still deeply felt. For example, David expresses both sadness and anger at how education’s enclosures, abstractions, and assimilations generally “conspire against the human soul, or even the idea of a human soul,” how [they are] destructive to our bodies and spirits, “reshap[ing] humans as machines.” Considering these statements personally, he talks through his own experience of being emotionally and physiologically drained by enclosures of his body and
thoughts. Even as we sit inside the space of his backyard office—a rare moment inside compared to most of our outdoor wanderings—the window is cracked and he tells me how he will always try to open a window in any indoor space. “I NEED AIR. No matter where I am, I have this need to just open the fucking window!”

Further, David links the aspects of how institutions end up “taking away [one’s] sense of self” to other “institutional dynamics [that are] so geared toward productivity and so not geared toward nurturing the whole person . . . or for that matter, the community or the land.” In his experience, the pressure to perform and produce not only affects one’s own sense of self, but also disrupts one’s relationships with others. He describes a conversation he had with a colleague who said, “All academics I know are workaholics.” David says it’s true, but that he does not want to be one: “My father was and . . . even though I resented him, I hated him for it, I became him. Classic family dynamics. I have been a workaholic in the last ten years—not the last few—after I got tenure, I started to be in recovery.” Feeling as if he needed to “overachieve” in order to be “safe,” David experienced the over-expenditure of “time and energy and the costs associated to family and self and to others.”

Even now, in this time of “recovery,” the transition that he and his family are experiencing in the move from Palouse to Thunder Bay, has resulted in an “amazing amount of grief and stress.” For a family of place-based educators and children who have grown up in close connection with the land on which they live, the

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Image 3. Nests

Also a place-based educator, David’s partner, Jill, homeschools their three children: eldest Eli, and two twin girls, Kate and Ivy. Amongst the wholesome activities of collecting chicken eggs, baking with local pumpkins, making place-based alphabet books, and playing board games, the giddy chirps of Hannah Montana flickering in the background seem out of place. Assuring me that the kids normally don’t watch TV, Jill and David explain how the upcoming move has shifted their parenting into bargaining mode as well.
reality of moving and uprooting for a job is particularly difficult to reconcile.

Standing a few paces away from Bert Brown’s grave, we walk under the swaying branches of a giant willow, the cemetery’s United States’ flag catches the wind, and its attached rope clangs against the pole. “So, why do you do it, then?” I ask. Given all these issues, why choose to work within such a system? Initially, David answers by reiterating the privilege of his job: “It’s the most privileged job in the world. I get to think, reflect, and write, and I get paid a lot of money to do it.” I ask him whether it would be possible to engage in these same kinds of activities, but outside of the context of a university. In response, he recounts a time in which he lived off the land and, yes, was able to do much of the same thinking, reflecting, and writing outside of the institution. However, he did it for little or no money. And once his family came, so did his sense of responsibility to engage within a social system that would allow for them to have choices and opportunities down the road. It is a reality that I rarely hear academics acknowledge, but the money does matter.

However, in later conversations, it seems that the most significant reasons for David’s choice to work as an academic hinge upon his desire to “be a part of social change.” Many educators feel this call; for David, he describes it in these terms:

To identify as an educational researcher in a world full of violence, injustice, and ecological ruin is, first of all, a privilege. . . . It is a privilege to have the economic and social capital needed, and the distance from suffering required, to be able to reflect in relative comfort on the world’s problems, to be an interpreter of major crises instead of a victim . . . . With privilege comes a responsibility to examine and work to transform the structures that maintain interconnected webs of privilege, oppression, violence, and multiple forms of domination and control. (Gruenewald, 2006, p. 5)

David explains that the roots of his desire to work toward social change come from being an “on-the-margins” kind of kid, one who worked at trying to conform for some time before he grew to realize that the search for conformity was unfulfilling. In high school, after reading Thoreau, he
became happier being on the margins and instead found himself largely discontented with the “BS of society.” These days, David continues to turn to Thoreau and works toward social change alongside acknowledgements of his own complicity. He writes, “My own uneasy relationship with the teacher education bureaucracy is nicely captured by Thoreau (1947, p. 609) in his observations of the culture of his time: ‘The greater part of what my neighbors call good,’ Thoreau wrote, ‘I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is my good behavior.’ I likewise repent at my own many compromises of conformity to a regulated system that has little to do with what I truly value” (Greenwood, 2010a, p. 5).

In some instances, David’s feelings about his choice to work as a professor are heavier than others. While he enjoys the privileges and much of the work expected of him, he also refers to his sense of complicity within postsecondary institutions as a “Faustian bargain,” a “selling of [his] soul at the crossroads.” In reconciling the privileges and complicity, David sometimes aims for a sense of balance. He describes how he tries to “achieve goals and meet expectations without entering into a Faustian Bargain where the costs start to mount . . . it’s my own integrity, it’s my health, it’s my relationships . . . as much as possible I want to live outside that game and just be real.” But when it comes down to it, that balance if and when it does appear, is fleeting. Accordingly, David also reconciles his privileges and complicity by embracing a sense of struggle. In response to a question I have about times when he felt good about his work, he ends up suggesting that he feels best when fully engaged within the struggle: “I don’t really feel I have a finest hour as a professional . . . I’ve struggled a lot, you know? And, my finest hours are probably within that struggle, right? I mean, that’s what it’s about for me. The struggle is where the windows and doors open and it’s the little glimpses of what you might make happen, even
within the struggle, that sustain me. But, you know, the finest hour is yet to come. All my songs are redemption songs. I’m not the shining example.”

5.2 A walk

Rounding the hill, we walk down onto a road covered in gravel, black and wet with recent rain. We walk mostly silently, save for the hearty crunch of one foot placed in front of the other. After several minutes, David veers off to the left toward the trees. Following his silent lead, our footsteps become quiet as the coarse gravel gives way to a soft bed of ponderosa pine needles. As the ground begins to tilt down toward the Palouse River and we duck under the first of many low-hanging branches, I notice David has stopped. With a joyful fire in his blue, blue eyes, he turns to say in a hushed and excited voice, “I like to walk where the deer walk.”

When it comes to the beauty of a place and being with the land, David’s does not hesitate to speak with reverence, many pauses, a tear, or hearty laughter. As we walk, he begins to share aspects of his ecological philosophy with me. David uses the phrase “the land” often as he talks and I ask him to clarify what that means to him. “The land is everything, I mean, the land is us, . . . there is no other place.” He also says, smiling, “I am mad for it to be in contact with me.” A favourite Walt Whitman quote, this passage captures his itching need to connect with the land. Walks such as the one we are taking now are “sacred.” They are opportunities to “re-member” himself, his body, with/in the land. Walking provides an opportunity to remember one’s membership with/in the land. Clearing his head, getting out of his mind and into his body, David can re-member what he calls (after Thoreau) his whole self.
Approaching the river, the undergrowth thickens and we pause, silently observing this place. David spots a kingfisher, our breathing slows to a resting pace, and bit-by-bit, we pick up the conversation. We talk about freedom and wildness. “I have a pretty big . . . appetite for freedom and wildness,” he says. Being outside, something “switches on” inside him; he feels free from institutional constraints that limit behaviour, thoughts, and bodies. Wildness, he says, is the freedom to be self-willed, the freedom and spontaneity that come when he can make his own decisions about where to go next. “Nothing makes me feel more present, awake, tuned in, than walking the land and reading the signs, reading the landscape.”

On most days, within ten minutes of waking, David is out the door walking. After climbing a nearby hill with views to the Idaho forest or a downhill walk to the Palouse River, he returns home to make tea and toast, settling in with a book for a deep read. He tells me, “The ideal day involves a good walk and a good read. And if I have those things, I feel like I can do anything, pretty much. . . . Because each of these is an expression of my own freedom and wildness. I choose where to go, I choose what to read. . . . I feel like I’m growing from each, I feel like I’m being worthwhile.” Daily practices of walking and reading enable two types of learning—“one is more accidental and one is more intentional”—and together constitute what Emerson says you need to do to be a learner, and what David likewise takes up as his educational philosophy: “study nature and read books.”

In this instance and others, much of David’s ecological and educational philosophy draws from romantic and

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*Image 5. The research table*

On the table during our indoor interview, David placed a large bundle of smudge, an owl claw that he had found, a photo of his two girls shortly after they learned to walk on their family’s land in Idaho, a picture of his mentor, and a book. My own tea, tape recorder, notebook and pen sat mostly untouched during the conversation.
transcendentalist thought, the American nature and wilderness tradition. However, as he later tells me—once we have finished our walk and sit down to some tea and toast of our own—he was also influenced by a mentor—Michael Morris—who “expand[ed] that landscape to include culture and politics.”

The language David uses to express his vision for education is thus evocative of the intimate and complex connections between culture, place, politics, and ecology. The words he chooses to express this vision: decolonization and reinhabitation. He writes,

Decolonization signals a strong critique of cultural practices and their underlying assumptions. . . [it] problematizes the colonization of people and land, both as historical practice and as the political progenitor of today’s empire. . . . Reinhabitation involves maintaining, restoring, and creating ways of living that are more in tune with the ecological limits of a place . . . learning to live well socially and ecologically . . . in a way that does not harm other people and places. (Greenwood, 2010b, p. 19)

Although the work of decolonization and reinhabitation promises to be challenging for individuals, for classrooms, and institutions, when we talk about it, there is an air of inspiration in David’s voice. I get the sense that what is required within his conception of decolonization and reinhabitation is not just a shouldering of responsibility or burden. Within the process of educating oneself about “the history of colonization of people and land,” and how to “develop communities of congruence and resistance,” are ample “opportunities for creative work . . . restoration, and transformation.” It is a compelling vision of what education can be.

Alongside this societal vision, David holds a pedagogical one that is context-dependent. He suggests that his responsibility as instructor is to encourage a process of learning in which “people are challenged to articulate who they are, what they want, and are supported in some way to move toward their own ideals.” He says, “I believe that we all have something unique to offer a community of others and that part of the role of education ought to be to listen for, identify, nurture, what that gift is.” In other words, just as he was inspired by his mentor to
“continue to articulate, refine, and nurture, incubate” his own vision “in the presence of others who have diverse yet overlapping visions,” he wants to create a pedagogical environment that will encourage others to do the same.

Accordingly, the what, why, and how of an educational experience depend upon the people, the place, and the time. When I ask him to describe an educational experience where he walked away thinking, “That was it! . . . That’s what I want,” David responded first by bringing the conversation back—again—to context. “It depends on what context we’re talking about, right? And then, whatever that was, I would always bring it into the context of place, region, and planet.” In this way, his version of context always, already carries with it an ecological dimension, as opposed to some other perspectives that might solely focus on socio-cultural aspects of context. Rounding off our morning’s conversation that has meandered through freedom and wildness, vision, and context, David summarizes: “Education for me [is] not just about human being exploration, it’s about human being exploration in a context, and that context has an ecological dimension that needs to be understood and explored, and then the relationship has to be—ideally, for me, a relationship needs to be developed between the human becoming and the becoming of the place. And, if that’s in harmony, then everything’s cool!”

5.3 Stay calm. Be brave. Wait for the signs.

Mid-morning the next day, we meet with two of David’s former graduate students, and I am given some insight into how he integrates notions of trust, spontaneity, vision, context, decolonization, and reinhabitation into a pedagogical practice. During the
half-hour drive from David’s home to the WSU garden, the land rolls along, giving us alternating views of expansive wheat fields and far-off buttes dark with high desert forests. Nearing the university, but before the characteristic red-brick buildings, we follow a winding road through apple orchards to the top of a hill. Stepping out of the car and around a stand of apple trees, I look down upon a soft slope thick with corn, cabbages, tomatoes, artichokes, eggplant, squash, pumpkins, flowers, beans, culinary herbs, and more. We are greeted first by Justin, who hands us several golden, tiny tomatoes. Delicious. An absolutely perfect blend of mellow sweet and tang brightens my senses and leaves me already grateful to both him and Francene, who have agreed to me sitting in on their meeting with David.

In preparing for this meeting, David describes it as a chance to check in with two people that are “continuing the work” he was part of at WSU. He has no specific agenda, but rather trusts that what needs to be said and discussed will arise on its own. Neither Justin nor Francene are current students of David’s—Justin finished his PhD, and Francene has another supervisor—nevertheless, he remains closely tied to their academic and personal journeys. My impression is that this is primarily because they have become friends. Through serendipitous encounters and enough time spent together, David considers Justin “a brother” and Francene “a soul mate for sure.” Gathering to talk is partly about catching up on one another’s lives, but also, he describes their meetings as “inspiring and conspiring together.” Reflecting his previously described educational philosophy, this “inspiring and conspiring” is a process of exploring and creating a personal and collective vision grounded within a place.

Shortly after introductions and hugs are exchanged, David shares a phrase he recently learned from a friend, who had herself reportedly learned it from a Maori friend: “Stay calm. Be brave. Wait for the signs.” This mantra strikes him as one to live by and has particular resonance
for Francene as well. She repeats it many times and says she likes it. Later in the conversation, as she shuffles through an assortment of ideas for her thesis work, using David and Justin as a sounding board, the sun suddenly comes out and shines down upon us. As it does, she invokes the mantra: “See! Look for the signs! That’s my sign. Okay, I think I might do this.”

That Francene is entirely serious in this moment, that she feels the first soft rays of sun on her back, turns to watch as a cloud moves to fully reveal its light, and jumping up and down a bit, says with excitement, “hey, these are the signs!,” brings me mixed feelings. Initially, I am surprised, my deeply rooted skepticism of such direct communication between human and all our relations in full swing. Yet, I subsequently settle into a sense of easy appreciation. Rather than adopting my own ready-at-hand skepticism, Francene demonstrates an openness to the mystery and subjectivity of place. This mystery and subjectivity feels closer to the surface throughout Francene, Justin, and David’s meeting in the garden. And further, they seem able to find it while simultaneously making way for critical socio-cultural discussions and also localized, particular stories of the history of this rich land, a place where the topsoil goes down up to 200 ft. in some places, but where photos of crop dusters are revered as beautiful on the front covers of local papers; where large amounts of “Sure Kill” herbicides, fertilizers, and pesticides are used all around and no one talks about it. Below is a postcard advertising the “Abundant opportunity and enterprise in the wholesome city of Palouse, Washington.”

Image 7. Garden fieldnotes
My field notes (above) from this meeting show swiftly drawn scribbles of the long, long rows of tomato plants. The words on the page tell how David, Justin, and Francene were “standing, talking, sharing stories.” Not just listening and talking, but actually co-creating. Further down (not shown), there are notes on the untold story of this rich land, a place where the topsoil goes down up to 200 ft. in some places, but where photos of crop dusters are revered as beautiful on the front covers of local papers; where large amounts of “Sure Kill” herbicides, fertilizers, and pesticides are used all around and no one talks about it. Below is a postcard advertising the “Abundant opportunity and enterprise in the wholesome city of Palouse, Washington.”

Image 8. Wholesome Palouse
place and the people who live(d) here.

Standing adjacent to the sprawling squash, conversation meanders from Francene’s thesis topic to departmental culture, faculty interest in place-based initiatives, and a fascinating course that examines Palouse water issues from multiple perspectives. Their academic talk has an air of exuberance, trust, inspiration, and grit. Grounded in story, in place, in communities, it is about who is there, what is happening, what is important, and where people are making meaning. Critical theories emerge as frameworks for understanding these grounded stories and places of meaning. As Francene and Justin talk through their ideas and experiences, David listens a lot. He flows from their enthusiasm into suggestions for future work, encouragements, and probes for deeper understanding of both past experience and future vision.

As the conversation winds its way to a close, we walk up to the tomato bushes. Hungry after almost two hours of talking, I eat at least a dozen of the culls, maybe two. They are even more amazing the second time around. David and I return to his car and to Palouse, and I am left with the slightly sticky, prickly green smell of tomato vines on my hands and a curious mantra in my mind: “Stay calm. Be brave. Wait for the signs.”

5.4 Visions of interventions

We are walking again. This time, we’re walking up. David’s hand reaches out periodically to brush by or lightly grasp the oceanspray, the ponderosa pine, snowberry, and others. Eventually emerging from the trees onto the exposed rock at the top, we are greeted by big sky and big land. Several hawks circle above
and the fields are gold with fall crops. Periodically standing, resting, listening, watching, and talking, this is where we have our last interview. The audiotape records almost as many silences as it does conversation, and is dotted with hawk cries and gusty winds throughout.

David has spent some time thinking about the notion of a paradox. He has written about it in publications and also brought it up during my visit. He explains that, for him, paradox is really a unifying concept, something that brings things together that otherwise do not seem to fit or belong. It seems to be a term he uses to reconcile contradiction in various contexts. Referring to the field of environmental education, David gives the example of how institutions and critics of them can be united if we consider them as parts of paradox. Echoing his earlier inclination to embrace struggle, he says that “going into paradox is the most generative. . . . It helps you to ask questions and make discoveries that wouldn’t happen otherwise.” In a keynote address from 2009, David (2010b) again hints toward a “paradoxical” approach to the negotiation of contradiction:

I hold in my hands two related objects: the flight feather of a barn owl, and a wallet full of plastic and paper money. Inquiry: How do these objects and what they represent implicate me and shape our work? Nature and empire, the flight feather of an owl and the wallet of a white man, generate a paradox, a paradox that we need to hold, and balance. (p. 10)

The notion of paradox and its associated utility is in service to his desire to see and be a part of substantive social change. Discussing this further atop Kamiak, David explains what social change means to him now, and what it might mean when he transitions to Lakehead University. In terms of research, he has a proposal underway with colleagues that aims to critically analyze what is left out of sustainability discourses in education. This project works toward social change by first allying with a large and potentially powerful social movement toward “sustainability;” and, second, by seeking to deepen and strengthen that movement itself.
Despite the disagreement around what sustainability is, David feels that it has momentum, and as long as the discourses can avoid getting too far away from our ecological connections, the differences in opinion around sustainability can be fruitful. It is that idea of paradox again, he says. Uniting the differences through paradox allows for acknowledgement of tension and contradiction while still moving toward social change collectively. “Through partnership, solidarity, and persistence, social groups grow wiser and stronger in their ability to transform this logic [of empire], and to reinhabit our colonized places and lives” (Greenwood, 2010b, p. 21).

Continuing the discussion on social change, David explains that a second vision he holds for his future at Lakehead University is to “develop relationships with learning sites that can be used across faculties.” He continues, “I really think that all schools and all universities ought to better connect with the land and the sustainability issues in their immediate region. So, how to do this? Well, one way might be to identify a set of exemplary places where people are doing work around sustainability and then develop ways of integrating lots of different courses and programs with those places and the people who know them and work with them.”

Of course, one of the challenges most often cited with academic work that engages meaningfully with community partners is that it takes more time. “If you look at faculty members that do a lot of community work, they tend not to have a lot of publications and vice
versa.” The same is true for engaging students outdoors, David says. He has made sure that there
are out-of-doors components to all of his classes, trying “to get outside as much as possible” and
give his “students a taste of a practice that they could include for themselves if they find
rewarding reflection happening there.” However, the increasingly strong push toward
productivity is not only placed on the shoulders of professors, but it lands on students as well,
making “outdoor work . . . harder and harder to make time for.”

After a lengthy pause in our conversation, I recall how David’s desire for social change is
connected to his reading of Thoreau, and I ask him, “What does the civil disobedience of an
academic look like? . . . Not just an academic, but a place-based academic?” Another long pause
follows as he mulls the question over. Ideas and answers are tossed about over the next few
minutes, and David’s thoughts seem to trace two paths. The first has to do with “taking some
form of direct action, . . . not buying in to the productivity discourse,” saying “‘No, I’m not
going to do that,’ and being willing to face consequences.” However, he explains, “There’s civil
disobedience, and then there’s being an agent of change—and sometimes they overlap, and
sometimes they’re separate projects.”

Returning to Thoreau, David maps out the ways in which writing—a common “outcome”
of the academic push for productivity, and the second path he discusses—can actually be a
powerful source of social change. “I think that’s one way, is in writing, which is of course, what
Thoreau’s essay was. His act meant nothing, it was the writing of it that became a movement,
and one that’s been taken up by lots of groups on the ground in lots of different places, so there’s
definitely value in that.” And, ironically, “The good thing about academe is that if you couch
your discourse in academic language, you can be pretty radical. . . . I’ve been very critical of the
very institution that pays my bills . . . in an effort to help create an environment that feels more sustainable, more in tune with people, place, and land.”

While David has not written a book that has received attention in the way Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience has, the 2003 “Critical Pedagogy of Place” article he wrote for Educational Researcher continues to be a reference point for many scholars—critics and fans alike. Indeed, David’s publishing record is substantial, not only in terms of its volume, but in terms of its scope and effects. Many eco/environmental educators know his name and are affected by his poignant writing. Having worked for years in public schools as an English teacher, his talent for crafting gripping essays and poetry is exceptional. Publishing ecological education pieces in mainstream education journals is thus another potentially powerful and under-utilized avenue for social change that David suggests. As of my visit with him, he said that there had not been another environmental or ecological education piece published in Educational Researcher since his in 2003, and David admits, “I don’t understand why other people don’t do it—I just don’t get it. Or, maybe they are and these articles are just being weeded out. . . . I really think that people in environmental ed. that have this broad analysis of culture and environment really ought to reach a wider audience, be more strategic about how to make an impact on the field.”

Another silence follows these thoughts. Squinting at the brightness of the sky, David points North, “More redtails in that little slice of sky.” We hear their cries as they prey upon the abundant rodents in the fields below. Our final interview is circling to a close. David repeats my last question, “. . . it’s what a lot of us at these EE conferences have been talking about: what should we do as a group, how do we make a difference, how do we interrupt the status quo, how do we make an intervention? . . . What
should be our act of civil disobedience or our intervention at this point in time? I think that’s a really good question . . .” And this time, the question is left as a point of reflection for the future.

“How are you feeling?” I ask.

“I’m on top of the rocks! I’m feeling pretty good . . . I talked with Jill about how being on this end of qualitative research is interesting because you realize how inadequate a certain snapshot of text is to capture the life, you know. So. But you trust that another human being can appreciate the complexity underneath the linearity of speech acts. Snapshots of speech acts.”

I acknowledge to David the brevity and limited nature of this research. “What I keep coming back to,” I say, “is the idea of sharing and telling stories. Feeling that that’s all I can hope for in this process.”

He nods, “I hope you take away the story of my love for this land and my sadness of leaving it and my excitement about meeting another land, developing that love affair again of another place that I know I love already, or else I wouldn’t be moving there.” David stretches his back side to side with arms raised and calls out, “We’re on top of the world, here! Can you peek through there and just see how on and on it goes? . . .”

5.5 Transitioning

Within the time that has elapsed since I visited the Greenwood family in Palouse and the actual writing of this portrait, they have moved and settled in to Thunder Bay, Ontario, and David into his new position at Lakehead University. The move marks a period of significant transformation. Before he left, David told me that with “this current re-invention of myself,” another one of his commitments
is to engage more with what he calls “inner work” and wellbeing. Given David’s Thoreauvian emphasis on the “whole self,” this vision makes conceptual sense, but is riddled with hurdles. “If sustainability is a serious discourse and is growing in higher ed, sustainability of the people that work in higher ed isn’t on the map, which isn’t surprising.” Part of this neglect comes from environmental education’s attempts to “legitimate itself in the broader academic community,” and when it comes to legitimacy, such things as wellbeing are considered “fluffy.” I asked David whether he felt there would be more space for him to push back against that, given that he is coming into Lakehead University in a leadership position. “Does [the CRC role] enable you to take more risks or does it pressure you to conform more?” Initially, he laughs and responds, “This is the question that keeps me up at night! This is a big struggle for me.” But, eventually, David asserts that despite fears of being marginalized or silenced, his intention is to bring more language of wellbeing into, for example, committee meetings. “If I want to re-invent myself and bring more of myself to the work, the institution—and I do—then I must step in this direction. . . . I know that academics are pretty resistant and I don’t really have a lot of skill and experience . . . [but,] it’s a good opportunity for me.”

I take the three-minute walk up to Greenwood Cemetery again on my last night in town. Looking around, one can see so many stories here—not just of the people that have lived and died in Palouse, but of David’s family too. The kids play hide-and-seek here, their close friend and neighbour, Marge’s, land borders the Western edge, and the (Greenwood) cemetery features as the letter “G” in their homemade “P is for Place” alphabet book.

Watching the sun descend over a distant horizon, I don’t have to “wait for the signs” of transition. They are here. It is autumn, the light is fading on my final day in Palouse, David’s family has three weeks left before they move, and as I gaze toward the radiant reds above the
plains, a distant jet glints in the sunlight, heading to some far-off destination. Snapping a few photos, I try to imagine the simultaneous excitement and sadness David’s family is facing. Ultimately curious as to what new beginnings this ending will bring, I finally shift my focus back to the country road that will take me to my own next destination. I walk down the hill, listening again to the crunch of gravel as I place one foot in front of the other.
Chapter 6: A portrait of Madhu Suri Prakash

6.1 Happy Valley

Exhausted after a red-eye flight across the continent, I gaze out the window as our plane descends into the autumn-coloured, rolling hills of Happy Valley, Pennsylvania. A brisk walk into, through, and out of the tiny airport, followed by a welcome inhale of balmy fall air, begins to waken my senses. Although I do not see her right away, my exhaustion is replaced with excitement and anticipation as I scan the sidewalks and parking lot for my host. A short two minutes of sitting in the sunny grass later, I catch sight of bold reds, oranges, and blacks lightly blowing in the breeze. Laughing with affection and joy before we even make eye contact, a vivacious woman—beautiful and radiant—walks toward me with arms extended.

Full Professor at the Pennsylvania State University, Madhu Suri Prakash would, over the course of the next week that I spend with her, describe herself in various ways: a philosopher of education, yes. But also: a daughter, a mother, a loner, a friend, a Luddite, and, simply, soil. I came to visit Madhu because of her unique perspective and voice within the field of eco/environmental education, her experience therein, and her animated interest in participating in this research.

Madhu had insisted on picking me up at the airport as if there would have been no other option. After our initial hug and “nice to finally meet you!” we walk toward her car as she asks how to best make me comfortable, rested, fed, and cared for. I offer mixed answers of both
thanks and polite deferrals. Stopping briefly at her home, I discover that dinner is already prepared for the evening, she has purchased groceries for me for the week, and she makes me breakfast as I use her phone to call home. Madhu tells me that in her culture, guests are god; if you are not the best host possible, you are not showing respect to divinity. Guests need to know that they matter. Sipping warm tea, hunched over a bowl of freshly cut fruit and yogurt, I sit at her table wearing her red silk slippers. I am utterly wrapped in hospitality. Half an hour later, Madhu drops me off to rest with my groceries and a box of Bengal spice tea that she tossed on top as we headed out the door.

6.2 Assembly line

Looking for entrepreneurial possibilities in a remote Oaxaqueña village, a New Yorker stumbles upon the home of a basket maker. The basket maker weaves locally gathered and hand-dyed grasses into intricate and individual works of art. Living off the food of his land and largely outside of a monetary economy, he weaves on his porch when his daily work is done. The New Yorker sees opportunities for profit and returns home to work up a scheme by which the baskets could be sold as wrapping for fancy pralines at a New York sweet shop. However, when the New Yorker attempts to finalize the deal back in México, the basket weaver surprises him with his accounting. As the number of baskets he is asked to make rises, so does his price per basket. Taking into account the whole picture, the basket weaver figures in the time that he would be away from his farm, the time needed to find the right insects and plants for dyes, the time needed
to properly tend the drying grasses, and the effort of weaving a bit of his soul and song into each. Ultimately baffled by the basket weaver’s apparent disinterest in profit, the New Yorker and basket weaver part ways, each returning to his own distinct worldview and way of life.

Published in 1966, “Assembly line” is a short story written by B. Traven that appears in Madhu’s course reader and, indeed, in much of her conversation. She regularly uses this story as a metaphor for the ways in which educational systems work in relation to the “common peoples” of the world. Madhu “admires the Oaxaqueña basket weaver” and bemoans the influence of the “assembly line” mentality and institution that drove the interests of the New York businessman. Her 2008 book, “Escaping education: Living as learning within grassroots cultures,” would suggest that the basket weaver from the story was lucky to have “escaped” from the “assembly line” of the global economy. In that same logic, she considers those who live and thrive within land-based economies lucky to escape the colonizing forces of modern education and “development.”

Madhu’s academic work traces how mainstream, modern education has become equated with development, “boxing” people and cultures into categories of “developed” and “un/under-developed.” In so doing, the traditional knowledge of land-based cultures is not only under-valued and ignored, it is looked upon as “backward” and uncivilized. Institutionalized

**Image 15. Assembly lines**

*Assembly lines often refer to the mass production of goods, such as those used to produce the Penn State garb that adorned seemingly 1 in 3 students I encountered on campus. However, Madhu also refers to institutional education as an assembly line: a mass production of graduates rubber-stamped through a gamut of courses and certifications until they are deemed suitable to join the global economy.*
education is spreading in concert with the global economy, from one “un-developed” place to another. In its wake, it too often leaves behind the false promise of “better” jobs, “improved” lifestyles, and the “skills” to progress beyond subsistence living. The global economy cannot accommodate the thousands of newly educated peoples from “developing” nations. Led astray on a “road to nowhere” and having traded land-based skills/knowledge for global-economy skills/knowledge, graduates are frequently left jobless and estranged from their traditional land, people, and practices.

In contrast to this type of institutional education, Madhu celebrates a living-as-learning, cultural transmission approach to teaching and learning about the world. These un-institutionalized, “traditional” approaches draw from a deep well of Indigenous wisdom that she calls “common sense.” Common sense is about the ways in which people relate to one another and their places. It arises from a belonging to place, an intimate knowledge of that place, and a self-sustaining community that passes on that knowledge. Madhu eloquently explains, “Common sense is that other sixth sense that comes from belonging to a commons. The other five senses are deprived when we are in just engineered spaces. . . . But that sixth sense, that’s called common sense, requires belonging . . . to a place, requires belonging to the people of that place, requires understanding how that place in turn is connected to all places, that we all in a sense live downstream.”

What I find fascinating and challenging about these two very different approaches to education that Madhu’s work explores is the way in which they are intertwined in her own life. As a professor of education and teacher-educator, she is at times required to take on the role of the New York businessman, with her own role to play in the “assembly line” of education. And also, as a daughter and grandchild of land-based women, she is intimately familiar with common
sense, as is the basket weaver. The interplay of these values and worldviews challenges Madhu to negotiate a situation where forces pull in sometimes opposite directions, and contradiction becomes inevitable.

6.3 **The roots of rasa**

“Rajinder’s Remarkable Rasoi,” an article published in *Yes! Magazine*, was the first written piece Madhu shared with me. Giving glimpses of the life and lessons of her first teacher, her mother, Rajinder, this article and others divulge the cultural landscape that nurtured Madhu’s sense of hospitality and relationship. As was revealed on my first day with her, Madhu’s hospitality is often centred on food—cooking, serving, eating, growing, and composting food. From her mother, she learned the simple, yet sacred ways of going about these acts. She writes, “Only when food is prepared with love, with reverence and respect not only for the eater and the eaten, but for our Creator and all of Creation, do people become adept in the art of bringing out the juices—the rasa that flows from all the vegetables, fruits and other ingredients that go into the sublime and sacred preparation of food.” (Prakash, 2009, p. 49). Like the Oaxaqueña basket weaver, Madhu’s understanding of food transcends both physical and spiritual sustenance; it connects families, communities, plants, animals, soil, water, and sun.

In particular, Madhu’s passion for food is rooted in a larger love of soil. Talking over her round dining table, she spends most of our first interview expounding on common sense, food, water, and soil. Next to her is a stack of favourite books, and midway through our conversation, she reaches out to Wendell Berry’s (1990) “What are People For?” When I tell her I haven’t read it, her response is, “ecstasy awaits you.” Happily sharing the many insights she has had from this book, Madhu paraphrases Berry’s thoughts on...
the very purpose of life: “We human beings have no more important task to do than to keeping our soil regenerated; our physical soil and the culture that knows how to sustain that soil in place.” And, flipping through the well-worn pages of the book, she quotes, “These two kinds of accumulation, of local soil and local culture, are intimately related and the most important task for any people to do.” The care and renewal of soil is thus etched into our very purpose for living. Madhu also recognizes soil as not only something to care for, but fundamentally as herself. She remembers several years ago when she was collecting fallen leaves from her neighbours, the boy from across the street came over to see what she was doing. Madhu told him she was “piling them up to make soil,” and then reached down, grabbing the flesh of her forearm with an emphatic shake, and added, “I love to make soil because, you know, I am soil. This is all going to become soil.” I am soil. We are soil. Preserving oneself means preserving soil, and vice versa. It is all connected.

These days, Madhu actively articulates the connections between food, people, and soil. Her words echo familiar strains in eco/environmental philosophy . . . Humans are “part of the natural world . . . not separate, . . . not other.” “We are knots in a big web of life,” and “profoundly connected with the whole cosmos.” But, in her mother’s kitchen, where the rasa flowed daily, these connections were so omnipresent as to remain nameless. With a dual sense of

**Image 16. Madhu’s backyard hostas**

I was surprised to discover that Madhu’s paper “waste” isn’t recycled, but is instead piled below and between mounds of dirt, plants, and leaves in her backyard. She uses it to make soil. If her yard were carpeted with a uniformly green, trim lawn, I would have noticed stacks of paper lying around. But Madhu’s yard—front and back—has as little grass in it as possible. She calls it her “no-mow” strategy. Wanting to avoid all mowing and tending of grass, she has planted as many bushes, trees, shrubs, flowers, vines, and veggies as she (or any of her friends who come to help) can manage. Any gifts of hardy houseplants likely will not be found in the house at all, but instead will be tucked into the soil, adding to the lush landscape of her backyard.
both admiration and loss, Madhu explains that what her family “had in their blood, coursing from the minute they drank their mother’s milk was such a sense and sensibility of knowing without having the words of the earth’s limits!”

Enhancing the contrast between admiration and loss, Madhu shifts her perspective out of her mother’s kitchen into the here-and-now. Stepping into her role as a professor, aware of the processes of cultural colonization, she looks back and names the good, but also the bad. She describes to me how the things that were important and valued to her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother were not taught in schools, nor were they important or valued to those who were “educated.” Land-based knowledge was not a part of her formal schooling. Madhu recalls, “we didn’t call it education, we called it common sense. It’s what commoners had. But, to become educated, we had to go beyond common sense, because [(sarcastically)] after all, everyone has common sense, even illiterate people.” Having experienced a common-sense based education alongside a Westernized, school-based education, she says, “My best experiences were outside walled classrooms . . . taking place just being raised by mothers and grandmothers who were not educated. . . . They happened so subtly that I didn’t even notice them, like fish don’t notice water . . . it didn’t belong to the classroom because no classroom ever brought it up.” And further, “I feel sooo happy to be part of something that I was earlier taught to dismiss as not education. They’re right—it is not education, it is cultural transmission of a culture of sustainability that never called it that, it just called itself Hindustani culture.”

6.4 Schooling and de-schooling

Afternoon sun slants through two narrow windows onto a horseshoe of navy blue desks. Madhu’s Philosophy of Education class, a mandatory course for pre-service teachers, is meeting for the third time during my week in town. Madhu had requested that I come for this particular
week because of the relationships and trust that she felt would be established between her and the students by this, the halfway point through the semester. Today, she exhibits this trust by sharing some of her own story. Although she is happy now about her roots in common sense, she did not always feel this way. Assuring the class that she is on “a journey . . .[and] nothing I say is final,” she asks us to open her and Gustavo Esteva’s *Escaping Education* to page 88. She reads aloud:

On January 20, 1949, President Truman took office and launched a new era for global development: “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing (Truman 1949, 114-115).”

. . . On January 20, 1949, two billion people became underdeveloped. In a very real sense, they ceased being what and who they were . . . the heterogeneous and diverse social majorities reduced to the homogenizing and narrow terms of the social minorities. (2008, p. 88-89)

A dramatic pause follows her reading. “I’d like you to think of a time when you have been boxed. When you were judged or labeled by someone else,” Madhu says. Slowly at first, students raise their hands to share stories. Soon, there are more hands up than can be answered. Students share personal memories of their own marginalization, or in some cases, how they have marginalized others. Afterwards, Madhu shares her own.

Growing up in military schools, Madhu was considered privileged to have access to a quality Western education, a “modern” education that considered “everything that my people
represented [as] backwardness and underdevelopment.” Reflecting her own experiences of being “boxed” and “boxing” others, she describes her childhood distaste for her black hair and envy of Barbie’s blond locks. Thus carrying the weight of the cultural colonization of India, Madhu walks us through her past as she “progressed” through her bachelor’s, two master’s degrees, and eventually a PhD from Syracuse University. Between her master’s and PhD, she moved to the United States and shifted disciplines from economics to education. Her goal was to learn all she could about “this ‘fabulous’ democracy of America and take it back to transform India.”

During her first year as a professor at Penn State, Madhu’s adopted father, a respected professor himself, brought in a scholar to give a lecture series. Although she had not before heard of this scholar, she quickly learned that he was regarded as an audacious theorist that was allegedly “anti-feminist and anti-gender equality,” and that he would supposedly “squash you like a fly with a fly squasher” if you asked him any questions. Skeptical, yet curious, Madhu attended. At the end of his first lecture, she marched down to personally ask him, “Are you against gender equality?” After one glance at her, his sharp response was, “I do not wish to speak with you.” This was Madhu’s first introduction to Ivan Illich.

In the years following, Illich gave many more lectures at Penn State, enough to warrant him having a small home in the town of State College. Madhu initially regarded him with contempt. “I started teaching Deschooling Society more to teach his foolishness, but the more I taught it to ridicule it, the more it taught me, and the more it forced me to stand my ideas about education on my head.” After a five year transition from contempt to admiration, she made her peace with him: “I went to his home, ate humble pie, shared his pasta.”

As Madhu began accepting Illich’s ideas, she also encountered Wendell Berry and David Orr, further contributing to a radical shift in her philosophy of education. “Just when I thought I
knew philosophy of education, everything I knew was being called into question by these people. It was very liberating; it was very shattering. I had to lift myself out of the debris of all my ideas being smashed.” She learned about the “abject immorality of the development enterprise” and how development and the education system go hand in hand. Alongside this critique, Madhu began to recognize that her “best, best, best forms of cultural initiation were taking place just being raised by mothers and grandmothers who were not educated . . . just being alive and living as education.” She tells us, “It was Wendell Berry who first gave me the idea of contrasting the cultures of development and juxtapose them to soil cultures,” and it was Berry and Illich who helped her to re-discover Gandhi as well. For these lessons, Madhu freely expresses “a lot of gratitude to Orr, Illich, Berry. They have transformed my philosophy of education completely. And they’ve brought me back to my mothers and grandmothers by showing the centrality of where we can start with ecological literacy.”

Rapt with attention to her dramatic pauses and passionately inflected voice, the students cannot help nodding in agreement as Madhu transitions from her story back to the quotes from her book. “My hope is that you will never, ever use the words ‘under- over- developed’ or ‘developing’ unless you use them in scare quotes because they are foul words. Just as those same words that you described others calling you in your stories of being boxed.” And so, seeing as how she had just drawn a strong connection between education and development, Madhu asks
her future K-12 teachers, “What’s keeping me here?” Considering the basket weaver lucky to have escaped education, why would she be part of a College of Education, part of the “assembly line,” helping to train future teachers? She immediately offers one answer, “We have to, in some ways, stay slave to the system to share within it the insights we had [in] class [today].” As she says these words, my pencil races to keep up with them and I make a note to follow up during our next interview.

Later, Madhu finishes class with an acknowledgement of her students’ participation, “thank you for sharing,” and with some advice for their next assignment: “It should be great fun. If you’re not having fun writing that essay, you’ll be punished!” She laughs, and over the end-of-class rustling and sliding of desks back into standard rows, I hear snippets of comments from students to Madhu . . . “You’ve completely changed my view of what a teacher should be… my job is almost harder now, but I’m more invested. . .” “This class has taught me everything about how . . .” “. . .coming out of the darkness of it . . .” “We, being in this classroom, we have a choice to be involved in standard school or not . . .” “You are different than any other teacher I’ve ever had and that’s so refreshing.” And finally, once most students have left the room, a group of three are left talking in the corner about where they can buy organic onions for their group assignment due next week. I cross the room to Madhu, brimming with questions.

6.5 Post-shattering: Re-arranging the pieces

Before we come together again to talk about the story and insights she shared with her class, I visit the home of one of Madhu’s former students, now her good friend and colleague. Gusty fall winds blow thousands of leaves across our view of her backyard garden and cobb oven. Warming myself with blueberry tea, I wrap my hands around the hot mug and listen to Dana’s stories. The two of them initially met at Illich’s Penn State lectures. Madhu would
sometimes bring her six-year-old son with her, softly speaking to him in Hindi, lovingly stroking his hair. Dana says that she first noticed Madhu because she fell in love with the relationship she had with her son. That, and the fact that Madhu was the only one in the Penn State College of Education who she could turn to if she wanted to study Illich. Madhu later told me, “no one had ever, ever come to see me especially interested in Ivan Illich. I couldn’t believe my luck. This totally committed, brilliant, wonderful, hard-working, creative woman . . . because she had heard—not just from our campus but from others as well—that Madhu is the only one who takes Illich seriously.”

From her unique perspective as student, colleague, and friend, Dana was witness to some of the “shattering” Madhu experienced as her beliefs about education underwent dramatic changes. Attempting to reconcile her new philosophy with her preexisting “developed person’s life,” Dana remembers when Madhu left State College to travel to India “on a quest to root herself and her son in a community or village with eco-sensibilities.” Engaged in this search for 2.5 years of Dana’s PhD, she describes how difficult it was to communicate. “There was a lot of computer communication then.” Madhu was also traveling to México during that time as she completed two book projects that pushed her toward promotion as full professor. Wanting to leave in search of something more fully outside of the “assembly line,” Madhu’s promotion represented a kind of institutional welcome and acceptance that, even while she worked hard and felt satisfaction for it, she also wanted to resist. Eventually, in the face of many challenges, Madhu put her quest to relocate to rest, returning for good to State College. Although she would not be changing her permanent home and job, she would attempt to re-shape various routines and commitments in ways that reflected her changing beliefs.
Probably the largest change to her life after Madhu’s attempted move to India is her annual migration. In a pattern strikingly similar to that of Illich, she divides her year between three places. Each winter, Madhu leaves her Pennsylvania home to visit family in India for one-two months. And again in the summer, she leaves to spend two-three months in her second, chosen home of Cuernavaca, México. Initially, these choices led me to believe that—even if State College is referred to as “Happy Valley”—she prefers to be somewhere else. Madhu had years ago tried to move, and barring that, she spends several months of each year in another country. I recall an incident in State College when we were walking across a crosswalk and a car that was far off when we started across the street had to brake only the tiniest amount as we neared the other side. But, as the driver passed, he slowed to almost a walking pace and rolled down his window to yell at us, “Screw you!” I was shocked and confused, but Madhu said that this kind of thing happens all the time in State College. “People that live here are cranked up on sports and who knows what else.” However, when I later shared my impression of her dissatisfaction with State College, Madhu was quick to correct me. She said that State College is her home base and she has a lot of gratitude for the stability it has provided. And, even while she expressed frustrations with some aspects of the climate or attitude in State College, she made sure to share many instances when she has been supported and has found many loving friends and neighbours.
In addition to her annual migration through three homes, Madhu has made other adjustments to her daily routine. Most notable and distinct is her practice of “separating shit from state.” Collaborating with a Méxican friend, she worked to create and utilize a “dry toilet” that “does not make human waste, it makes golden soil . . . it is the best fertilizer that otherwise people use factories to make.” In a similar vein to the notion that democracy means the separation of church from state, Madhu suggests that common sense can be represented by the separation of shit from state. “Common sense comes when people say, ‘We will take care of our shit. We do not need the state to treat our shit.’ We can do it by . . . keeping our shit in our own house instead of sending it to other people’s fields, instead of sending it to the oceans . . . [or] a sewage treatment plan that is managed by the state and that supports a massive trillion dollar chemical industry of the sort that Rachel Carson would easily say is the cause of silent spring.”

As I sit and talk with Dana, however, her reflections speak more toward the ways that Madhu has changed academically since her shift in philosophy. She says that, “In the last decade, Madhu has taken a giant step back from the university.” Whereas Madhu was the head of her department’s program in Education Theory and Policy when Dana was in school, she is much less involved in typical academic service these days. She is more interested in student-led, action-oriented groups, feeling that some of her previous service work was useless. Madhu later articulates, “While the polar bears are dying, we’re worried about . . . how many committees we can sit on, we’re sitting on 20 committees. . . . How can [my service] be less about me and my ego and my curriculum vitae and more about the beauty of the earth, the beauty of the people?”

Similarly, Dana notes that, “Madhu is not taking on many grad students anymore . . . but if she finds someone and falls in love, the formula changes.” She wonders if Madhu’s disinterest is because graduate students are more set in their views and less open to exploring the
transformative potential of Illich and Berry’s thought than undergraduates. When I later ask
Madhu about this, she confirms, “I’m really not interested in churning out a lot of doctorates, at
all.” Part of this disinterest stems from the politics of assigning PhD students to faculty members.
However, deeper concerns arise from a feeling Madhu has that both she and her department are
incompatible with some graduate students’ needs. Departmentally, those that are interested in
environmental and ecological education are required to take years of courses that she feels are
largely “irrelevant” to them, as eco/environmental issues are more-or-less ignored in her
department. Furthermore, Madhu finds that when she works with graduate students who want to
embark on a typical academic career, the relationship is often not fulfilling for either of them. “I
think for their future, for what they’re really seeking, the kind of jobs, etcetera, they’re better off
with other mentors . . . given the kind of careers they want.”

Dana’s note about Madhu’s disinclination toward graduate supervision reflects a
tendency I noticed in Madhu to devote a large amount of her thought, energy, and conversation
to her undergraduate, pre-service teacher classes. Over time, she has found several ways of
adapting her teaching to more closely align with her educational philosophy. She centres her
courses on food and ecology, actually and metaphorically. As she began her Thursday class, she
said to the students, “This course is about food for the mind, belly, and human spirit.” And later,
talking one on one, she explains, “I’m most compelled by food. It’s something we have such an
intimate relationship with, and it’s something we can make changes on here, today.” Her writing
echoes this centrality of food: “I am slowly learning to reconnect food and waste (instead of
schizophrenically severing their relationship) as the center of my courses in philosophy of
education” (Prakash, 2011, p. 48). She says, “Good food is essential to a good life.”

Madhu’s current and former students emphasize the ways in which her philosophy of
education takes shape in a mutual sharing of personal, experiential learning. For each journal entry her students write, they are asked to identify one new action they will take in their life starting tomorrow as a result of what they are learning. “She would challenge her students with committing to changes in their lives that must happen NOW, not later, not tomorrow, right NOW,” says one former student. Another remembers how Madhu “talks about the shit in the world, but always with examples of solutions, hope.” He quotes Berger: “Naming the intolerable is in itself the hope.” Overall, Madhu’s former students that I spoke to all agree that her pedagogical approach solicits transformation, and while the content of her courses explicitly focus on ecology and education, the underlying issues at hand are the personal growth and philosophy of her students. “The deeper goals are for students to explore their selves as human beings . . . to find their own moral action, in which lies happiness and joy in doing what they think is right,” says another student.

With the expectation or hope for transformation that she has, Madhu’s students describe how their relationship with her blurs the lines between personal and professional. “Having a relationship with Madhu as a teacher is like friendship. She asks favours of you and she gives back. There’s respect, you are treated equally.” Another student reveals, “Madhu is like my mom, she trusts me and I can share with her.” Peter, a current PhD student of hers with whom I spend an afternoon walking through State College and a nearby forest, explains how “to be

**Image 20. Irving’s bagel shop**

I met with 8 of Madhu’s former and current students, all interviews that she arranged for me prior to my visit. For most of these, we met at her favourite café, Irving’s bagel shop, which devotes a small section of its store to selling local farmers’ produce. Madhu would bring me to the café, and after introductions, but before she left to allow us to talk alone, she would often say, “tell Nora about the time when…” or “tell Nora about your experience in my class when you…” or “tell Nora about how you transformed from not caring to caring…”

Wanting to celebrate an experience or characteristic of her students, Madhu’s excitement was felt during these meetings long after she hurried out the door.
Madhu’s student is to be in relationship, to meet her halfway.” As we weave our way through the twisting trails and out toward the edge of a field full with rustling corn stalks, Peter contemplates his relationship with Madhu. Perhaps inspired by the rich smells and sounds, the warm sun gracing us as we sit and rest, Peter comes up with the word “carnal.” He says that Madhu does not ignore or separate “food, shit, sex, bodies, flowers, hugs, kisses . . .” If you have a relationship with her, you can expect that she will embrace and talk about the embodied aspects of being human.

Madhu has thus molded and shaped her teaching in several ways that reflect the education she has come to value. Other adaptations, however, have proved more difficult. When I ask her if she takes her classes outside, she shakes her head and explains how difficult it is because of the lack of silence, students’ allergies, and weather. Madhu also recalls how, for five years, she attempted to start a garden at Penn State and other local schools, but encountered either too much resistance or not enough interest. “My journey has been to see every school on earth have a garden. All my [gardening] attempts at different schools have really amounted to nothing.”

In recent years, Madhu has found opportunities outside of Penn State for the professional reconciliation of her philosophy with her teaching. In 2009, Vandana Shiva asked Madhu to assist with a course that she, Satish Kumar, and Samdhong Rimpoche had been teaching on “Gandhi and Globalization” at the University of the Seed in India. The learning in this course and others at the University of the Seed is enriched by teachers whose “lives teach as much as the words and

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**Image 21. Greenhouse**

Madhu sees her attempts as “amounting to nothing.” However, some local public schools are beginning to integrate gardens into their curriculum and schoolyards. Peter and I walked past this greenhouse, made from repurposed Penn State plastic bottles (Buckland, 2010). Dana’s large backyard vegetable garden is also visited weekly by the elementary school across the street.
stories they share,” and by non-credentialized Elders who are brought in to teach credentialed courses. Madhu thrives here, a place where the “knowledge and wisdom of soil, of seed, of eating, cooking, nourishing soil, etcetera,” is sought after and passed on. Harkening back to her own roots, she is able to utilize her academic work within a setting that celebrates “cultural transmission” and values the knowledge of her own mother and grandmothers.

With my blueberry tea gone and notebook enriched with memories and impressions, I go about giving thanks to Dana and saying goodbye. Madhu has done well in choosing her as a friend, I think. Honest and caring, it is no wonder that the two of them have many successful collaborations. As I walk the six blocks from Dana’s to Madhu’s, the deciduous trees are brilliant against a gray sky. The wind flies down the street and sends thousands more leaves off to a new iteration of their life.

6.6 Awareness in/of the assembly line

As my last night in State College winds down, our bellies are full of tomato ginger soup, avocado, fresh mozzarella, brown rice, and shrikhand—a near-magical combination of yogurt, cardamom and saffron. Long after the sun has set, Madhu and I sit on opposite ends of her couch and I have the chance to ask her about her statement that we sometimes have to stay slave to the system to bring awareness into it, to show, as she says, “the absolute, abject immorality of the development enterprise and [how] development really requires the educational system, they go hand in hand.” And beyond this, to “celebrate what [common peoples] have, honour what they have, and stop comparing them as lesser than us.”
I often assume that, at least to a certain degree, contradiction is an inevitable part of life. But as she explains her ideas, Madhu’s words challenge this assumption. Referring to Illich, she describes contradiction as one of the hardships of the “modern, easy life.” We have cars, planes, trains, TV, fast food, all of these so-called luxuries, but one of the heaviest burdens that comes with them (for her at least) is contradiction.

“The kinds of freedoms and autonomy we want in order to live sustainably, in order to live with ecological literacy, are destroyed by the very institutions within which we are all living. That’s the contradiction.”

“And you live with that contradiction to give awareness to your students?” I ask.

“Mm-hm. And that’s plenty. . . . As I look open-eyed and humbly at my own contradictions, maybe I take solace in the fact that, till he drew his last breath, Ivan Illich basically taught in universities.” Madhu likewise notes that her “hero,” Wendell Berry, although he resigned from academic work based on a recognition of the same type of contradiction she speaks of, did come back several times, also drawn toward teaching. And yet, despite her positioning of Illich and Berry as mentors, Madhu recognizes that their projects were/are different than her own: “Both Illich and Berry are no longer interested in trying to do, for example, what all of us are seeking to do within the educational system, which is making it more humane, to make it more ecological, to make it more sustainable. I, for one, have spent my life seeing how my own classrooms can be kinder places, gentler places, more affirming places, more moral places. Where people get a taste and savor some notions of human generosity and kindness from one another, that’s what I seek to cultivate. It’s not that Berry or Illich dismiss these efforts, it’s just not what interests them.”
Still referring to Berry, Madhu adds, “I truly cannot even imagine anybody in the United States living more rooted, living more sustainably. . . . He’s very open and honest about his contradictions. If he can look at all those contradictions, and not exactly make his peace, but recognize that he’s not going to make them disappear . . . then, imagine me in suburbia. . . . I’m still miles away from alleviating contradictions, I’m still living a very developed person’s life.”

“I’m a professor of education. I’m in a College of Education. And I’m seeing all the counter-productivity of the educational enterprise and then talking about it, and then living with that talk. . . . Yes, I live in continual contradiction. And there are days when it feels like an enormous burden. And other days where I’m light and see that as the human predicament. And, you know, stop blaming anybody, including myself . . . and just make peace with all my own limitations and the limitations of the context within which I work, reflect and teach. And it’s okay on those days; I wear the contradiction lightly. And there are other days of sorrow where I wear it very heavily. Doesn’t do anyone any good, but it comes with the territory. . . . People want some handy solution to fix the contradiction, and there isn’t one. . . . At some juncture, I guess, one can continue to be very sad about it all, or make some kind of peace.”

Madhu continues, “Ivan Illich says, ‘we all have to carry our own cross. To be human is to have the cross,’ (if one is speaking of the human condition in Christian terminology). And so, it doesn’t matter where you look, each person has their own brand, their own type of cross.”

“Even the basket weaver?” I ask.
“Yes, of course,” Madhu responds. “He’s not living in utopia or paradise, he’s living in reality, … the reality of millions of peasants. In addition to the fact that he spends many, many hours growing his food on the soil, [he faces] all the challenges of being surrounded by developers. [Even though] he finds his own capacity to make beauty, to create beauty, to do good work. . . he has his crosses.”

I therefore ask for clarification, “Is the cross a hard life, or is the cross contradiction? Or is the cross the hard life that can take shape as contradiction?”

“Yes, yes,” she confirms, it is the latter. “The hard life in my life takes the form of contradictions. His cross is of a different kind. And, I don’t want his cross, but neither do I want to hand him mine thinking it’s lighter. . . . I can’t ever present my privileges as a reason for anyone else to envy me in the world. . . . When I go to villages in India, I really do not come away thinking, ‘I have an enviable life.’ I just see enough beauty, enough humanity in other people’s existence to not want those juxtapositions and comparisons with my own. . . . Needless to say, there are thousands of people suffering in war zones, women and men beaten to earn enough money to make a few tortillas. I recognize the nature of other people’s crosses. But, saying all that, and being grateful for the fact that I’m not beholden to a husband, a brutal husband, or . . . for a landlord oppressing me because I’m on a rented field or a rented apartment for that matter. I recognize there are all those forms of crosses. . . . and that mine, I know how to carry it, somewhat. Somewhat. [I am] experiencing many joys on a daily basis.”

We are both silent for a moment. As I process our conversation, my eyes leisurely look over the colourful artwork that fills Madhu’s walls. We both turn to watch a small, gray, ancient-looking bug as it slowly marches down her arm. She laughs quietly and we remark how these little creatures have been crawling up and down the curtain behind us and on and off of Madhu
for the last half hour. With affection, she tells me that they’re everywhere. “I don’t even know their name,” she says. I am reminded of how she described her mother’s knowledge . . . “a sense and sensibility of knowing without having the words of the earth’s limits.” How like Madhu, I think . . . to love and know something without knowing or needing to know its name.
Chapter 7: A portrait of Ray Barnhardt

7.1 An appropriate case of laryngitis

Tucked into a corner of the Seattle airport during a layover on my way home, I talk into a tape recorder about my visit with Ray. Just the night before, we had dinner together at the Fairbanks Pump House restaurant—me, Ray, his wife Carol, and two visiting professors from New Zealand, one of which was visiting Fairbanks to give a presentation at the Alaska Federation of Natives conference titled, “The Role of Education in the Empowerment of a People.” In it, he talked largely about the contribution of education to the “cultural and economic enhancement” of Aboriginal communities. During dinner, as he discussed the sacredness of the land to Maori people, I asked him about his earlier presentation, “Don’t you find that with economic development, there’s harm to the land?” Right away he answered, “Yes, that’s one of our dilemmas.” And, after explaining various considerations and ways in which this dilemma manifests itself, he concluded, “We’re looking for a middle ground: economic development through cultural means so that we don’t degrade the land; there’s a lot of challenges to that, but that’s the goal.”

That evening over dinner, I had many questions about these ideas and goals. And as I reflect again at the airport, in between plane rides, my recorder picks up the phrases “I just don't know. I don't know what the right answer is.” And again, “I don't know. Just struggling with that—thinking through it.” And again, “I don’t know.” I find it personally difficult and challenging when I think too much about Indigenous education because I feel like it is not my place to fully understand, evaluate, or proclaim. I have a great-great-great grandmother who was a Cherokee woman (as do probably many “white” people), but I grew up with all the cultural assumptions and privileges of being “white.” I do not know the struggles of Aboriginal peoples.
Even secondhand through study or relationship, I cannot pretend to have expertise in Indigenous education. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that over the course of my Alaska trip, I have laryngitis. I stay on the outskirts of gatherings to avoid passing on germs, and mostly observe people and places. When I do talk, it is in a physically timid voice, hoarse from coughing, yet poignantly indicative of the uncertainty I feel within.

Ray Barnhardt is also white, a settler in Alaska, born from second-generation immigrant parents. But, unlike me, he has made it his life’s work to know about and work toward Aboriginal autonomy in education. He has lived in Fairbanks, Alaska for more than 40 years. Dozens of initiatives and projects list his name as collaborator with First Alaskan Elders, researchers, administrators, and teachers. In fact, even most of Ray’s nuclear family has significant ties to First Alaskan education. Many years ago, when they first moved to Alaska, Ray traveled with Carol and their two-year-old son to rural villages as a field researcher for a study on “American Indian education.” Navigating the troubled waters of non-Aboriginal research within rural Aboriginal communities, having his family present—particularly his young son—“broke the ice” for Ray, opening the doors for trust and connection. Through family, Ray was able to make his entrance into First Alaskan culture and forge relationships that continue to this day. At the time of my visit with Ray, Carol is the Chair of elementary teacher education for the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Their daughter, Amy, is an elementary teacher and adjunct professor of education at UAF. And Ray’s grandchildren attend the place-based
Watershed Charter School that bases its curriculum on the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools. First Alaskan education is something Ray’s whole family knows about in intimate ways, even if they themselves are not Aboriginal.

And yet, my visit to Alaska reveals traces of uncertainty in Ray as well. It is difficult for me to get Ray to talk about himself. When I ask him about his own ideas or the challenges he faces personally, he tends to turn the conversation toward concrete examples of projects he has worked on, or if he does talk about ideas, they are often the ideas of others. This tendency seems partly indicative of Ray’s immersion in Aboriginal communities where relational, place-based, and collaborative understandings of knowledge are prevalent. Still, I think there is something else going on. Ray’s disinclination to talk about himself and his ideas feels like a distant cousin to my own actual and metaphorical laryngitis. As a non-Aboriginal working in and with Aboriginal communities, Ray must continually re-negotiate his own role according to the unfolding needs of Aboriginal educators in their work toward autonomy. Ray’s work, then, is largely about positioning. What I initially perceive as silence or uncertainty is at least partially attributable to a lived positionality of respect, deference, and humility.

7.2 One step at a time

The state of Alaska is 1,717,854 square kilometers, roughly double the size of British Columbia and one fifth the size of the continental United States. Its vast array of mountainous, pacific coast, and arctic terrain is home to more than 200 rural villages, eleven distinct cultures, and twenty different dialects (Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum, 2011; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2010). Beginning with somewhat small educational endeavors by the Russians starting in 1784, to widespread initiatives to “Christianize” and “civilize” children through to the early 1900’s (Alaska Natives Commission & Alaska Federation of Natives, p. 7, 2010), First
Alaskans were subject to widespread attempts to (as Ray says) “break down the whole cultural system and [impose] a whole other set of values, trying to do away with language, and so on.” Adding insult to injury, severe epidemics hit Alaska in 1900, resulting in 25-50% of First Alaskans losing their lives (Wolfe, 1982). After Alaska gained its statehood in 1959, First Alaskans came together in an effort to protect their rights to the land, forming an organization called the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). The AFN continues to meet annually with the mission to “enhance and promote the cultural, economic and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community” (Alaska Federation of Natives, 2013). In early fall, when AFN meets, many other friends, groups, and organizations do too, taking advantage of having so many people together that otherwise live in very disparate parts of the state. I come to Alaska this week as well, following Ray through five full days and nights worth of meetings with students, colleagues, friends and family: a PhD student retreat, potlatch at the hockey rink, Rural Education Caucus, a distance-education course, and the actual AFN convention and arts and crafts fair.

With more than forty years of work under his belt at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Ray Barnhardt is the longest standing faculty member there. Lining the tops of all available surfaces in his office are plaques describing teaching awards and outstanding research contributions. The walls are adorned with beautiful gifts of various crafts that overflow out into the adjoining common space. If it is not clear from the dozens of people that I witness seeking him out for a quick hello, bit of advice, or catch-up on respective family lives, being in his office...
confirms that Ray does good work that makes a difference in people’s lives, and they are grateful for it.

In various capacities, his research, teaching, and service are geared toward shifting First Alaskan education over to First Alaskan hands, helping to ensure that rural education is relevant, culturally appropriate, and place-based. The duration of Ray’s commitment to Aboriginal autonomy in education and the friendships and trust he has created along the way seem to keep him mostly relaxed and comfortable within this work. When questions do arise for Ray, they have to do with the ongoing negotiation of his role. He asks, “Where do I fit into an environment that is the Native cultural environment? What right do I have to enter into that domain, and what role do you carve out in doing so that isn’t contradictory to the things that are the basic premises of what I’m working from?” And, while Ray finds workable answers to these questions, he does not rest for long in any of them. “I don’t have a [definitive] answer to the question of where or how I should think of myself; it’s kind of one step at a time.”

Ray’s CV is a testament to his shifting roles. Most academics, once hired within a tenure track position, may sometimes take on administrative roles in addition to their professorships, their changing roles being tied together by the thread of their own evolving interests or personal
career “advancement.” Ray’s professional commitments, however, are significantly more varied and are motivated, not by self-interest, but rather by the changing needs of First Alaskan communities. In writing, Ray refers to this type of positioning as the work of an “advocate:”

Advocates tend to prefer positions that allow them to keep in close touch with the community (e.g., field office’s), so that their institutional ties are often of a somewhat tenuous nature. Faced with a choice between alienation from the community and losing one’s job, the advocate is likely to choose the latter option… From the community advocate point of view, change must occur by bringing institutional practices into closer alignment with the expectations of the community being served, rather than the other way around (Barnhardt, 2010, pp. 10-11).

Ray self-identifies as an advocate. He recognizes his privileged position as a white academic and endeavors to use that privilege in dynamically strategic ways. Most of the time, this results in him taking on the role of facilitator or administrator. “I’ve tried to be very careful to be in a position to facilitate and support initiatives or prepare [doctoral students] in a way that they have access to the range of tools and knowledge and skills and so on, and such that they can exercise greater control over their lives.” Rather than taking on roles that position him as the primary researcher, author, or some kind of authority figure, his choice to work in administrative or facilitative roles shows his deference to First Alaskan control of their own needs, questions, ideas, and initiatives.

In the foyer of my hostel for the week, Ray stamps snow from his boots and lightly flaps his jacket. Glancing down the hall, I feel a surprising twinge of shyness as I collect my belongings and go to meet him for the first time. Ray greets me with a quiet smile and holds the door as we step out into the gray morning. Minutes later we are ordering hot drinks from the second floor café of Ray’s favourite used bookstore. Between sips, we exchange questions and answers, getting to know one another and setting up a schedule for the week. I am his first of many meetings for the day. Back in the car, Ray gives me the lowdown on Fairbanks Elder
Howard Luke, who we are on our way to pick up. Until last year, he kept up a home on the South side of the Tanana River. Long after everyone else moved to Fairbanks proper, Howard continued to cross the river when it froze in the winter to maintain his home and relationships to the land there. We find him today at a hotel conference room and afterwards cross the street for some lunch. Filled with food, we hop again into the car and soon arrive at the afternoon’s main event, the PhD student retreat.

After greeting each person as they come through the door, Ray raises his fist to his mouth and clears his throat at the front of the classroom. The forty chatting people slowly face forward at their desks, away from the Fred Meyers food trays at the back, the circulating tin of homemade oatmeal cookies, the 20’ long relief map of Alaska, and give their attention to Ray. He briefly welcomes us before standing aside and inviting Elder Howard Luke to give an invocation. Several minutes later, Ray briefly speaks again before standing aside to allow other administrators to introduce themselves. And after, he again sets up a series of stories from graduates of the program before stepping aside to allow them to be told. Literally and figuratively providing structure, then standing aside, Ray positions himself as facilitator and listener.

In other administrative roles, Ray’s purposeful positioning has been even more evident. Beginning in 1994, one of the defining administrative roles of his career was granted a whopping $10 million grant from the National Science Foundation and the Rural School and Community Trust for a project called the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI), intended to increase culturally relevant education. From the start, Ray and First Alaskan co-Principal Investigators Oscar Kawagley and Frank Hill, set up the grant so that it would be managed by the AFN. Ray explains, “Instead of the funding—ten million dollars!—coming to the university as the place
where the expertise was… we arranged that the grant was submitted through the Alaska Federation of Natives. So the funding… came to AFN. It was the only time they’d done anything like this.” After the politics of initial grant approval and then the approval of AFN as the recipient, “AFN sub-contracted with the Dept. of Ed, with the University, … school districts, Native organizations, … and so on. … AFN was responsible, they were the ones who determined where the funds went, and we had to account for what we did with it.” Over the course of the next 12 years and an additional $13 million, the project accomplished a significant amount in terms of breaking “down barriers between school and communities” and “increas[ing the] capacity of communities… to take control of the educational system.” Ray attributes this success to have been built upon the strategic positioning of AKRSI at the outset: “[AFN] had ownership over the whole process. And it was that link that brought the Elders into the mix… If [the funds] had been at the Department of Ed or university, it just would have been another mainstream, non-native initiative. But because they had control over it, Elders came out of the woodwork, they were all over the place helping do this.”

As he describes the initiative, Ray continually uses the pronoun “we.” “What piece do you feel like you’re bringing to these different initiatives?” I ask. In response, Ray stops for only a short half sentence to focus on himself before turning back to the story of the larger grant, its accomplishments and structure: “I’ve been in a position as administrator or director of the centers, or the projects and the grants and so on associated with this, but the work that was done through those [projects]… was a lot of people…”

When I talk with Ray’s students, they describe characteristics that lend themselves well to his deferential positioning. A current PhD student says that Ray is, “quiet, humble, dedicated… and possibly overcommitted.” In reference to his humility, he adds that he “can see
why [Ray] gets along well with Natives.” Other students who have longer and more in-depth relationships with Ray describe him as “available, kind, and knowledgeable.” Commenting in particular on how many people Ray knows and how much knowledge he has, one student taps his head and says, “He’s got it all in here! … He’s awesome, he’s like a foundation, and he always credits others for the work.”

Several days after our initial meeting and the PhD student retreat, Ray and I attempt to beat the mid-day rush that will accompany the lunchtime break at AFN, driving to a nearby diner early. Still, we just barely manage to get a table in the non-smoking section. Mid-way through my plate of fries and Ray’s sandwich, he explains again that there is an iterative and unknown aspect to his professional identity. He says that one of his major considerations is “trying to focus my efforts on doing things that there aren’t other people in a position to do at this point in time. When other people come along, PhD students in teacher programs, and so on, then I shouldn’t be doing or pretend to be doing what they can be doing. So, over time, the challenge has been to try to identify what’s the next component … [and] what’s going to be the most relevant.”

“How do you determine these ‘components’ and figure out what is needed?” I ask.
Hastily finishing the last bite of his sandwich, Ray pauses briefly before answering, “It’s largely a matter of listening.” He gives the example of the meetings with the new Indigenous Studies PhD cohort we had on Monday and Tuesday. Listening to their interests and desires for support as students, he is able to “focus on what students in the program need to know—writing, forming a research question, publishing an article,” and so forth. The process of “hearing what frustrations, challenges, issues, students have and need help with… becomes part of setting up the support structure to deal with it.”

At this point, Ray is still in a unique position to be able to help set up these kinds of support structures, but he senses that this time is coming to a close, and soon there will be less “things that I can bring to the table that aren’t currently being addressed by somebody else.” With PhD students graduating from the Indigenous Studies program and then turning around to be hired by the university, they are now in a position to do the type of administration, teaching, and research that Ray has done for the last four decades. Describing the doctoral program as “the capstone,” he says it’s “kinda like the last level at which I can make a contribution without feeling like I’m imposing an outside set of values.”

“I’m the longest standing faculty member at UAF. I’ve outlived everybody else!” Ray says, laughing. “When I completed my PhD, I was 30, and that’s when we moved up here. I moved around within the institution. I think this PhD [program] is probably my last project. Time to move on and do something else. I’m predicting that I’ll be part-time teaching, be on [toward] retiring, at least see the students for whom I’m on their committee through their programs” within the next year or two. As his time shifts more fully from a professional to personal context, Ray’s concrete projects will take shape more and more at home, and his accountability will shift to his family. With an ideal day for him involving some kind of manual
labour and carpentry, Ray says that his yard is already dotted with some five or six homemade sheds. But, by now having become adept at re-negotiating his role according to the unfolding needs of his community (e.g., a wife fed up with so many sheds!), Ray chuckles as he assures me that, “Having the grandkids around takes the place of the next shed.”

7.3 Relationship and relevance

From the time Ray was a child, he has lived in cultural and economic contexts that foregrounded the importance of relationship and relevance. Ray was born and raised on a small farm in North Dakota that was originally homesteaded by his grandparents in the early 1900s. “We grew most of our own food. Eggs and cream were the source of funds to buy sugar and flour and things like that. … Everybody [in the community] worked together to help with whatever needed to be done. When it came time for harvesting, people got together and moved around from farm to farm to do the work because it was a lot of work with horses, and physical labour then.” Ray can see the roots of his current work and ecological philosophy in his youth. He explains, “I felt an affinity with the physical environment as something that nurtured us, that we’re an integral part of the environment, that we’re not something that can be thought of as separate, aloof and above and controlling the environment. And I think that [these] views [or] inclinations that I have, grew out of my growing up on a farm and being dependent on it… seeing clouds come over the horizon and hail wiping out the whole crop for the season, the garden and so on, and trying to figure out how to eke a
living out of all that. And watching my parents do that and not lose faith in the process. That our well being, our livelihood, rides the waves of the environment in which we’re situated.”

Ray attended the same one-room country school as his father had; he was the only one in his graduating class. The connection between school and community was very tight. “Curriculum was geared toward the things you needed to know to be a successful farmer in that area, so it was connected to the environment where we were living.” The combined effect of a high school opening in a nearby town and the gradual replacement of physical labour with mechanical labour meant that Ray did not complete his schooling at grade eight, as his parents had. “The assumption or expectation was that we would follow in our parents’ footsteps, but [the new] school opened new windows and doors and opportunities and perspectives. And then, conditions changed of course—machinery took the places of horses and a lot of the physical labour, and that meant you had to have cash and that meant you had to get into the economy.” Once Ray finished grade 8, his parents rented out a small garage apartment that he stayed in from Monday to Friday while going to school, returning home to the family and farm on the weekends. Being the oldest of nine, he was the first to forge this path, but eventually all of his siblings followed, attending the same high school and boarding together in often overlapping stays at the garage apartment. Ray notes now that the transition his family went through from living off the land to a more industrial and capital-dependent economy is comparable to some of the changes Aboriginal communities in Alaska have had to manage: “Very similar to what native people are dealing with here, but in an agriculture context rather than a subsistence context.”

Several years later, after a stint in the army and Bachelor’s degree in math and education from North Dakota State, Ray came back to some of the educational principles of relationship and relevance that he encountered at the one-room schoolhouse. With his new wife, Carol, he
taught in an inner-city school in Baltimore where the population was shifting from “semi-affluent white students to black students” residing in social housing. The change in population density during this transition put extreme stress on local schools, forcing them to switch to a split shift in which one set of kids came for school in the morning and the other came in the afternoon. Further, the school had “no extra-curricular stuff;… [it was] not a healthy school.” Squeezing five classes into only half a day, Ray encountered the challenges of being extremely overworked and pressed for time, as well as cohort after cohort of students, unmotivated by curriculum that was mostly irrelevant to their lives. Thinking back to his childhood experiences of a curriculum that was integrated with his life outside of the schoolroom, he recalls, “I started experimenting with taking kids outside—using trig functions to calculate distance across the lake… That intrigued me because it wasn’t the way my education classes had prepared me to teach math, but I could see that you needed to have some way to connect what you were trying to teach with something that students could relate to, from their environment.”

With Ray’s interest in outdoor, relevant curriculum growing, he went on to pursue graduate studies. “[I] felt I had limited leverage in what changes could be made in the system as a teacher, but if I could become an administrator, I fantasized that I could have more impact.” In an interdisciplinary doctoral program in educational administration and anthropology, Chet Bowers and Harry Wolcott helped add a cultural dimension to Ray’s philosophy.

Given his rural upbringing in a subsistence agriculture context, it makes sense that Ray’s academic work would have wound its way back to a philosophy that unites people and place. Still, though, his experiences on the farm are not an equal match to the history and depth of connection to the land that he encounters in his work with First Alaskans. Even after all his years spent with Aboriginal communities, Ray is still “trying to understand and figure out what one
does with understanding the depth of the relationship that people have with the environment, with each other, with the whole interconnectedness aspect of things.” Several times during our week together he shakes his head and says with a smile how it’s really true that “the more you know, the less you know.”

7.4 “Cultures have literally grown out of the land”

Our footsteps press quickly through crunchy snow. Ray has a meeting with a colleague in just a few minutes. Besides that, it’s cold, and walking briskly just feels better. As we cross the Chena, nearby ducks erupt in a fit of quacking and scatter away from the clang of our weight on the metal footbridge. Ray is talking about the historical trajectory of the field of outdoor and environmental education. He remembers how he initially sat on “outdoor” education committees that later changed their names to “environmental,” and then to “ecological,” most recently landing on “place-based.” He explains how this shift in names reflects (for the field, but also for himself) a change in understanding around the role of culture in place. Whereas earlier iterations of outdoor and environmental education tended to separate nature from culture, prioritizing interactions with and understanding of the physical environment, more recent understandings of place-based education recognize the ways in which culture and nature are always, already connected in dynamic, mutually influential relationships. There is an ecologist, Ray continues, who put together a map of discreet bioregions within Alaska, largely defined by watershed. He then placed on top of this map another that showed discreet cultural groups, largely defined by language. Their boundaries
were the same. Ray explains, “Cultures have literally grown out of the land.” Place-based education for him, then, is teaching and learning about the knowledge and traditions that have arisen from thousands of years of life within particular places.

Ray’s thoughts on place-based education reflect the general sentiment expressed at the Rural Education Caucus—a group of primarily First Alaskan policy makers, educators, youth, and Elders concerned with rural education—that we attended the day before. Never before had I seen “place” and “culture” used so synonymously. Equally surprising was the popularity of place-based education. Everyone at the Rural Education Caucus references it as if it is the undisputed goal of all 70-80 people in the room.

However, the stated goals and conceptions of place-based education expressed here differ from what I have often otherwise encountered. There is little to no discussion of mainstream “environmental” content based on recycling or energy conservation. -- In fact, the large amounts of paper, plastic, and Styrofoam waste at the Rural Education Caucus and several other events I attend, make me quite uncomfortable. -- Instead, place-based education in Alaska centres more on culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. For instance, in Yup’ik villages, place-based education would be teaching and learning about Yup’ik traditions and practices through the Yup’ik language. Although the words “ecology” or “environment” are not always explicit, there seems to be an underlying assumption that First Alaskan cultures have, as Ray said, arisen from the

*Image 31. Places to gather*

Events for the week were held in a mixture of First Alaskan cultural centres and typical academic or convention-centre buildings. At sunrise, the Alaska Centennial Center for the Arts (above) housed the Rural Education Caucus.
land, and thus carry with them eco-centric worldviews and practices. At one point during the Caucus, an Elder stands up to address the entire gathering, repeating twice: “The real education is out there [pointing outside]. From the land, the ocean, and the air.” Admittedly, I find myself unsure (yet again): does he say this in support of the work happening here, or in contrast to it?

In addition to the prevalence of this notion of culturally-placed education, there is an equal (and for me sometimes puzzling and troublesome) emphasis at the Rural Education Caucus on the politically dominant values of accountability, standards, achievement, and job preparedness. Whereas Ray has written that,

Traditional [Aboriginal] education processes were carefully crafted around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plant and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. All of this was made understandable through demonstration and observation accompanied by thoughtful stories in which the lessons were imbedded (Cajete, 2000; Kawagley, 1995). (Barnhardt, 2008a, p. 120)

He explains that First Alaskans (along with many other Indigenous peoples) currently live within “two worlds,” “one being the locally derived Native world within which they are intimately associated, and the other being the externally defined world that has enveloped their existence” (p. 113). Accordingly, the arguments in much of his recent writing on place-based education advocate for educational approaches that integrate both Western and Indigenous views and practices. Choosing a “glass half-full” perspective, Ray suggests that what were “once competing

Image 32. Drawing out values

During the week of AFN, there is always a “Youth and Elder” conference. Although I did not attend, they summarized their discussions on education at the Rural Education Caucus. The poster they drew (and I roughly sketched above) showed self-perpetuating relationships at the core of a series of 16 values (e.g. stewardship of the land, subsistence, etc.). The four “pillars” of their vision for rural Alaskan education include: 1) Elders and family investment in the classroom; 2) Native teachers; 3) let the land be our classroom; and 4) [native] language in the classroom.
views of the world are striving toward reconciliation through new structures and frameworks that foster co-existence rather than domination and exploitation” (Barnhardt, 2010, p. 1). Indeed, much of the work of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative was dedicated to documenting “a widening range of examples of the successful [emphasis added] merging of Indigenous and Western ways of making sense of the world” (Barnhardt, 2008a, p. 122).

Bookended by an interview in a nearby hotel lobby and a warm car ride to Ray’s next meeting, our walk across the Chena is not only fast-paced, but brief too. The sounds of our footsteps on snow transition into the sounds of automatic gears and tires on wide salted parking lots and roads. There are yet further degrees of evolution that Ray’s understanding of place-based education has taken in recent years beyond the recognition of culture within place. Post-colonization, the very notions of culture and place themselves are quickly and complexly evolving. Place-based education in Alaska thus finds itself in a condition where the “real education from the land” is as important as job preparedness. Functioning within these two worlds, working toward integration of two often-opposing frameworks, there is ample room for frustration, and struggle, yet simultaneously, creativity and opportunity.

While Ray’s writing often focuses on the idea of “reconciliation,” he seems sometimes more optimistic about the process than others. Alongside the quote below is a sketch from day two of the PhD seminar in which we spent the day in a basement library/office room where only one window blind was open to reveal the gray skies and fall leaves outside. … “The incongruities between Western institutional structures and practices and Indigenous cultural forms are not easy to reconcile. The complexities that come into play when two fundamentally different world views converge present a formidable challenge. The specialization, standardization, compartmentalization, and systematization that are inherent features of most Western bureaucratic forms of organization are often in direct conflict with social structures and practices in Indigenous societies, which tend toward collective decision-making, extended kinship structures, ascribed authority vested in Elders, flexible notions of time, and traditions of informality in everyday affairs (Barnhardt, 2002) (Barnhardt, 2008b, p. 157).
7.5 “Domesticating the ivory tower”

Skies are dark at the end of a long day. After a bit of dinner, four students, Ray, and myself join up in a small basement-level room that adjoins his office. Ray sets up a black polycom conference speaker and microphone in the center of the table. Shortly afterward, five cohorts of university students and faculty members from all over the world dial into a phone conference. It is week nine of the course, “International Seminar on Cultivating Native Well-Being.” Required for PhD students in the Indigenous Education degree program at the University of Alaska, it is co-taught by five faculty members, one from each of the international universities at which the course is offered.

It was back in 1970 that efforts began to “domesticate the Ivory Tower,” what Ray describes often as bringing the university to the students instead of the students to the university (Barnhardt, 2002). The course we “attend” now, facilitated by distance education, is one manifestation of this “domestication.” Across a wide array of programs (teacher education, Master’s and PhD), Ray has been part of projects that place students and teachers in the field (i.e. in domestic, rural contexts) for multiple purposes. He explains that a primary goal is for First Alaskan students—who can otherwise feel physical, cultural, and social isolation and disorientation in university courses and living arrangements—to be able to maintain their way of life and integrate their university education into their existing worldview. Ray further suggests that when students are at home, the pressure to conform to Western standards decreases and questions of how two different conceptions of the world may relate to one another increase. On the faculty side, the “domestication of the Ivory Tower” has created programs and courses that place faculty members in rural communities for both their professional development and course instruction. “The primary rationale for placing faculty in the field has been to reduce the cultural
distance and the role dichotomy between the producers and the consumers of knowledge in rural Alaska” (Barnhardt, 2002, p. 243). Additionally, these efforts with faculty aim to increase awareness of the wealth and value of Indigenous knowledge that is often otherwise overlooked in dominant compartmentalized and abstracted university norms. All told, the more than forty years worth of efforts to “domesticate the Ivory Tower” remain ongoing and, during my site visit with Ray, take shape in two very different courses. The first, this distance education course, is designed for mature PhD students with the goal of “promoting scholarly cross-fertilization and synergy” (Barnhardt, 2008b, p. 163) across institutional borders among various Indigenous students and scholars.

At the designated time, voices start popping up. Everyone who connects says hello to Ray. In addition to being the instructor for the Alaska cohort, he is a central figure in the organization and connection process of the course as a whole. An abnormally long fifteen or twenty minutes are spent connecting, reconnecting, muting, and unmuting the speakers until everyone is on board. Finally, Hawai’i confirms, “Okay, Ray. Everyone’s connected now!” And Ray exhales, “Alright, let’s keep it that way.”

Class begins by each cohort muting their microphone, with the exception of the instructor who is

Image 34. Alaska to Aotearoa

Video conferencing is also used during the PhD student retreat when we connect with the Indigenous Studies program in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Indigenous Studies programs in Alaska face significant challenges because of the sheer size of the state and the diversity of language and cultural traditions represented therein. Whereas the Maori students and faculty are housed together in an ornately painted and carved fare (traditional meeting house pronounced FAR-eh), speaking Maori, and singing songs, the Alaskan students gather in a non-descript conference room at the UAF. Although many introductions and thanks are said in students’ native languages, our interactions are necessarily in English. Thus, the geographic and cultural diversity of Alaskan Aboriginal students, alongside the typical structures of the university, enable different kinds of learning places and shared experiences than might happen in otherwise smaller contexts.
responsible for presenting that given week. Today, both Ray and the professor from Ontario are presenting. She goes first, and we mute our mike. Often, instructors or student presenters will upload powerpoint presentations so that they can be shared with everyone, but her powerpoint has embedded videos, and it would be too difficult to synch them all up, so we just listen. At least I do. The other students seem to be occupied with their laptops, and Ray intermittently prepares for his part of the lesson, checking his powerpoint or glancing at a book. The Hawai´i cohort has forgotten to mute their microphone and we can hear them intermittently laughing and talking in the background. They speak exclusively in Hawai´ian.

When I first heard that Ray was teaching place-based education through distance learning, I admittedly raised an eyebrow. In one of our first email exchanges, I cautiously wrote, “It seems like it must be a fascinating challenge to teach place based types of education over a distance!” Generally skeptical of technology, my eyes see tools that demand a particular conformity of bodies and minds, that quiet us, push us toward desks, tables, and screens. Even while technology enables real-time global communication, I wonder about the quality of that communication and connection. However, Ray’s response to my questions, along with my experience in Alaska, gives me pause. In his email reply, Ray wrote, “Actually, by having place-bound students firmly embedded in their own ‘places’ while they are taking the distance ed classes, they are able to put PBE principles into practice and draw on each others’ experiences to enrich the learning process.” Further, he explains during my visit that, “Rural students, when they’re in their own communities, are much more likely to challenge and present other views that make the class more rich” than when they are otherwise required to physically come to the university for a course.
My expectations for place-based education and the “domestication of the Ivory Tower” were a bit more romantic, I suppose. I often have to remind myself to be self-reflexive and watch for assumptions or expectations that have their roots in racist notions of stereotypical “natives.” That being said, what Ray describes as his “most rewarding” class to teach is also an example of the “domestication of the Ivory Tower,” but is strikingly different. The technologies used in this class are salmon traps and birch bark baskets. For the last 20 years Ray has been taking groups of public school teachers to Old Minto, a fishing village on the Tanana River that has been used by Athabascan people for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. When Ray talks about the course, his conversation slows and he finds words harder and harder to come by. “You get to know people, Elders, at such a level… It makes me appreciate even more the phrase ‘the more you know, the less you know.’” As opposed to the online distance course for (primarily Aboriginal) PhD students, this intense three-week summer course is designed for non-Aboriginal students. The goal is to increase cultural awareness, or at least—as Ray explains—to increase the capacity for learning from and with First Alaskans. The hope is “that they will be able to and comfortable [with] entering a new community and knowing how to go about learning about that community and understanding that community from the perspective of the people that are there.” Together, Ray and the students spend about 8 days camping at Old Minto. While there, the “only” job they have is to live. Off the land. Salmon need to be caught and traps repaired. Canoes need to be made, songs sung, and fires lit. There are no lectures or powerpoints here, nor are there concrete learning outcomes or even set roles for who is a teacher and who is a student. At Old Minto, living life is learning, there is no distinction.

Ray says, “I just tell people, it’s your responsibility to figure out what’s going on and to connect with people in ways that you can participate and be a contributing member of that place
and get to know the people there and for them to get to know you. … So we don’t have meetings—sometimes we do if there’s an issue floating around or the Elders want to talk about why things are happening. You have to figure out how to negotiate your way into whatever it is you want to do. … I participate just like them, we’re all on the same plane; I’m not a faculty member at that point. … The Elders each have their own skills and roles that they play and we join in, become part of that. So, they’re living their life the way it comes naturally in that setting, and we become part of it, amazingly so.”

Participation in a subsistence lifestyle offers tremendous, yet subtle lessons not only for students, but also for Ray. He says, “[I will] only appreciate years later what I either didn’t recognize or I thought was by accident, and was actually deliberate. … It takes a lifetime to reach a deep enough layer that you’re not violating their way of doing things.” In a context where learning happens through living, perhaps the most significant “outcomes” of his own experience are the relationships created. Old Minto has given Ray a real sense of belonging: belonging to people—he is regularly invited to ceremonies, funerals—and belonging to the land. When the time comes for his ashes to be spread, he wants them to be dropped at the head of the Chena, flowing past Fairbanks, “into the Tanana [next to Old Minto], then into the Yukon, and then the Bering Strait… going past all the places I know and love.”

The very notion of “domesticating the Ivory Tower” thus walks a meandering line between the “two worlds” of traditional subsistence education and modern, institutionalized education. The non-Aboriginal students that are
immersed in the Old Minto “cultural camp” are preparing for the cultural context in which they will be teaching. The Aboriginal students in the PhD seminar are in a more “modern, institutionalized” course that spans local and global Indigenous contexts, promotes digital and face-to-face relationships, and is both instructor and student led (two-thirds of the course is made up of student and community led presentations versus the instructor lectures I witnessed). Each in their own way, these courses are working to meet the needs of multiple communities within, what Ray aptly describes as, “an ever-evolving complex, adaptive educational system and cultural milieu.” He further suggests that,

It has been through the interplay of teacher, learner, and researcher across diverse cultural contexts that new constructs have emerged and new educational opportunities have been generated—the ivory tools on the tundra have begun to blend with the literate traditions of the ivory tower. (Barnhardt, 2002, p. 247)

The projector screen lights up during the second half of the PhD seminar. We all turn to watch as Ray’s powerpoint is shared and he begins his lecture. He describes the changing role of higher education in indigenous communities over the last 30-40 years, outlining a new initiative for accreditation of indigenous universities, colleges, and programs. Because he is sharing this week’s timeslot with the professor from Ontario, and because of the earlier technical difficulties, Ray only has five minutes for questions before the “thank you’s” and “good night’s” start to filter in from the international cohorts. Once only the Alaska group remains connected, they spend another half hour discussing students’ final projects. Ray’s advice to virtually everyone is to aim for relevance: consider how it is “relevant to your future teaching, to the course topic, and to similar issues others are also dealing with… start from the place that [you’re] in, use local knowledge.” Tired from the long day, we collect our belongings and bundle up in anticipation of the cold night air, say goodbye to the two Alaskan students remaining on the conference call, and Ray turns off the black polycom speaker.
7.6 New questions

Coming to know and spend time with Ray surprised and challenged me in many ways. If questions about contradiction and ecological integrity inspired the visioning of this project, I leave Alaska with yet more questions. However, in Ray’s situation of being non-Aboriginal in First Alaskan contexts, I find that the question of contradiction shifts to a question of commitment. Ray cannot live according to a First Alaskan philosophy because he himself is not (nor would he pretend to be) Aboriginal. He accepts and utilizes this position as a moral compass of sorts, guiding his advocacy, helping him know where and when to help, and where and when to step back. Ray’s subsequent ease, his many accomplishments, and his trusting relationships stir up new questions about community, dedication, and humility. How, too, might I “give back” to a community, make a difference in people’s lives, and eventually find my own capstone?
Chapter 8: A series of collective snapshots

In 2002, David Greenwood published an article about his experiences learning from and teaching with Thoreau’s texts. In it, he questions how he might go about attempting to live “a conscious life of principle and conviction,” as Thoreau sought to do. David writes,

Since leaving high school teaching, [I have] been searching for a place in education to make sense of my experience, to imagine and create a better way, and to be true to what I value most [emphasis added]. Wherever one teaches, this is the most difficult, rewarding and educative work I can imagine. (Gruenewald, 2002, p. 10)

By my selection, all three participants in this study attempt to “be true to what [they] value most.” As written into the criteria for participant selection, “I was interested in educators who showed that they were seriously attempting to find some kind of cohesion between their ecological theory and their day-to-day lives.” I thus began this study anticipating and hoping that participants would be particularly inclined toward asking themselves first, what it is they value; second, how those values are relevant within the world as they know it; and third, how to live accordingly. Particularly interested in these questions as they relate to all our relations, my understanding of how participants reflect and act in relation to their ecological values was deepened through the research process. I explain these deeper understandings in this chapter.

I have titled this chapter “A series of collective snapshots” to reflect several structural choices. First, I attempt to bring all three participants’ stories into conversation with one another. Reflecting on similarities and divergences around core themes of the dissertation, I discuss participants’ stories with the aid of relevant theory. Second, there are many areas of overlap in this chapter; the sections are not comprised of discrete themes. Rather, the metaphor of a “snapshot” is used to evoke an image of how, as the author, I re-arrange the many pieces of this dissertation differently for each snapshot (i.e., section). Many of the same pieces appear in
multiple snapshots, sometimes foregrounded, other times backgrounded, and yet other times viewed from a different angle.

In discussing my interpretations of this research, I encourage readers to retain their own; there is no one, final, or “correct” interpretation of the portraits. As Sparkes (2007) writes about his academic story writing,

Given that I have chosen to offer a story for consideration, then the story must do its work, on its own, as a story. To enhance this possibility, I prefer to operate as what Thomas Barone (2000) describes as an ‘artful writer-persuader’ who understands the necessity of relinquishing control over the interpretations placed on a story, inviting an aesthetic reading whereby readers interpret the text from their own unique vantage points, contributing their own questions-answers-experiences to the story as they read it, as co-participants in the creation of meaning. (p. 540)

Having made these qualifications, I turn to the collective snapshots. The key topics I explore for each are: 1) practices for seeking out an ecological ethic; 2) naming the struggle; 3) “opting out;” 4) “opting in;” and 5) assessing “goodness.”

8.1 Practices for defining and understanding ecological ethics, principles, and ideals

Earlier in the dissertation, I suggested that, in part, ecological integrity means living one’s life in accordance with a set of ecological morals or ecological principles. In the portraits, I shared stories of how David, Madhu, and Ray attempted to adhere to their ecological ethics. Here, I take a step back to explore how participants define and/or deepen their understanding of the ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals to which they ascribe.

Participants share a foundational assumption of culture and “nature” as reciprocally relational. By reciprocally relational, I mean that participants understand culture and “nature” as always connected and as mutually influential. For example, Ray paints a picture of how “culture literally grows from the land,” and David says, “the land is us, the land is everything.” In this way, participants’ understandings strive toward non-dualistic frameworks that unite culture and
“nature” in reciprocal relationship. Many scholars share similar relational, non-dualistic understandings (Bai, 2001; Harvester & Blenkinsop, 2010; Plumwood, 1993). Even so, the eco/environmental field remains dominated by theory and research that mostly privileges scientific, objectivist understandings of “nature” and environment as existing outside of culture (Bowers, 2001; Demeritt, 2002; Ruitenbergh, 2005; Russell, 1999), or (more recently) critical, cultural analyses of “nature” that lose sight of the Earthly dimensions of human life (Greenwood, 2010b; Gruenewald, 2003c; 2008; Russell, 2005). Acknowledging this foundational assumption of reciprocity and relationship between what are otherwise commonly separated as human and/or “nature” is important for learning about how participants define their personal ecological, ethical ideals and their sense of what constitutes an ecological, ethical imperative. Each participant’s definition of their ecological, ethical ideals reflects a similar non-dualistic understanding of humans and all our relations.

David and Madhu both discussed the importance of engaging in experiences that enable them to know and feel their own membership or connection with all our relations holistically: through thought, emotion, senses, or intuitive, spiritual connection. David describes a practice of daily walks in which this is his explicit goal. He calls these walks “sacred,” and he finds that they are one way for him to “re-member” himself with the land, getting out of (only) his head, remembering his whole body, and remembering his membership with/in the land. Similarly, Madhu describes how “in formal meditation, in a conversation, on a walk, watching a waterfall, [and so on,] I [feel] more whole, more human, more myself.” Their practices of walking or meditating echo familiar themes in deep ecology or Eastern meditation traditions in which the goal is to transcend not only human/“nature” dualisms, but also mind/body dualisms (Bai, 2001; 2009; Devall, 1994; Næss, 1995; 2005). Deep ecologist Warwick Fox (1993) suggests that the
kinds of practices in which one senses the self as extending beyond the limits of one’s own skin have the potential to “lead us spontaneously to appreciate and defend the world around us” (p. 75). Thus, one way I see David and Madhu deepening an understanding of their ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals is by making space for practices that understand and value all our relations through a sense of interconnection and belonging with/in them.

Similar to the environmental autobiography work advocated by some eco/environmental scholars (Brandt, 2004; Thomashow, 1992, 1996), David, Madhu, and Ray also demonstrated how their processes for defining their respective ecological morals, principles, or ethical ideals include an investigation into the cultural assumptions that structured their formative childhood and adult years. Each participant grew up in significantly different cultural contexts. David was raised in the woods of Wisconsin by middle-class, working parents in the 1960s. Madhu was raised primarily by her mother, as her father was in the Indian military; they lived in many different towns and villages in India, with her mother filling their house with food from local plants, animals, and farmers’ produce. Ray was raised on a subsistence horse farm in North Dakota where the local grade 1-8 school had 14 children, 1 teacher, and the curriculum was geared toward what students needed to know to become good farmers.

When I asked Ray about his ecological ethic, he immediately described his experiences on his family’s farm as a child.

I felt an affinity with the physical environment as something that nurtured us, that we’re an integral part of the environment, that we’re not something that can be thought of as separate, aloof, and controlling…. [These inclinations] grew out of my growing up on a farm and being dependent on it and seeing clouds come over the horizon and hail wiping out the whole crop for the season, the garden and so on, and try to figure out how to eke a living out of all that. And watching my parents do that and not lose faith in the process.

Madhu, too, recalled lessons from her mother, grandmothers and aunts as foundational:
What my family had in their blood, coursing from the minute they drank their mother’s milk was such a sense and sensibility of knowing without having the words of the earth’s limits! They just knew from the ways in which they were raised, the ways in which you can say they suffered—and I don’t use that word negatively, I use it very positively, in the way that Ivan Illich has taught me—they suffered their limits beautifully.

Whereas Ray and Madhu both turned to their upbringing as a way to explain their ecological ethic, David did not. I imagine that this is in part because Ray and Madhu were raised in cultural contexts where an ecological ethic was, as Madhu says, “common sense.”

In Ray’s childhood, he was steeped in a lifestyle that *necessitated* ecological knowledge. His days and nights spent outside attending to the land—the weather, “cattle, pigs, and chickens,” and so forth—were not intentional efforts to “commune with nature” or even gain pleasure from being outside (though these certainly may have happened). Ray’s time outside and the relationships he nurtured were *necessary* for his, his family’s and his community’s survival. Subsistence settings thus have the potential to foreground dependency, inter-connection, responsibility, and care for self, community, and all our relations, making it more visible, experiential, and immediate. If, as Plumwood (1993, 1997) has said, dualisms are born on the back of a denial of dependency on a perceived radical other, subsistence cultures have the potential to work against the dualistic tendencies of anthropocentrism. Those of us living non-subsistence, “modern” lifestyles share these same responsibilities and connections to all our relations, but they are actively hidden, disregarded, and denied by the elaborate institutions and societal structures that compartmentalize our bodily living.

Although Madhu did not live a subsistence lifestyle per se, she has published and spoke at length during my visit about her childhood in which dependency, inter-connection, responsibility, and care for self, community, and all our relations, making it more visible, experiential, and immediate. If, as Plumwood (1993, 1997) has said, dualisms are born on the back of a denial of dependency on a perceived radical other, subsistence cultures have the potential to work against the dualistic tendencies of anthropocentrism. Those of us living non-subsistence, “modern” lifestyles share these same responsibilities and connections to all our relations, but they are actively hidden, disregarded, and denied by the elaborate institutions and societal structures that compartmentalize our bodily living.

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7 Despite the potential to break down dualistic assumptions through the recognition of dependency, subsistence lifestyles in no way guarantee non-anthropocentric ideologies. For example, Christian frameworks that position humans as “stewards” of the land still consider humans as separate and above all our relations (Merchant, 2005), and have been prevalent in many (particularly European and North American) subsistence agricultural contexts.
responsibility, and care for all our relations were also a way of life, primarily through food. The growing, harvesting, preparing, eating, and composting of food were vitally important, not just biologically, but culturally and educationally. Madhu often suggests that subsistence lifestyles offer the potential to enact what—in reference to Wendell Berry—she suggests is our purpose in life: the preservation of actual soil and the diverse cultural traditions that teach how to do so. In the same way that Ray was not explicitly taught to see connection between himself and the land, but it was implicit in his life, Madhu explains that her own most valuable learning was similarly not institutionalized, but was part of the culture and lifestyle.

I can say that my best experiences were outside walled classrooms, they happened so subtly that I didn’t even notice them, like fish don’t notice water, they live in it, they swim in it. So, I swam in environmental thinking, ecological thinking where the concept of waste was akin to sin, of disposal as not having respect for the stuff of creation. But it was so engrained in us, the conservation of water, of food or the conservation of heat or cold, that we just saw it as a way of living, not as education, it was a way of life.

In contrast to the abstracted lessons of dominant educational institutions, Madhu characterizes these childhood lessons in ecological ethics as a series of living-as-learning practices.

Eco/environmental educators are sometimes criticized for romanticizing subsistence cultures (Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011). I do not get the sense that Madhu or Ray overly romanticized their past. When Ray described to me the kind of dependency that characterizes his ecological ethic, he gave the example of “hail wiping out the whole crop for the season,” and Madhu likewise uses Illich’s phrase of “suffering one’s limits.” Having said that, there is a distinctly appreciative angle to Ray and Madhu’s accounts of their childhood cultures’ ecological ethics. While they do not treat it as easy or perfectly harmonious, they do find an appreciation for a culture that engrained in them from a very young age the healthy dependencies and inter-connections to be found within subsistence cultures and living-as-learning practices.
As adults, we may take our culturally rooted stories about all our relations for granted. For example, Madhu did not come to value the culture of sustainability in which she “swam” as a child until she grew older. However Madhu and Ray’s stories suggest that, if we take seriously the notion that our knowledge and experience with all our relations is shaped by our cultural heritage, one way of seeking out and better coming to know all our relations is to learn more about that cultural heritage itself and the ecological, ethical lessons it values.

David’s cultural heritage—the little that I learned of it—did not necessitate an ecological ethic in the same way that a subsistence lifestyle would. When I asked David about his ecological ethic, he tended to turn toward his knowledge and experience of all our relations, similar to Madhu and Ray, but that knowledge and experience was gained through different means. As part of his expressed love for places, David longs to learn about the natural history of a place, the names of birds, plants, valleys and ridges, even while acknowledging the culturally storied aspects of this knowledge. In particular, he is interested in the stories of a place within the context of colonization; during my visit, he said:

Learning the place is a long-term project for me—I approach it from the position of curiosity and respect for what’s there . . . and an interest in the history of the place: what was it before, and what were some of the political and economic factors that transformed it . . . after white settlement in North America? So, getting to know the stor[ies] of the place.

David’s efforts to get to know and be with place are first and foremost intentional, and to a lesser degree, leisurely. Not discounting what seems to be a genuine spiritual need for David to be in contact with all our relations, his work to learn about place and history is not immediately necessary to his survival in the same way it was for Ray or (somewhat) for Madhu when they were children. David’s learning is an example of what Weston (1996) calls “environmental practice.” Locating the roots of his ecological ethic in such practices, Weston recalls:
Quarrying with my father, as a young boy, I discovered geology… What I know of birds comes from a lifetime habit of watching them… An old hobby of star-watching… opened up an understanding of the great cycle of the holidays… as deeply tied to the waxing and waning of the light and the seasons. (p. 42)

Similarly, David seems to deepen his understanding of his ecological ethic through various environmental practices: walking, hiking, skiing, bird-watching, and so on. Embedded within these kinds of skilled practices is the familiar association eco/environmental educators make between caring for that which you know (Gaard, 2009; Greenwood, 2010a; Smith, 2004; Sobel, 2005). In other words, the more you know something and create relationships to it, the more likely you are to care for it.

Having thus framed the differences between how participants define and deepen their understandings of their ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals, I do not wish to imply that one is better or stronger than another. In fact, interesting questions are raised in this discussion between the effects of an ecological ethic that was ingrained and taken-for-granted versus one that was intentionally chosen. On one hand, there is great strength and stability in being raised with an ecological ethic that was necessary for one’s survival and/or readily apparent in day-to-day “living-as-learning” practices. On the other hand, there is also great strength and conviction in taking up an ecological ethic that runs counter to the dominant culture in which one was raised. Further inquiries into these differences are outside the purview of this study, but would provide for fascinating discussion.

8.2 Naming the struggle

Madhu called contradiction her cross to bear, referencing Illich’s Christian terminology. David called it the Faustian Bargain, and Ray framed contradiction in terms of the practical roles he does or does not choose. These phrases capture only particular moments; participants have many varied understandings and experiences of what I have called contradiction, complicity or
hypocrisy. Once, when I asked Madhu to speak to some of the challenges that prevented her from fully enacting or living according to her ecological philosophy, she laughed. “That opens hundreds of doors,” she said. Admittedly, the question is huge with a great many answers. However, in this section I distill the many challenges participants mentioned to a few characteristic descriptions of their struggles.

The most common way for David, Madhu, and Ray to frame the conflicts they felt between their ecological, ethical ideals and their actual, dominant, and/or habitual practices was in reference to socio-cultural institutional structures. That is, they felt a conflict between their own (individual and community-based) goals, ethics, understandings, and desired behaviour, and those of dominant forms of education. In discussing education, participants do not refer to individual people or programs, but to the structure and purpose of education as a socio-cultural institution. Madhu called it the “counter productivity of the educational enterprise.” In some of David’s more recent writing he calls educational institutions an extension of “empire” (Greenwood, 2010b). Ray characterizes it as a “Western bureaucratic form of organization” (Barnhardt, 2008b, p. 157). In each instance, participants are getting at the well-documented tendencies of North American educational institutions to take up centric, instrumental thinking and behaviour that is primary service to the global economy, as described in Chapter Two.

What I have found fascinating are the different ways in which participants think about the inevitability of contradiction in their lives. On one hand, David, Madhu, and Ray would all agree that certain elements of contradiction are inevitable. However, when it comes to the ways in which they framed the differences between their ecological, ethical ideals and actual life practices in the university, the question of inevitability was considered altogether differently.

Ray spoke about contradiction as if it were something he had to be careful to avoid. He
did not suggest that it was inevitable, but rather that it was something that could happen if he was not vigilantly attentive to himself in relation to both his colleagues and the overall work that needed to be done. Rather than a sense of existential, conceptual, or moral contradiction, he had a particularly practical take on the concept. He explained that his deferential roles as an administrator or facilitator and his shifting, strategic commitments are aimed at helping in the work for Aboriginal autonomy of education in a way that avoids contradiction. Framed in this way, it seems that he (and others) feel he is largely succeeding at such avoidance.

Alternatively, David used the word *complicity* in his description of disconnect between his ecological ideals and actual life practices. He tended to focus on how the characteristics of the university (that he so adamantly criticizes) shape and limit his own behaviour. He quotes Thoreau, “The greater part of what my neighbors call good . . . I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is my good behavior,” acknowledging, “I likewise repent at my own many compromises of conformity to a regulated system that has little to do with what I truly value” (Greenwood, 2010a, p. 5). Later, David (2010b) similarly writes:

No one knows the full scale of the problem of empire, its spiral of unintended consequences, and the degree of our own complicity: the way we are part of the problem we fail to understand, the way we fail to understand our part in it. (p. 14)

This last line in particular carries a lot of weight. There is a sense of a heavy responsibility being shared here, an acknowledgment that many of us (privileged North Americans, particularly educators) participate, comply, and unwittingly advance socio-cultural structures and norms with which we do not agree. In this way, David’s framing of complicity shares Jackson’s (1994) and Evernden’s (1985/1993) suggestion that we are only ever partly aware, but takes it a step further to suggest that there are significant moral consequences to this lack of awareness. This reading of contradiction or complicity would suggest that it is *not* avoidable under the present
circumstances. Unless the system changes, or we find ways to divest ourselves from that system, our complicities within it will remain.

Madhu’s framing of contradiction was different still from both Ray and David, though it shared some characteristics with David. What I found most intriguing was how she connected it to a privileged, “modern, developed person’s” life. In so doing, Madhu broadened her sense of contradiction beyond educational institutions to other socio-cultural structures and institutions in which our very living goes against our ecological ethic (by using flush toilets for example). By implication, her connection between contradiction and the “modern, developed person’s life” suggests that individuals or communities living outside of the socio-cultural institutions and structures of the “developed world” would not experience the same kinds of contradiction. She is absolutely clear that the social majorities living a diversity of alternatives to “developed” lifestyles still have plenty of hardships. Where I think the distinction lies is in the difference between peoples who still retain the cultural structures, traditions, and skills that enable them to more fully live according to an ecological ethic versus the “modern, developed” context in which Madhu lives where those structures, traditions, and skills have been so significantly ignored or repressed as to have been nearly eradicated. In such a (North American, modern) context, it is “normal” and expected to engage in a multitude of socio-cultural structures that have seriously negative ecological consequences.

While I have focused the last three paragraphs on participants’ conceptions of contradiction in relation to their experience with/in socio-cultural institutions, there were other contexts in which it came up as well. Similar to what I found in the eco/environmental education literature on contradiction, Madhu sometimes spoke about contradiction in terms of her eco-footprint. She was conscious of her house, her car, her yard, water use, and so forth. Also
reflective of the literature review, David expressed that he sometimes senses a contradiction between conceptual frameworks that he uses. In these instances, he tended to frame a perception of conflict or opposing purposes as paradox, rather than contradiction. For example, sharing how he came to his twinned goals of “decolonization” and “reinhabitation,” David invokes his grandmother’s wisdom along with his critical, academic training. He writes, “Building things up and tearing things down—this apparent dichotomy presents another opportunity to hold and balance paradox” (Greenwood, 2010b, p. 18). In contrast to the heavier sense of complicity he expressed above, these forms of conceptual contradiction are something David considers to be good and productive. As he said during my visit, “driving into those paradoxes is where the discourse changes.”

Finally, there is another form of contradiction that was notably missing from much of my conversations with participants. Moral expressions of contradiction in which there are two (or more) conflicting versions of what is “good” or “right” did not receive much attention in my visits with participants. The questions I described between the visiting Maori scholar and myself at the beginning of Ray’s portrait offer a good example. In that case, we discussed how the “right and good” enactment of Aboriginal autonomy in his particular context has the potential to conflict with “right and good” practices that maintain or increase ecosystem health. Interestingly, I had a difficult time engaging Ray in a similar discussion. In contrast to the Maori scholar’s acknowledgement of the contradiction and possibilities for harm on both “sides,” Ray’s tendency was to frame Aboriginal autonomy as always the priority. I would guess that this stems from his chosen role as an advocate as well as his deference to and trust in First Alaskan expertise and history with the land. Having analyzed my experiences with participants, if I were to do this research again, this would be an area into which I would explicitly inquire more deeply.
8.3 Opting out

In Chapter Two, I brought several scholars together to emphasize how eco/environmental educators must pay attention not only to what they do, but also to what they do not do. While the implication in that chapter was that there are things we are currently not doing (i.e. going outside) that we ought to do more, this section explores things that perhaps we should consider doing less or not at all.

“What does the civil disobedience of an academic, a place-based academic, look like?” This question I posed to David stemmed from my reflection on his stated desire to work for social change paired with his interest in Thoreau. It offers an interesting lens to think through how participants in this study actually do something by not doing it. In other words, I question where their work toward ecological integrity directs them to opt out of certain roles or practices on ethical grounds.

Ray’s work to “make a contribution without . . . imposing an outside set of values” is a type of opting out. He chooses only certain kinds of roles (primarily administrative or facilitative) and avoids others. Citing his and Verna Kirkness’ “Four R’s” article (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001), he says that these four R’s (respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility) are his “moral compass.” His choice to work in certain capacities and opt out of others stems from his personal commitment to this ethic. Additionally, Ray’s choice makes a political statement. Especially given the respect and recognition he has received throughout his work, there is reason to suggest that Ray’s strategic positioning, which has effectively worked him out of a job, is something other non-Aboriginal scholar/activists interested in contributing to the ongoing work of Aboriginal autonomy in education should consider.
Madhu’s opting-out practices are less centred on her career. Although she and Dana noted that there are certain committees that Madhu chooses not to sit on, and so forth, what I found most notable were the choices Madhu made to opt out of certain taken-for-granted social structures and norms outside of the university. On the less controversial side would be her goals for a “no mow” yard. In the middle might be her choices to fast on Tuesdays, not having a cell phone, or opting-out from the city recycling system for paper “waste.” And of course, on the more radical side would be her choice to opt-out from the “toxic chemical slurry” of the flush toilet system whenever possible. In these various day-to-day actions, her opt-outs are similarly based (to Ray) on a personal ethic while also making political statements.

Although it was David and I who explicitly discussed the question of the civil disobedience of an academic, I know the least about his opt-outs. Largely due to the shorter amount of time and circumstances of my visit with him, our discussion of this topic remained more abstract. David did discuss the desire to “opt out of the productivity discourse” of the university where possible, although admittedly he already has tenure. A notable opt-out of social structures I did observe was David and Jill’s choice to homeschool their children. However, we did not discuss the reasons for this decision at length. Should we have had the opportunity to spend more time together, I would imagine that he would have discussed “opt-outs” further.

Having listed these various choices participants have made to not do certain things, I return again to the notion of civil disobedience. I fully agree with feminist assertions of the personal as political, that individual, day-to-day choices carry political messages and consequences (Li, 2007; Merchant, 2005; Pelias, 2005; Plumwood, 1993). However, what I wonder, and what David also asked in our conversation on top of Kamiak Butte, is what might be done as a collective opt-out? Is there room for eco/environmental educators to work together
toward collective forms of not only social change, but also, specifically, civil disobedience? If so, what might those look like? I believe there is indeed room for conversation and action in this regard, particularly at this point in time in the eco/environmental education field where more attention is being devoted to strategic shifts in the field (Hart, McKenzie, Bai, & Jickling, 2009).

8.4 Opting in

“Opting out” of a particular role or practice generally means “opting in” to something else. That is, in choosing not to do certain things, one chooses to do others instead. As discussed in Chapter Two, eco/environmental education scholars agree that collective, strategic action in the face of contradiction is key (Hart, McKenzie, Bai, & Jickling, 2009; Fawcett, 2000; McKenzie, 2004; McKibben, 2013; Smith, 2004). Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci (2011) confirm, “We must be willing to teach each other how to identify what its useful and mutually beneficial in our commons and what is harmful. And we must be willing to work together to do so” (p. 284). In the portraits, I described several aspects of what participants choose to do with others. Here, I focus less on what they “opt in” to, and more on how they do so. In other words, I discuss how David, Madhu, and Ray conceptualize and enact their participation in commitments they have made to and with others. Examples of commitments range from Ray’s broad, nearly life-long commitment to aboriginal autonomy in education to Madhu’s commitment to support student-led eco/environmental action on campus.

One of the areas where participants varied most in their engagement with others was in how they positioned themselves as leaders. David’s new job at Lakehead University was by definition a leadership role: Canada Research Chair in Environmental Education. Even so, his engagement with others aimed more toward reciprocal visioning and leadership rather than a
hierarchical positioning of himself as leader among a cohort of followers. His use of the words “inspire and conspire” characterize this collaborative, reciprocal ideal. He explained to me how

Learning more about the place in a community of others who care as well about the place, and then having intimate, embodied experience with the place, sharing that and then conspiring, inspiring with, supporting, a visioning that leads to some action that in some way supports the human and nonhuman communities of this place and region. That, I guess, that’s it, right? That’s what I love. That’s what I love to do and talk about.

Although David’s leadership is collaborative, Madhu and Ray seem yet more removed from shaping the vision or direction of collective action. In their cases, Madhu and Ray start with two very different groups of collaborators. Ray primarily works alongside mature adult First Alaskans whereas Madhu’s collective work with students tends to be with younger, undergraduate pre-service teachers and a few graduate students. Starting from these two different places necessarily shapes their different roles. Ray describes himself as an advocate, “find[ing] ways to accommodate [Native] perspectives [in the] institution [so that it] becomes an instrument of empowerment and service to Native people” (Barnhardt, 2010, p. 11). Madhu describes herself as a “midwife, . . . assist[ing] people as they give birth to their ideas.” While Madhu is sometimes considered an “expert” by her students in ways that Ray (generally) is not, their strategic, collective action with students strives toward supporting those students’ visions more than their own (accepting, of course, that there is likely significant overlap).

In other work with faculty members, Madhu’s friend and colleague, Dana, characterizes Madhu’s mode of collaboration as inclusive. Years ago, Madhu and others worked to create the Environmental Education Special Interest Group (SIG) and the Holistic Education SIG for the American Educational Research Association (AERA). However, in time, Dana notes how these groups became more positivist and professionalized, and therefore exclusive. Afterwards, Dana and Madhu worked together to create yet another SIG, the Ivan Illich SIG, which Dana describes
as “still a very convivial space.” “Madhu’s collegiality is all about inclusion, about enlarging the circle, not shrinking it,” Dana says. Therefore, Madhu “opts in” to work and commitments with others when they are inclusive, when not, she opts out.

Finally, I found a common disposition of humility in David, Madhu, and Ray. In working toward social change, they continually assert their earnest efforts to learn from others. David identifies one of his most joyful modalities as “getting inspired about ideas and learning from others, others’ experiences, whether it’s from building relationship or reading.” Ray and Madhu’s students describe them as humble. Dana explains that stemming from Ivan Illich’s work, Madhu says that to understand means to stand under; to learn we must be humble and open ourselves up, standing under. And I remember well how Ray found great difficulty in describing the depth of the lessons he has learned and continues to learn from First Alaskans at Old Minto. Cliché or not, “the more you know, the less you know” resonates with Ray’s experience and perspective. While David, Madhu, and Ray likely all have their moments on the soap box, the enactment of humility rings true as a pivotal stance for how participants engage with others.

It seems to me that humility is a key piece of ecological integrity. As a foundational disposition, humility offers a striking alternative to the assumptions of hierarchy, dualism, and denial that characterize anthropocentric habits of mind and body. Presuming superiority above all our relations is what allows us to see all life on Earth as uniformly separate from and existing for humans in the first place. Humility thus becomes a pivotal stance for entering into more dialogical, reciprocal relationships with all our relations (human and otherwise) (Hallen, 2000; Harvester & Blenkinsop, 2010; Houde & Bullis, 1999). Additionally, as a self-reflective practice, humility carries an expectation of continued, critical self-reflection (Blenkinsop, 2006). When
humility diminishes, self-assurance increases. As I discuss more in the next section, retaining a sense of inclusivity, collaboration, and humility in relation to others helps to ensure that one’s work is not overly self-referential, that ecological integrity remains not only a personal practice and goal, but a relational one as well.

8.5 Assessing “goodness”

As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) write, portraiture seeks out stories of “goodness.” This “seeking out” has partly taken shape in my dissertation through my recruitment of three respected, recognized educators. A second part of this “seeking out” lies in an exploration of what constitutes “goodness” in relation to ecological integrity. What makes ecological integrity “good” in the first place? Turning the question around, if one seeks to live with ecological integrity, how does one determine the “goodness” of this work? And further, as I was left inquiring in earlier chapters, where does one look to make these kinds of judgments?

Ecological integrity is inherently an ethical concept. As I have described above, integrity is sometimes understood to require adherence to moral principles. Logically, then, if one’s morals are “good,” then ecological integrity is as well (of course, this begs the question, “‘good’ in relation to what?” which I will discuss shortly).

However, this research suggests that actual, working conceptions and enactments of ecological integrity are less straightforward. In the first place, there are a range of different versions of ecological integrity at work in participants’ lives that could be said to exist on a spectrum. One end of this spectrum could be exemplified by Ray’s advocacy work in which he positions ecological integrity as ethical engagement within a particular project or commitment. At the other end, Madhu’s admission of living in “continual contradiction,” reflects a more stepped-back view that holistically considers how her many, evolving principles align (or not)
with her commitments. Participants do not strictly define or enact ecological integrity at one place along this spectrum; it is more common for them to take on varying views and/or enactments depending on the context. However, of particular interest to this discussion, each “end” of the spectrum is both “good” and potentially dangerous in different ways.

In the first, more practical and focused view of ecological integrity, it is positioned as ethical engagement within a particular project or commitment. Ecological integrity is equated to a job (very) well done or engagement in work that is good for people and places. Such a view can help educators to be focused and productive, making tangible changes through and toward a strong socio-ecological ethic. Turning again to Ray as an example, he has accomplished so much by focusing on how to ethically engage in work through the University of Alaska Fairbanks that will encourage Aboriginal autonomy.

Although the narrower, more-focused scope of this version of ecological integrity might help to “get the job done,” one of its dangers lies in losing sight of the “goodness” or coherence of other aspects of one’s life that lie outside of this more narrow focus (for example, McKibben’s reference to a university president who drives a Prius but refuses to consider divesting the university from fossil fuels). Additionally, this version of ecological integrity leaves the door open for educators to feel that they have “achieved” integrity and, therefore, there is no more work to be done. This potential perception of “achievement” would actually be a loss. While educators may only strive toward ecological integrity and never finally arrive, the act of defining ecological, ethical ideals and striving toward them itself has transformational potential. As David said, “I’ve struggled a lot . . . and my finest hours are probably within that struggle . . . The struggle is where the windows and doors open.” As all participants have demonstrated, ongoing critical self-reflection helps to circumvent these dangers.
Alternative to the project-specific version of ecological integrity is that at the other end of the spectrum, which is much broader. My initial conception of ecological integrity from Chapter Two explains this view well: “the ideal of coherence between one’s actual, day-to-day habits of mind and body, and one’s ecologically-based morals, principles, or ethical ideals.” Ranging from values to habitual behaviours to knowledge to visions and more, this view of ecological integrity attempts to step back from particular commitments and strives to get a sense of the (albeit always changing and incomplete) “whole.” This view of ecological integrity is “good” in its ability to challenge and push educators to consider other ways of thinking, acting, and relating to others in many aspects of their lives. Ideally, this view of ecological integrity strives toward ethical ways of being in all aspects of life, and where those ethics might conflict, this view of integrity brings the two into discussion and debate rather than setting the conflict aside (or not noticing it) on the grounds that conflict is simply inevitable.

One danger of this broader view of ecological integrity lies in the possibility of becoming overly self-referential. Although the “many aspects of one’s life” include our relationships with others and commitments to them, the focus of this view is still primarily oriented toward finding or achieving goodness within the self. Another danger of this view of ecological integrity is its potential to become paralyzing. Attempts to concurrently reflect upon so many aspects of one’s life are daunting, much less the subsequent implication of creating some kind of ethical consistency therein. Given the enormity of the task, educators can become over-anxious and paralyzed by the feeling of never being able to get it all right. Madhu’s words come to mind as important reminders for how to balance these dangers: “People want some handy solution to fix the contradiction, and there isn’t one. . . . At some juncture, I guess, one can continue to be very sad about it all, or make some kind of peace.”
Having thus teased apart how these two understandings and enactments of ecological integrity are “good” in their own ways, the question remains, “good in relation to what?” David, Madhu, and Ray’s answers to this question reflect both their different contexts and their different conceptions of ecological integrity. Across these differences, most of their assessments of “goodness” are in relation to others. That is, they evaluate their efforts in terms of the relative success, happiness, or health of all our (human and more-than-human) relations.

Ray assesses the “goodness” of his efforts in terms of how well they contribute to advancing First Alaskan autonomy in education. In a back-and-forth process, he asks what First Alaskans need, and determines where he can be most useful, re-evaluating along the way. I found that one set of indicators Ray used to assess the value of his work was institutional. The creation of new programs, distance and field-courses, community partnerships, culturally-responsive policies and structures, and an increase in First Alaskan professors are material indicators of his integrity. Another way Ray evaluated his work was through personal relationships. By maintaining inter-generational relationships with students, colleagues, and Elders, Ray is able to assess his contributions based on the trust that has been built therein. The continued respect he is shown reflects a sense from the broader community that he is contributing to the ongoing work of cultural and ecological wellbeing in Alaska.

Alongside her enthusiasm for teaching, I saw Madhu assessing herself in part by turning to her students. Recognizing growth, transformation, engagement, and deep reflection among her students becomes a key indicator to her that she is working in a good direction. In terms of assessing her ecological integrity outside of the classroom, I saw Madhu turning frequently to her mentors, colleagues, her mother, and her Oaxaqueña neighbours. She engages dialogically with these different groups of people for whom she has a great deal of admiration, learning from
and with them, and reflectively assessing her own choices and beliefs in terms of their “goodness” along the way. And while, on the one hand she sees the lack of school gardens on the Penn State Campus and asserts that “all of my efforts have amounted to nothing,” she also bubbles over with excitement when hearing about the growing number of what she calls “industrial peasants”: everyday people choosing to opt out of ecologically destructive agricultural systems and attempting to live more locally. While she does not claim credit for the increased popularity of this movement, its gaining momentum provides an indicator that her work (which aligns with it) is indeed good work.

David also assessed the “goodness” of his work toward ecological integrity in several ways. First, he is especially “dialed in” to what the eco/environmental education field as a whole is doing. He is interested in its historical trends and present-day shifts. In part because of his leadership role as the CRC in environmental education, and in part because of his love for writing, I see him assessing his work toward ecological integrity based on how well it contributes to positive shifts in the field. Second, at a more local level, David is also particularly attuned to the health of a place—the people and the land. He is more likely to feel good about his own work if he can sense that it is making a difference to the health of those people and places with whom he has direct relationships. Third, as an exceptionally reflective person, I also saw David evaluating his ecological integrity in terms of how he feels on a day-to-day basis. Simply asking oneself, “Am I happy?” is something David attempts to remember to do in an academic culture that tends to quiet those basic assessments of one’s life.

This chapter has traversed rich terrain. Analyzing the research questions from multiple angles, I have attempted to share the many nuanced lessons I have learned throughout the research process. In the next, final chapter, I continue to share my learning, but I do so less by
looking back to what has happened and more by thinking toward what might happen in the future. I discuss my revised conceptions of ecological integrity, the offerings of this research, its limitations, future research possibilities, and I close with a narrative of my own next steps.
Chapter 9: The concluding remarks

“I don’t have an answer to the question of where or how I should think of myself. It’s kind of one step at a time, trying to sort through, okay, what’s going to be most relevant?”

Unprompted, Ray provided in these two sentences a fairly complete answer to my research question (How do respected educators who recognize and critique the ways in which dominant, modern, institutionalized education contributes to ecological concerns, work toward and conceptualize ecological integrity within their personal and professional lives?). Although there were a great deal more stories and details to flesh out his thoughts, his answer nods toward the ways in which my understandings of contradiction and ecological integrity have grown over the course of this project, and specifically in the company of David, Madhu, and Ray.

In this final chapter, I begin by re-evaluating the notion of ecological integrity. Drawing on the portraits, I return to this concept to offer a more nuanced understanding of what it is and how it can be most useful. I then summarize several limitations of the dissertation and some of the questions that emerged but remain unanswered. I conclude the thesis with a reflection on the implications this dissertation has for me as I move on to the next steps on my own path.

9.1 Re-evaluation of ecological integrity and contradiction

As I write this final chapter of the dissertation, it is spring in Vancouver and the small plot in our community garden is eagerly climbing to marvelous heights once again. While I have been sorting through more nuanced understandings of ecological integrity, I have often popped out the door to watch the seedlings in action. Perhaps it is these frequent visits and attention toward the garden that have found me looking to our plot as a metaphor for ecological integrity.

In the theoretical framing and literature review chapter, I wrote that ecological integrity “refers to the ideal of coherence between one’s actual, day-to-day habits of mind and body, and
one’s ecologically based morals, principles, or ethical ideals.” It seemed to me that ecological integrity was defined by either the presence or absence of contradiction among these varied aspects of our lives. That is, one either has ecological integrity because of an absence of contradiction, or one is still working toward ecological integrity if contradiction is present.

Taking this view into the garden, someone who lives with ecological integrity might have a plot in which the plants (analogous to all the different aspects of one’s self) thrive in a symbiotic manner, consistent in their cooperation and mutual benefit. While it would take constant work to cultivate this symbiosis, it would be supported by relationships to surrounding plots and the many flora and fauna living with/in them. Another plot lacking this same kind of ecological integrity might contain plants that compete against one another and that do not contribute to the ecological health of the area. While the metaphor has its limitations, the point is that this view of ecological integrity is especially categorical.

As I discussed in the final section of the previous chapter, I have come to a more nuanced understanding of ecological integrity. Rather than thinking of it as either fully present or fully absent, an umbrella concept spanning all our values, choices, relationships, habits, assumptions, and ideal visions, we ought to also consider how ecological integrity is contingently situated within different relationships, projects, or aspects of our lives. In other words, ecological integrity is also identified, sought after, and assessed within the various projects and ongoing relationships we share with others. Back at the garden, this view paints a different picture. It suggests that our plots will inevitably, and in some cases, beneficially, have a mixture of symbiotic and competitive plants. Some plants will cross-fertilize productively with plants in other people’s plots, and others might not. Tending to the mix, we ought to appreciate the depth and variety of interaction. On the one hand, we can nurture the pockets of symbiotic interaction
(i.e., work well-done or perceived areas of ecological integrity) on our own and in collaboration with others. On the other hand, there is ample room to experiment with the competitive or struggling sections of our plots. As David suggested, embracing the struggle, driving into it, and generating new ideas or relationships. Stepping back and viewing the plot as a whole, taking note of how the whole mix works together, and where areas for improvement lie, is important too. While we would not want to tirelessly try to figure out how to get each inch of our plots perfected, viewing the whole offers opportunities to identify areas of our lives where we can experiment with new combinations of plants.

In offering these views of ecological integrity, I do not want to underestimate the difficulty of this work. Diverse movements toward ecological justice are limited by the insidious inertia of centric thinking and the socio-cultural structures built on its back. While we must retain a sense of personal responsibility for these cultural norms, they are bigger than us. They are the soil in which we grow our plants, and the frames that appear to separate us as discrete, individual, human-cultivated plots. It is possible to change the soil, structure, and shape of our plots. It will take multiple generations’ worth of digging and composting, sharing of tools and seeds, and a constant vigilance to changing conditions. We have to work together to dig down deep to yank up the roots of unwanted plants. Then we have to dig even deeper, below the wooden structures framing our plots, to discover and feel the intricate connections we already share with one another and all our relations. We have to compost our garden “waste” collectively and amend our soil with it year after year. At some point, the conditions might be right for us to relinquish (the perception of) individual control of our plots, sharing in the work of cultivation not just with other people, but also with all our relations. Who knows what future enactments of ecological integrity will look like and what kinds of gardens they will grow. The unfolding
vision will continue to be shaped by our individual and collective experiences and experiments, the “goodness” of those efforts, and the stories we share through time to describe them.

While I have been speaking largely in conceptual and metaphoric terms, I also want to remind readers that ecological integrity is a concept with material consequences. On one hand, as a descriptor of an ecologically ethical life, it puts words to any number of enactments of “goodness” with and for others. On the other hand, in expressing a vision of what could be, it opens possibilities for ethical action that may not have otherwise been considered. As suggested in the introduction, “the purpose of this dissertation is to inquire into, critically explore, and share thoughtful possibilities for teaching and living with ecological integrity.” I hope that in having read the portraits and my discussion of them, many of these possibilities are evident.

9.2 Limitations of the study

The discussion and learning described above has taken place within a very particular context. Throughout the research process, I have made decisions that allowed the research to speak to some issues and ignore others. In this sub-section, I acknowledge several limitations to this research including its focus on United States-based, postsecondary professors; its focus on individuals over communities; my limited engagement with participants; my limited interaction with participants’ colleagues, friends, and family; and my lacking attempts to foregrounding all our relations in the research.

First, on my list of potential participants to recruit were some ecological educators that were employed outside of the university, and several Canadian educators. However, I ended up with a group of participants that are all university professors and that, when I visited them, were all working within US universities. Still, despite the participants all being US citizens, they were living in very different bioregional areas of the US: central Pennsylvania, eastern Washington,
and interior Alaska, and had diverse philosophies and areas of expertise and interest. Next time, I think it would be important to include Canadian, Aboriginal, and/or non-academic educators.

Second, this research, though it expresses the importance of relationships with human and ecological communities, is undoubtedly focused on individuals. Particularly in my visit with Ray, I felt the limitations of my questions that asked about one’s ecological philosophy and one’s personal and professional practice. In taking up shared or collaborative understandings of knowledge, Ray’s “philosophy” and “practice” revealed to me my own individualistic assumptions. I was left inquiring about how philosophies are held among a people, a nation, or a community. In future work, I would be interested in exploring portraiture with particular communities or educational programs, as Pickeral, Hill, and Duckenfield (2003) have done with service learning communities, and Davis, Soep, Maira, Remba, and Putnoi (1993) have done with community art centres.

Third, the portraits are representative of a relatively short period of time and are necessarily limited in their depth. When David reviewed his portrait, he told me that he kept thinking, “Wow… that was before.” In particular, David experienced a series of large life transitions over the course of the time during which I first contacted him, visited him, followed up, and then wrote the portrait. When he reads it now, he perhaps feels more nostalgia than a sense of “resonance” or “that’s me!” that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) suggest represents one aspect of a portrait’s validity. In David’s reaction, and in reflecting on the project, I see the ways in which the portraits are so limited; even though I did have contact with participants and “gathered data” with them over a series of months (in fact, we are still in contact with one another), the portraits would have been much more robust if I could have scheduled 2-3 site visits with each person. In that case, I would have been able to return home, engage in more
in-depth analysis and reflection, then followed up in person to explore more questions. As it was, I felt that as I wrote the portraits, many of my questions (even in the follow-up phone interviews) were more general in nature, resulting in a more limited exploration of ecological integrity and contradiction than I would have liked. A longer period of interaction could have offered space for me to further refine my questions and explore key topics from a more informed perspective.

However, even if I had been able to spend more time with participants, I expect I would still find it difficult to write about and explore participants’ limitations and issues on which they feel unsure or vulnerable. In retrospect, in addition to more time, it could have been beneficial to explore new forms of portrait writing that would have offered opportunities for participants to write about their challenges in their own words. Specifically, I wonder whether it may have been beneficial for me to have written parts of participants’ portraits and then sent those to participants with some prompts/questions about challenges that I see in their lives, but that I want them to be able to articulate in their own words. I could have then included their responses in the dissertation, followed up with (my own writing of) participants’ portraits, and then the collective snapshots. I am not sure if this would have worked, but it is one thought I had as a way to increase the depth of the discussion while maintaining non-anonymous, respectful portraits.

Fourth, and related to the limitations of time and depth discussed above, I also wish that I had spoken to more of the participants’ colleagues and family members in more systematic ways. Madhu arranged many meetings with friends, former and current students, and colleagues for me during my visit. I also talked informally with several of Ray’s colleagues, students, and his wife, and with David’s family, a colleague, and his two former students/current friends. While I have specifically outlined that this research’s validity is not determined by its objectivity or methodological triangulation, I do feel that the opportunity to speak with others about
participants would have offered more opportunities for greater richness, complexity, and ambiguity in the portraits. Instead, I relied heavily on participants’ perspectives, reflections, and writing about themselves. While I was able to observe and drew heavily on my experiences with participants, rather than just the interviews exchanged, I had to generally trust that what they said of themselves was true. Through a certain lens, this is a limitation; it may mean that what I have written in the portraits is not an accurate, verifiable description of how David, Madhu, and Ray really think or really behave. However, I am inclined to believe that this is less a limitation and more a result of the relationships desired and fostered through portraiture. That is, the purpose of a portrait is not only to represent a particular person authentically, but is to honour the work that they do, to create trusting relationships in the process, and to share meaningful stories that give space for reflection in readers. In order to do so, I am less interested in triangulation and potentially “catching” participants in a false representation than I am in reciprocating the trust and vulnerability they have shown toward me in this non-anonymous research project.

Last, but certainly not least, the portraits are limited in their foregrounding of all our relations. As discussed in the literature review and methodology chapters, there is potential (and need) for research that foregrounds all our relations as participants in shaping our ecological identities (Timmerman & Piersol, 2013). Although I assert the value of portraiture in its potential for this kind of work, for the acknowledgement and representation of all our relations as more than “the setting” for participants, I do not think that the portraits I wrote actively attempt to give voice or fully represent my own learning with all our relations.

9.3 Emergent, unanswered questions

Many questions emerged through the research and writing of this dissertation. Further to some of the limitations acknowledged above, I wondered what younger, newer, non-tenured, and
non-academic ecological educators might have to say about ecological integrity. I found myself asking how ecological integrity might be held among a people rather than individually. And, I had many more questions for each participant, finding so much potential for future, deeper inquiry with participants, but limited opportunity. Below I share two other emergent, unanswered questions. In describing them, I go into further depth on how future research into these areas could be warranted based on this dissertation, and why it could be of value.

### 9.3.1 Age and angst

One question arising from my research asks whether the duration of one’s career affects one’s ecological integrity. Specifically, I wonder whether educators who have been teaching for longer periods of time are more likely to have found a sense of integrity, or at least a sense of ease within their ongoing work toward it. At the time of my visits with participants, David had three young kids living at home, Madhu’s son had just moved out and was in his first year of university, and Ray’s third grandchild was about to be born. As the youngest participant, David also was (relatively) the newest professor, with seven years in the academy; Madhu was in the middle, with 20-something years, and Ray, the eldest, with more than 40 years experience. While their personalities and contexts differed greatly and there is little room to generalize, I do wonder whether participants’ differences in age, stages of life, and career duration, are potentially reflected in their demeanour and approach to participation in this research project.

From first recruiting David through to the review of his portrait at the end stages, I felt that he understood my purpose and interest in this research the most (me, of course, being the youngest of them all with my own still growing family). It seemed that his understanding came from a sense of contradiction and search for ecological in his life similar to my own. Through our talks and walks, it was evident that David is engaged in a lot of exploring, trying new things,
learning, and reflecting. “Learning is my educational philosophy,” he said; and he likewise acknowledged that questions about integrity “keep him up at night.”

Madhu is also always learning and reflecting, but her projects and role in the university are for the most part well established. I felt that she is more settled in her work and has reached a point where she is comfortably selective with what she does and does not decide to do. I did not see her as eager to jump into new projects, new places, or new people. As her friend and colleague Dana said, Madhu is happy to remain “under the radar” at Penn State, maintaining her work with a heavy emphasis on teaching, supervision of a few graduate students, service especially within student-led groups, and other fulfilling projects in India and México.

Ray was working himself out of a job, which is a beautiful and altruistic way to end your career. He had a comfortable and unassuming nature about him. It seemed that my questions and opportunities for reflection were the least beneficial to him. On one hand, I wondered whether Ray’s apparent ease resulted from him no longer being on a particularly reflective, exploring or questioning path at this point in his career. On the other hand, perhaps it resulted from his primarily advocate-like role in which he is not the one directly responsible for determining the direction and goals of his work, but instead positions himself more as facilitator and administrator for First Alaskan initiatives. I am not sure of the answer, but the pattern of participants seeming to feel more comfortable and/or at peace with their lives was notable.

In sum, this outstanding question does not intend to suggest that participants are on a developmental trajectory in which one day David and Madhu will reach Ray’s “stage.” Each person has their own path and certainly their own personality. However, there may be some relationship between the perceived importance of and engagement with ecological integrity and
one’s time spent within the academy. Not having entered or designed this research to answer this kind of question, this could be an area for future exploration.

9.3.2 Mobility and embeddedness

Another unanswered question that arose during the research asks about the relationship between one’s embeddedness within a place and one’s conceptions of ecological integrity. With Ray having lived in the same place for more than 40 years, David getting himself really embedded in a place, and moving for work, and Madhu living in three places a year, I wondered how participants’ relationships with their home places affected their ecological identities and conceptions of ecological integrity.

It was fascinating to me that David’s sense of place, of the Palouse—the animals, the weather, the economies, and the histories of past inhabitants—was strikingly present during my visit. Not only with me, but also in his classes, he brings the stories of this place into his work. David had only lived in the Palouse for seven years when I visited him, but he described himself as “in love” with the land there, and yet he was preparing to move. Granted, he was moving to an area North of where he grew up, to a similar boreal forest that was familiar and resonated with his identity. Yet, I still wondered (and I believe he did as well) what the significance is of one’s willingness to uproot from a place in which one’s whole family is well-established, and move to another, particularly if that move is (at least substantially) motivated by work.

Madhu’s relationship with State College was also fascinating. She had attempted to leave and move to a rural Indian village several times, and even though she put that “quest” aside and now regards State College as her home base, she travels all over the world each year, and really feels as if she belongs and has homes in three countries. In her writing, Madhu has several times critiqued “mobility.” In some instances she critiques the idea of “social mobility” as associated
with educational credentials (Prakash & Stuchul, 2004). In other instances, however, she quotes Berry (2009/2010), who suggests that “mobility is a condition in which you can do little or nothing to help yourself, and in which you live apart from family and old neighbors who would be the people most likely to help you” (as cited in Prakash, 2011, p. 41). This is not a good description of Madhu; she has many old neighbours who help her and are, in some cases, like family. Still, I wonder how Madhu reconciles her sense of place and rootedness with her mobility.

Finally, regarding Ray, I did not get a clear sense of his connection to all our relations or his sense of place in Alaska. His connection and embeddedness within Fairbanks seemed strongly knit through the relationships he has made with people, and in subsequent years, with those people’s children, and their children. He did give an indication of his love for the land when he spoke about how one day he wants his ashes to flow down the Chena, “past all the places I know and love.” Yet, I think that Ray’s sense of integrity is more influenced by his embeddedness within groups of people (admittedly culturally land-based peoples) than it is by his embeddedness in or ties to place.

Taken together, these observations bring up the following questions: Once one reaches a certain familiarity with a place, is one more likely or free to engage critically with that place? How might moving to a new place make one more tentative, but also more inclined toward exploring, re-defining, and re-evaluating ecological integrity? Alternatively, what are the effects of living in one place for many, many years on one’s sense of ecological identity and integrity?

9.4 In closing, an opening

For several years, my partner and I conspired with some close friends to buy land and live together. We painted a vision of part-time work amongst all of us, subsistence-plus farming,
sharing childcare responsibilities, and a modest, but comfortable and joyous, lifestyle. It sounded “quaint” or “hippie-esque” to many, too good to be true to several. However, it was pretty real for us as an actual possibility. It remains a vision that tests “just right” in my internal “ecological integrity meter.”

Then one day I found an ad for a job at a university in a place I have dreamed about living for years. I applied. My partner applied. We even applied jointly. I mean, who actually gets academic jobs these days? Hardly anyone, right? But there came a day when I answered the phone and someone on the other line said they wanted to give me this job. He called to confirm that I really did want it.

Dozens of considerations went into my decision: pros and cons, uncertainties, angst, ego. Accepting this job would bring me to the big skies and big land that make my heart sing; it would bring us closer to my family and into the mix with some amazing, activist educators. But it would also mean forsaking (at least for the time being) our treasured plans with friends, and more to the point of this dissertation, I worried it would mean trading our collective vision of a life chosen and shaped by principle and friendship for a life shaped more by a “career.” I was skeptical of the possibilities for ecological integrity that this life choice could offer our family and myself.

Yet, in David, Madhu, and Ray, I have found several possibilities. Certainly, I have also seen the compromises, the contradictions, and complicities they live with on a daily basis. David Orr’s (1999) quote “we continue to live comfortably by robbing the poor and diminishing the prospects of our children” (p. 221) haunts me. And, in all honestly, I am leery of how I will approach my own compromises, contradictions, and complicities; I am not so sure I can do it with the same level of integrity that David, Madhu, and Ray seem to muster. Still, they give me
courage. Their work excites me. And, ultimately, it’s not just these three, but a whole gamut of other academics—my committee members, my colleagues, people who I’ve read and admired—that I find myself wanting to trust. There are many people who I respect as good, thoughtful people who have chosen to work within postsecondary education; if they have made this choice, there must be some good—maybe even great—possibilities for ecological integrity therein. On the flip side of Orr’s grim quote, I am encouraged by Jackson’s (1994) call to “go someplace and dig in and begin the long search and experiment [emphasis added] to become native” (p. 97).

So I said “yes.” I start in just over a month.

As I pack up my books and dishes, I am also tucking away bits and pieces from this dissertation, little nuggets of ideas and memories, like fortune cookie phrases carried in my pocket, as reminders of where David, Madhu, and Ray have found possibilities for ecological integrity. I thus carry with me David’s honest embrace of contradiction and struggle, and the opportunity he finds within these for generative, creative, grounded, and critical moments of conspiring and inspiring with others in place. I carry with me Madhu’s dedication to transformational, nurturing, and kind teaching, as well as her framework of metaphorically and actually “separating shit from state,” taking responsibility for creating soil rather than waste. I carry Ray’s long-term commitment to meaningful social change, and the strategic positioning, humility, and advocacy that have helped his efforts come to fruition, working himself out of a job in the process. The implications of these possibilities that I carry with me do not suggest that I follow the same paths as David, Madhu, or Ray; instead, they serve as a sounding board of sorts. In the inevitable contradictions I will continue to face, I will reflect and act upon them in relation to what I have learned from this dissertation.
In closing the door on so many other possibilities for what my next step was going to be, I face one open door. It is a compelling and generously welcoming door. What lies beyond it promises to be engaging . . . struggle and compromise? Absolutely. Challenges and growth? Yes, that too. Even ecological integrity?! We’ll see. . . I think the possibilities are there. In any case, fall is fast approaching, and the leaves will be falling again soon. Alongside adjusting to a new job and seeking out possibilities for ecological integrity within it, I am sure that my children and I will again find time to delight in the fanciful descent of those leaves.
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Appendices

Appendix A - Protocol for participant’s university context

*What kind of story does the university tell about itself?*
*What do the local papers say?*
*What do students say?*

Location
Established
Logo/Brand
Strategic Plan/Missions
  - At University?
  - In specific faculty/department?
Policy statements re: EE
  - At university?
  - In specific faculty/department?
Faculties
Departments
Faculty members in participant’s department
Other
Appendix B - Protocol for participant’s home place context

Location
Town History
Population
Major Economy
Predominant ecology
Common flora & fauna
Political atmosphere
Proximity to wilderness
Proximity to agriculture
Zoning: how are people “arranged” in the town
Colonial history
Green space within town borders
Geologic history (this place on Earth)...
Appendix C  - Protocol for site visit interviews

* Interview 1: Ecological Education: Assessments of the Field *
For this interview, I’m really interested in your perspective as a respected and experienced professional. The broader questions I’m hoping to get at are: what do you think “good” ecological/environmental education' is, and more specifically, how do you think “good” ecological/environmental teaching looks/feels/is done? I would also like to discuss what you see as some of the most significant challenges to EE educators. This is a “snapshot” of the current status of EE – what’s good, and what is hindering that “good” work from being done?

1. “Good” EE... What is “good” ecological/environmental education?
   a. Describe an experience you have had of “good EE.”
      i. What made it good?
      ii. Why?
      iii. More generally, how do you know “good EE” when you see it?
   b. How do you think the field is currently defining “good” EE?
      i. What are your thoughts on that?

2. Challenges for EE... What hinders that “good” work from being done?
   a. What is it that prevents this type of educational experience that you described from happening more often or with more people?
      i. What are some of the most significant points of resistance or challenges to ecological educators? …to their students? Why?
      ii. How (not) are these challenges unique to ecological education?
   b. Are there any other challenges that ecological educators face that you think are important that haven’t yet been mentioned?

* Interview 2: Ecological Philosophy *
For this interview, I’d really like to get to know you a bit more and focus on you as an individual, your history, your current location and understandings, and your ideas about the world. The main questions I’d like to ask are: what is your history and where are you now? And, what is your ecological philosophy, how do you conceptualize and understand the world (in relation to place, with all of our relations, etc.)?

3. Personal Background... How would you describe yourself?
   a. Describe an experience in your childhood that was particularly formative for you as an individual (in the development of “who you are,” your personality).
      i. Why and how was it formative?
      ii. Where were you living? Did you grow up in one place or many? (generally dig for details if they don’t emerge)
   b. Tell me the story of your educational path (not limited to institutionalized education)... take me along as a tour guide along this history... point out particular highlights, curious events, bright dazzling moments, ruts, etc.
   c. Paint for me a picture of a particularly wonderful day for you personally (or with your family... your “private” life)... a day when, at the end of the day, you go to sleep thinking of how great a day you had...
i. Who is there? Who are you (not) with?
ii. What are you doing? (etc., etc… probe for details to fill out the subject, background, context, etc. of this “painting”)

4. Philosophy… What is your ecological philosophy?
   a. What are some of your fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings and the human mind, about the relative moral status of human and non-human animals, about what knowledge is and how we may acquire it?
      i. Do you remember particularly formative moments that have helped to shape these fundamental ideas and beliefs?
   b. What are some of your fundamental ontological, epistemological, ethical and psychological assumptions (very general)?
   c. What are some of your fundamental ontological, epistemological, ethical and psychological assumptions as related to place/the natural world/the more-than-human/etc. that carry into your work in education?
   d. What types connections do you draw between those more general beliefs and the more specific ecologically-related ones?

*Interview 3: Ecological Education in Practice*

For this interview, I’m really interested in focusing on your actions in the world and how it is, through those actions, that you work to put the ideas we talked about (above, interview 2) into practice. Initially, I’d like to explore the “how” of your work – what it is that you do, why you do it, and what challenges you (personally) face along the way. Then, second, I’d like to dive a bit deeper into the notion of integrating your life and educational practice with your eco-philosophy.

1. Practice... How do you go about doing/living ecological education?
   a. Describe for me one of your “finest hours”… a time when you felt that you did something (either professionally, personally, or both) that really worked.
      i. What else do you do that “works” or that is “good?”
      ii. What does “working” look like? How does it feel to you, to your students, to the natural world?
   b. Why do you do what you do? What are your hopes/intentions/objectives as an educator/parent/citizen? Do you feel those are often reached? How so/not?
   c. What would you change about your approach if you could?
2. Challenges... Who/what challenges and/or enables your work?
   a. What are the institutional barriers and support systems that challenge and/or enable your work?
      i. Can you illustrate these challenges with a real-life story?
   b. How do you approach these challenges?
3. Integrating theory & practice...
   a. How do you (attempt to) integrate your eco-philosophy into your teaching, working, writing, living, and so on (specific examples)?
   b. How do you reconcile the reality that is teaching as a tenured faculty member at a university in North America with your ecological beliefs? Do you sense a tension there? Can you describe it for me? What do you do with that tension?
c. Do you feel that ecological educators in particular face unique challenges with regard to that tension?

Appendix D - Protocol for participant observation

* Informal observations in day-to-day activities*

During informal observation of day-to-day activities, I will be primarily observing, but also participating on the periphery if it seems appropriate. The field notes taken during these observations will first and foremost center on emergent events, ideas or relationships that seem to carry a lot of meaning and weight for the participants. During this time, I will also potentially take field notes on informal discussions between myself and the participants. However, generally speaking, I plan on attending to the following aspects of the participants’ day-to-day activities:

1. Interactions w/ people: How do these educators interact with other people?
2. Interactions w/ natural world: How do these educators interact with the natural world?
3. Priorities: What is important to these educators? Where do they prioritize their time? What lifestyle choices does s/he make that may reflect her/his philosophy?
4. Demeanor: What is the general demeanor of the educator? How does his/her demeanor change with different people or in different places?

* Participant observation in courses *

During course observations, I will be primarily observing, but also participating on the periphery if it seems appropriate. The field notes taken during classroom observations will first and foremost center on emergent events, ideas or relationships that seem to carry a lot of meaning and weight for the participants. However, generally speaking, I plan on attending to the following aspects of the course:

1. Learning Place: Describe the place where the teaching and learning is happening. How are the students and teacher situated in that place?
2. Communication: How does the educator communicate with students? What are the students’ responses? Are there other types of communication happening?
3. Approach to learning: What types of activities or events are going on during the class period? Describe what the teacher and the students do.
4. Educator’s philosophy: How is s/he “role modeling” what s/he thinks/knows/believes?