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Gregory Lowan-Trudeau¹

Abstract

This article reports on a study that examined the ecological identities and philosophies of Canadian experiential environmental educators who incorporate Western and Indigenous traditions into their pedagogical praxis. Guided by the overarching question, “Can Western and Indigenous knowledge of the natural world be blended theoretically and in practice?” notable findings include the clarification of the relationship between Western and Indigenous knowledge and philosophies of Nature as one with the potential for bricolage (integration) but not absolute métissage (blending) unless Western perspectives other than science, such as deep ecology and bioregionalism, are also considered.

Keywords

bricolage, métissage, Canada, Indigenous, Métis

Background

In Indigenous¹ North American cultures, it is customary in formal settings to introduce yourself culturally and geographically; this tradition also extends to contemporary research contexts. I am a Canadian of Métis (mixed European and Indigenous) ancestry on both sides of my family. I was born and raised on, and have recently returned to, the eastern slopes and foothills of the Rocky Mountains in the territories of the Nakoda Sioux, Blackfoot Confederacy, and Cree. My perspectives on and experiences with experiential environmental education are inextricably linked to my identity as a Métis Canadian, someone who lives and works in the “Third” (Bhabha, 1998) or “Métis Space” (Richardson, 2004) between Western and Indigenous North American cultures.

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Motivated by growing support from Indigenous (Cajete, 2001; Snow, 1977/2005), Métis (Swayze, 2009), and non-Indigenous (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2009; Snively, 2009) scholars and educators to combine the best of Western and Indigenous traditions in addressing contemporary ecological crises, this study was guided by the overarching question, “Is it possible to blend Western and Indigenous knowledge and philosophies of Nature?” To answer this and other related questions, I explored a variety of Indigenous and Western eco-pedagogical theories and philosophies as I sought to articulate and engage the “Third” (Bhabha, 1998) or “Métis” (Richardson, 2004) space, challenging the oft-perceived dichotomy between Western and Indigenous ecological philosophies and knowledge (Little Bear, 2000).

I also developed and explored the concept of *ecological métissage*—the blending of two or more ecological worldviews on a personal and/or cultural level as represented in identity, philosophies, and practice (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012) through consideration of Thomashow’s (1996) description of ecological identity as the way that we understand ourselves in relation to the natural world, and an understanding of “métissage” as a mixing or blending often associated with culture or ethnicity (Donald, 2009; Roth, 2008). Those unfamiliar with *métissage* may recognize similar terms from other regions such as “creolization” (Roth, 2008) in the Caribbean and American South or “mestizaje” (Pieterse, 2001) in the Spanish colonial world.

Etymologically linked to the term and cultural concept “Métis,” Dolmage (2009) also highlights the sociocritical connotations of *métissage* in contemporary scholarship:

The concept of *métissage* . . . locates and interrogates the ways that certain forms of knowledge have been relegated to the margins . . . a critical lens through which one might observe issues of identity, resistance, exclusion, and intersectionality. (pp. 24-25)

A spirit of *métissage* infused this study and continues to inform my understanding of Canada as a colonial manifestation. It also led to the development of the additional research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What characterizes the ecological identities of contemporary intercultural environmental educators?
- **Research Question 2:** Do they embody ecological *métissage*?
- **Research Question 3:** How might the concept of ecological *métissage* [and other similar approaches] reshape environmental education in Canada?

The concepts and questions presented above guided this study, rooted in my perspective and experiences as a Métis Canadian.

Canada: A Métis Nation?

In the early stages of this inquiry, I was also intrigued by the scholarship of Saul (2008) who challenges the narrative that Canada was founded by two colonial nations,

France and Great Britain (Francis, 2005), and emphasizes the long forgotten and largely ignored Indigenous foundations of our society. He proposes that an examination of our languages, justice system, political structure, and history quickly reveals the inextricable influence of Canada's founding cultural groups on each other. Consequently, Saul suggests that living with cultural complexity was, and continues to be, one of Canada's great strengths.

As a Métis Canadian, I find great resonance with Saul's thesis; however, I also believe that a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between Indigenous people and colonialism is required. For example, Saul's use of the general term "métis"² to describe Canada as a whole might seem overly optimistic to some due to the undeniably negative impact of European colonialism on Indigenous cultures, languages, and health. As Euro-American eco-philosopher Thomas Berry (1999) notes,

Here in North America it is with a poignant feeling and foreboding concerning the future that we begin to realize that the European occupation of this continent . . . has been flawed from the beginning in its assault on the indigenous peoples and its plundering of the land. (p. 2)

The effects of colonization were and continue to be devastating and wide-ranging for Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world (Graveline, 1998; Simpson, 2004). However, Saul's (2008) work is an invitation for all Canadians to revisit history, not only acknowledging the wrongs that were committed but also recognizing inspiring examples of intercultural co-operation and métissage, and moving forward to collectively re-imagine our cultural and ecological future.

Exploring the Third Space: Understanding a Métis Worldview

When considering the blending or integration of Western and Indigenous knowledge and philosophies in Canada, one solution that may come to mind is simply adopting the worldview and practices of the Métis people. However, isolating and adopting *the* "Métis worldview" as a model for contemporary métissage (ecological in this case) would be inappropriate because, as with other Indigenous groups in Canada and around the world, a singularly identifiable Métis worldview does not exist (Gibbs, 2000; Richardson, 2004). Such an action would also amount to cultural misappropriation (Hermes, 2000; Simpson, 2004).

What can be most commonly identified is a Third Space *mentality* (Bhabha, 1998; Richardson, 2004): amenability to incorporating two or more cultures, languages, and traditions on individual, community, and regional levels. Rather than seeking to reduce and essentialize the diversity of the Métis world to an exclusive set of cultural and epistemological characteristics, I suggest that what is required is an understanding of the *spirit* of métissage—a Third Space mentality (Bhabha, 1998; Richardson, 2004).

As this area of inquiry and practice grows, key issues of concern and debate are rising in the literature such as examining the similarities and differences between

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Western Science (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005), and whether blending or integration can actually be achieved in a Western framework without misappropriating Indigenous knowledge (Hermes, 2000; Simpson, 2004).

From Intercultural to Transcultural: Considering Contemporary Models

A growing number of scholars advocate for the development of the Third Space between Western and Indigenous ecological approaches. In practice, many educational initiatives take an integrated, intercultural approach that can also be characterized as “bricolage” (Roth, 2008).

For example, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) compare and contrast Western science and Indigenous approaches in search of common ground based on their experience with the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI). The AKRSI brings together Elders, educators, and other knowledgeable community members to work with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across Alaska. Culturally responsive pedagogies such as learning through experience and observation on the land (Armstrong, 1987) are foundational components of the program. Barnhardt and Kawagley note many similarities between Western science and Indigenous knowledge of Nature; however, they also identify several distinctions.

Similarities identified by Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) include belief in a unified Universe; personal qualities such as perseverance, curiosity, and honesty; empirical observation of nature; and a desire to understand plant, animal, and elemental behavior. Differences include Indigenous trust in inherited wisdom contrasted with Western intellectual skepticism, Indigenous holism compared with Western compartmentalism, the Indigenous belief in the link between the metaphysical and physical worlds as opposed to the Western science focus on the physical world only, and the Indigenous tradition of seeking understanding to apply it to daily living versus the Western science value of seeking understanding for its own sake.

Others, such as the Integrative Science group at Cape Breton University, are expanding and engaging with this relationship in practice, using the concept of *Toqwa'tu'kl kijijitaqnn* or “Two-Eyed Seeing” to combine Western Science with Mi'kmaq knowledge and philosophies (Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2009). Their aim is “concentrating on common ground and respecting differences” to teach “both systems side by side” (p. 3) by bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous Elders, educators, and students in classroom and land-based experiential learning environments. Hatcher et al. (2009) suggest that “in weaving back and forth between knowledges, Two-Eyed Seeing avoids a clash or ‘domination and assimilation’ of knowledges” (p. 5).

In cultural terms, Two-Eyed Seeing could be described as “intercultural” (Welsch, 1999) or “bricolage” (Roth, 2008); it is based on an assumption of difference rather than similarity between cultures. Considering the previously mentioned similarities and significant differences between Western Science and TEK, this makes sense.

However, what if we were to expand our conception of “Western” ecological knowledge and philosophy to include approaches other than science such as deep ecology (Naess & Rothenberg, 1990) and bioregionalism (Dodge, 1981)? Might we find increased resonance with Indigenous traditions? Such situations, where similarities outnumber differences, lend themselves more to blending or *métissage* (Donald, 2009; Roth, 2008) rather than integration or *bricolage*, and are called “transcultural” (Welsch, 1999). A limited group of scholars, such as Kawagley and Barnhardt (1999), have acknowledged the existence of Western traditions other than science that are more closely aligned with Indigenous traditions, although none have expanded upon this relationship (potential or enacted) in detail.

Ecological *Métissage*

Considering recent comparisons of Western Science and Indigenous knowledge (e.g., Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005), if we expand our conception of “Western” environmental knowledge and philosophy to include approaches such as deep ecology (Naess & Rothenberg, 1990) and bioregionalism (Dodge, 1981), the distinctions between Western and Indigenous approaches diminish and more similarities emerge, positioning us well to move from *bricolage* to *métissage*.

Drawing from the traditions of deep ecology and bioregionalism allows us to include tenets such as respect and recognition of cultural and ecological diversity, the inherent value of all beings, spiritual forces, long-term multi-generational thinking, the embedded and relational position of human beings in the circle of life, locally focused and responsive living, practical application of theoretical principles, local traditions, and acknowledging Indigenous territories and sacred landmarks. Roth (2008) describes this shift from *bricolage* to *métissage* as a process, in this instance enacted as a move from intercultural integration to regionally inspired transcultural blending.

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of ecological *métissage*, inspired by the infinity symbol found in the center of the Métis flag to represent the joining of two cultures (Dorion & Préfontaine, 1999). Donald (2009) notes that, as with Métis people and our communities, every instance of theoretical, curricular, or methodological *métissage* is distinctly developed through the unique lens of the individual theorist. The principles of ecological *métissage* are explained in further detail below.

Acknowledging Indigenous Peoples and Territories

The central concept of ecological *métissage* is acknowledging and honoring Indigenous territories as connection to the Land is a foundational characteristic of Indigenous cultures (Cajete, 1994; Meyer, 2008). Central to this concept is recognition of the ancient symbiotic evolution of Indigenous languages, cultures, and worldviews within specific geographical areas. Several bioregional scholars also emphasize recognizing and engaging with Indigenous peoples, traditions, and territories (Aberley, 1999; Dodge, 1981; McGinnis, 1999). While this perspective may have been somewhat

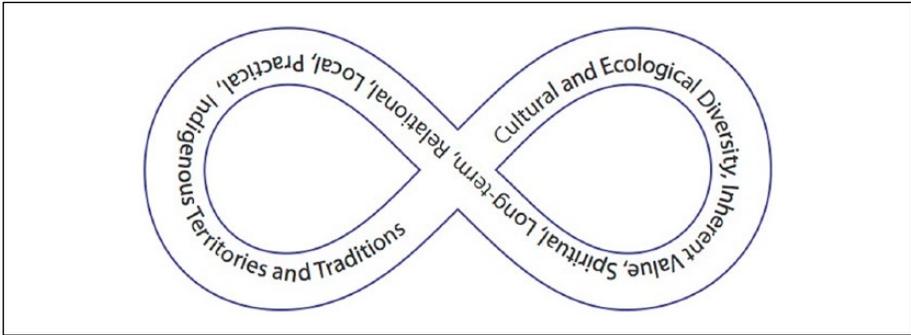


Figure 1. Ecological métissage.

shallow in the early years of bioregional scholarship, it seems to have taken on an increasingly authentic character.

The result of this recognition of and connection to specific geographical regions is similar to what many contemporary Western scholars call a sense of place, a strong feeling of being at home in a particular area (Curthoys, 2007). However, an Indigenous sense of place goes beyond simply feeling at home or connected to the Land. As Snow (1977/2005) explains from a Nakoda Sioux perspective,

The Rocky Mountains are sacred to us . . . These mountains are our temples, our sanctuaries, and our resting places. They are a place of hope, a place of vision, a place of refuge, a very special and holy place where the Great Spirit speaks with us. *Therefore, these mountains are our sacred places.* (p. 19)

This sacred sense of place, relation, and interconnection is explained further through the concept of “All My Relations.”

All My Relations

Inherent in most Indigenous worldviews is recognition of the inherent value, spirit, and interconnectedness of all people, living creatures, and bioregions (Cajete, 1999). The cyclical and interconnected worldview of Indigenous North American cultures is often illuminated in the concept of “All My Relations” (Simpson, 2004). As Cajete (1999) notes, “An ecological sense of relationship encompassed every aspect of traditional American Indian life” (p. 4). According to Cajete, this respect for and deep sense of relationship with the greater-than-human world results in a feeling of kinship and responsibility as, “Indigenous people felt responsibility not only for themselves, but also for the entire world around them” (p. 11).

Similarly, deep ecology also argues for a more humble humanity; it exhorts us to experience the world as a whole, recognizing the inherent rights of other people and beings and living accordingly (Naess & Rothenberg, 1990). As Drengson (2008)

explains, “Deep ecology supporters appreciate the inherent value of all beings and of diversity” (pp. 8-9). The late founder of deep ecology, Arne Naess, encouraged us to view ourselves as *part of* the web of life on a physical as well as a moral and spiritual level (Naess & Rothenberg, 1990). In a manner similar to many Indigenous traditions, deep ecologists advocate for a more embodied, respectful, and reflective approach to ecology, placing humans in the circle of life with the rest of the natural world, rather than outside of it as detached “shallow ecologists” (Stibbe, 2004, p. 243).

Respect for Cultural and Ecological Diversity

Recognizing that all of Creation is inherently valuable also means honoring cultural and ecological diversity. As deep ecologist Macy (2007) explains,

Diversity is a source of resilience. This is good news because this time of great challenge demands more commitment, endurance, and courage than any one of us can dredge up out of our own individual supply . . . (p. 29)

Drengson (2008) also notes,

The . . . principles [of deep ecology] are supported by people from diverse backgrounds . . . They each have their own personal ecosophy . . . This sense of global solidarity helps us persist in our efforts. Exactly what policies and actions we undertake depends on our personal situation, cultural context, and individual place. *No single solution can be applied to every place.* (p. 30)

This emphasis on the strength of regionally grounded diversity is reminiscent of Indigenous scholars such as Snow (1977/2005) who comments, “The creator created diversity amongst plants, animals, and people. So isn’t diversity a good thing?” (p. 23).

Locally Grounded, Long-Term Vision

Locally grounded, long-term vision and planning is another characteristic common to Indigenous, deep ecological, and bioregional traditions. For example, deep ecologist Drengson (2008) suggests that “abstract knowledge is not sufficient for a full life” (p. 40). Aberley (1999) also emphasizes a locally relevant, practical approach when he notes that

bioregionalism is best understood when viewed from the “inside,” not from reading one or several texts. Gatherings should be attended, ephemeral periodicals reviewed, restoration projects participated in, and place-based rituals and ceremonies shared. (p. 32)

In a similar spirit, Anishnaabe scholar and activist LaDuke (2002) states, “you take only what you need, and you leave the rest” (p. 80) while describing the Haida tradition of harvesting lengths of timber from living trees without chopping them down as

an example. This kind of long-term thinking embodied in action is characteristic of Indigenous ecological wisdom and is often represented by the Seven Generations maxim (Coates, Gray, & Hetherington, 2006): How will our actions today impact our descendants seven generations from now?

As previously mentioned and described in detail elsewhere (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012), the concept of *métissage* not only informed my initial ponderings and review of literature but also deeply influenced my methodological approach to this study.

Methodological Métissage

I traveled across Canada over a period of 6 months, using a methodological *métissage* (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012) of interpretive (Denzin, 1989) and Indigenous (Kovach, 2010; S. Wilson, 2008) research approaches to explore the life histories, cultural and ecological identities and philosophies, and pedagogical practices of 10 intercultural experiential environmental educators from a variety of cultural backgrounds (First Nations, Métis, European, and Asian Canadian) who incorporate Indigenous and Western traditions into their personal identities, philosophies, and educational practices.

This journey produced profound dialogues and meta-dialogues between and with the participants and the literature. Interpretation of the interviews began with Denzin's (1989) interpretive biographical strategy of searching for and highlighting "epiphanic" or "aha" moments in the participants' narratives. These narratives were subsequently presented as discrete biographies or "portraits" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) to respect the integrity of individual's stories (Kovach, 2010; S. Wilson, 2008).

In keeping with the Indigenous oral tradition that requires us to make sense of stories relative to our own unique contexts and life experiences, I concluded the study with reflexive interpretation of my own learning, experiences, and insights over the course of the research (Kovach, 2010; S. Wilson, 2008). I revisited the collection of 10 mini biographies searching for insights, discussions, and meta-discussions that responded to and expanded upon my original research questions.

Following standard qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2008; Lichtman, 2013), I reviewed the biographies and coded the participants' responses for themes based on my original research questions. As Kovach (2010) explains, this approach is allowable for Indigenous researchers who have also honored participants' stories by keeping them intact in previous sections of the study. In keeping with the contextual nature of the oral tradition, it is appropriate for a researcher to provide *their own* interpretation of this research experience and the stories shared by the participants. However, it is centrally important to note that these are only *my* interpretations; it is appropriate and anticipated that other readers (listeners) might have different interpretations (Kovach, 2010).

Discussion of Findings

As I came to the end of this research journey, I found that some of my original questions had been answered; however, new questions had inevitably risen in their place.

Another conundrum that I faced was that every participant had a unique perspective on the topics and questions guiding this study. How then to make sense of it all? In the following, I highlight some of the notable ideas and discussions that emerged during this research journey.

Cultural and Ecological Identity

The educators interviewed for this study represented a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, opinions, ideas, and identities. However, they also exhibited similarities such as the common perspective of seeing themselves as *part of* rather than *separate from* Nature. As each discussion progressed, it became clear that the influences on and expressions of their identities were quite diverse. Most notably, intriguing dialogue developed around the relationship between cultural and ecological identity and how this relationship influences pedagogical praxis.

Several participants discussed the complex relationship between cultural and ecological identity. For example, Natasha (participants selected pseudonyms), an Acadian, eloquently expressed her own culturally and regionally rooted ecological identity when she noted,

I [don't] . . . draw lines between my ecological . . . and my cultural upbringing . . . I see . . . a party with my family as an ecological lesson and I see . . . spending time outdoors or learning about the environment as a cultural lesson as well. So I really don't . . . separate them. I think [that] because I grew up spending so much time outdoors . . . we [were] never "learning about ecosystems" . . . it's kind of always tied together with the cultural aspect.

Considering similar themes, Cedar Basket, a Sto:lo Elder and teacher educator, reflected on how she introduces Indigenous perspectives to her students:

The very first thing I [do] . . . is to say that, "There has . . . always been . . . another narrative, an original narrative . . . here in this land, across Canada. Before . . . contact, before the Hudson Bay [Company], there was a narrative that was deep and rich and it's still here today. It hasn't gone away . . ." And I believe that . . . when [non-Indigenous] teachers are welcomed in . . . where they don't feel like it's their fault what happened in the past with Canadian history, that they have a very powerful place to play now . . . And for the most part I find that they're leaving . . . with a . . . lot of resources and maybe somewhere down the line they'll still be thinking about some of the conversation that went on in that course.

Thor, a Euro-Canadian educator, described a similar perspective when he related his experiences of working with Inuit youth, attempting to integrate what he saw as the best of Western and Inuit values and practices:

I worked to blend Inuit culture and values into my program plans and what we did through the classes . . . I worked to teach and educate towards respect and leadership and honesty and . . . other such character traits and values that I think . . . span across cultures. . .

The question of whether it is appropriate or even possible, for someone to adopt a cultural identity different from their own raised a plurality of opinions. While some described a belief in *learning with* but not adopting Indigenous cultures, others described experiences with Indigenous Elders that led them to believe that one can be “welcomed” into another culture if they handle themselves with deep respect and humility, challenging the boundary between philosophy and personal identity. I am inclined to optimistically align myself with such a perspective; while I am extremely cognizant and respectful of the hesitation of many Indigenous peoples to open up to sharing culture and knowledge with non-Indigenous people (Simpson, 2004), I am hopeful that, through a continued increase in authentic and mutually respectful engagement, more non-Indigenous people will be welcomed into Indigenous communities, further expanding opportunities for intercultural and eventually transcultural (Welsch, 1999) experiences and creations grounded in a regional sense of collective connection.

To Blend or Not to Blend: From Bricolage to Métissage

Echoes from the literature resonated throughout my discussions with participants in this study; while some were strong proponents of *transcultural* métissage—seeking new blended creations that draw on the strengths of both to create something new, others recommended a more cautious *intercultural* approach reminiscent of bricolage, suggesting that, while there are many points of convergence, Western and Indigenous knowledge can and should never be completely blended. The different opinions presented by the participants interacted with the perspectives of various scholars and my own thoughts and opinions to create a dynamic dialogue.

Similar to the concerns of Anishnaabe scholars, Hermes (2000) and Simpson (2004) who caution against the “watering down” of Indigenous knowledge, Olivia L’Hirondelle, a Métis participant, expressed reservations about the absolute blending of Western and Indigenous knowledge. She expressed her support for an integrated, but not blended, approach:

In bringing Western and Aboriginal philosophies and knowledge of Nature together, I don’t think that blending is the correct way to focus. I think that they can learn, share and teach from each other and there are ways in which they are coming together, but to blend is to blur and for me this is something that we need to be aware of.

Similar to Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (1998) who caution against simply integrating Indigenous knowledge *into* Western-style curricula, Kate, a Euro-Canadian educator, expressed concerns regarding unabated blending, but she also discussed when it may be appropriate:

I don’t think I could say . . . that everything should be blended because then . . . the only option is to create something new . . . But maybe where blending is useful is . . . as a bridge for people to find points of resonance and find places where they can get on the same page and form some relationships and have some conversations.

However, Cedar Basket, a Sto:lo Elder, scholar, and educator, expressed her enthusiasm for the future of blending and transculturalism when she stated,

I really want to see [a] meshing of science and of art and of literature and of math . . . It's . . . not . . . interdisciplinary, it's *trans* disciplinary . . . It's going beyond just how, there they are, all linking, but what comes out of that? . . . If we're really serious about education and revitalization in the second decade of the 21st century . . . we need to start exploring . . . different ways of how we put knowledge and curriculum together. And yes, Aboriginal worldview[s] and science . . . [are] all . . . part of that.

Cognizant of the concerns presented by some of the participants in this study and scholars such as Hermes (2000) and Simpson (2004) surrounding the “watering down” and misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge, I would suggest that in the case of environmental education initiatives that bring together Western and Indigenous knowledge and philosophies, the best approaches begin as an intercultural, integrated, *bricolage* of two or more approaches, being careful to recognize and discuss the original sources of the knowledge. As Cedar Basket enthusiastically advocates, this process (Roth, 2008) will hopefully result in an eventual expansion of the Third Space (Richardson, 2004) and the proliferation of respectful, locally grounded, transcultural instances of *métissage*.

Implications for Environmental Education in Canada and Beyond

My final guiding question was “How might the concept of ecological *métissage* [and other similar concepts] reshape environmental education in Canada?” My initial response to this question is that it is already beginning. For example, along with the growth of experientially delivered intercultural environmental education programs such as those described in the literature review and findings of this study, a number of conferences and journal issues (*Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 17; *Green Teacher*, 86) over the past few years have focused on the concepts examined in this study.

Considering this recent growth and the experiences and perspectives shared by the participants in this study who are leaders in our field, how might we be re-shaping experiential environmental education in Canada and beyond? Also, what effect might our efforts have on Canadian society in general? Such questions are addressed in the following.

From abstract notions to authentic engagement. One intriguing theme that emerged in several interviews with Euro-Canadian participants was growth from curiosity and abstract notions of Indigenous peoples and cultures at young ages to authentic engagement later in life. For example, Skywalker shared early memories of time spent at a family cottage:

I can remember for sure, [at twelve], maybe younger, when we would drive there, I would look out the window and I always saw myself as this Aboriginal person running in the bush beside the car and if there was a river then I was on the river in a voyageur canoe.

However, through her work and involvement with other various organizations and initiatives later in life, Skywalker had and created several opportunities to engage for extended periods of time with Indigenous peoples. Through building reciprocal relationships and being open to learning and making mistakes, her understanding of Indigenous cultures has deepened significantly since childhood, resulting in an authentic, deeply respectful, and embodied understanding today.

Orange Blossom expressed a similar shift from abstract notions of Indigenous peoples in childhood to authentic understanding grounded in experience later in life. Reflecting on how these kinds of experiences influenced her pedagogical practice, she related the creation of a university-level field school that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in a coastal community where local Elders and Euro-Canadian academics all contributed to a “Third Space” (Bhabha, 1998; Richardson, 2004) educational experience.

These kinds of informally facilitated intercultural experiences not only deepen the awareness of non-Indigenous students but also challenge the diasporic educational experiences of Indigenous students (Roth, 2008). By facilitating direct interaction and relationship building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a reciprocal intercultural learning environment, students learn from and about each other in very authentic ways. Indigenous “voice” (Graveline, 1998) is also introduced into mainstream discourse; confronting the preconceptions and assumptions of non-Indigenous students and encouraging all students to consider the similarities and differences between Indigenous and Western epistemological and ontological traditions, another important implication of these kinds of initiatives.

As Naess (Naess & Rothenberg, 1990) suggests, challenging the reductionist assumptions of Western Science and encouraging students to consider other ways of understanding and living in the world might also help them to deepen their ecological views, promoting a heightened sense of connection to their home regions. These kinds of experiences can also motivate non-Indigenous students to rediscover their own cultural traditions and to consider how they might incorporate those into their personal and professional lives in the future.

A’o’Ako: Reimagining pedagogical relationships. Another intriguing meta-dialogue surrounded participants’ descriptions of their pedagogical approaches and philosophies. Several participants related teaching philosophies and practices that included common concepts such as humility, building reciprocal relationships, having a sense of humor, and being open to learning *from and with* your students. I wouldn’t venture so far as to say that these characteristics are *unique* to intercultural environmental educators; however, I would suggest that these kinds of beliefs and practices are important *foundations* of effective intercultural environmental education.

For example, Tong, a Euro-Canadian participant, eloquently described the transformational power of being “comfortable with the uncomfortable” in intercultural situations; she related the challenge, but importance of being brave in the face of intercultural conflicts and described facilitating heated and emotional discussions that touched on challenging topics, but eventually deepened relationships between instructors and

students as well as among the students themselves. Skywalker also described several instances where having a sense of humor about herself allowed her to overcome cultural gaffes and deepen relationships with Indigenous people.

Another foundational concept in many Indigenous cultures (Graveline, 1998) recognized by many participants is the importance of reciprocal relationship building. Orange Blossom expressed this concept eloquently, along with demonstrating her sense of humor, when she described educational beach walks that she led in the remote coastal Indigenous community where she conducted her doctoral research, giving back to the community that was providing her with knowledge of their own.

Nalani Wilson (2008), a Hawaiian scholar and educator, describes the reciprocal exchange of teaching and learning as “A’o/Ako” (p. 19). Educators who view themselves and their students through a lens of A’o/Ako with humility and humor demonstrate genuine respect for other people, creatures, and cultures. My hope is that, as intercultural educational programs continue to grow and further infiltrates the field of experiential environmental education and education in general, an increasing number of educators will also embrace the spirit of A’o/Ako.

Final Thoughts

This study was limited to the Canadian context. However, these explorations led me to understand that there are certain commonalities of experience and perspectives emerging from other nations influenced by the ongoing legacy of colonialism. Thus, I encourage those who read this from beyond Canadian borders to interpret the themes and concepts presented through their own sociocultural and ecological lenses.

This study has helped to further explore and articulate the relationship between Western and Indigenous ecological knowledge and philosophies and the use of bricolage and métissage as metaphoric models for research and pedagogical praxis (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012). As described above, I believe that the current relationship between Western and Indigenous Science is one with the potential for an integrated bricolage, where many similarities exist alongside significant differences. I also believe that ecological métissage is possible on a regional level if we acknowledge and explore Western traditions other than science such as deep ecology and bioregionalism through experiential environmental education.

As embodied by the educators profiled in this study, the Third Space (Richardson, 2004) is once again taking hold across Canada and around the world. As Roth (2008) states, the world needs more people like this who are able to, “live and create diasporic identities” (p. 915). Educators committed to such an approach are developing and facilitating programs that foster locally grounded authentic engagement and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and epistemologies, conscious of their simultaneous role as teachers and learners, with a sense of humor and humility. I am inspired by the growth of our field; my hope is that, in the decades to come, we will experience a continued increase in intercultural sharing and collaboration, with the common goal of learning how to live well together on this Land.

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Notes

1. Key cultural terms and concepts such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, White, Land, Western, All My Relations, and Elder are capitalized to recognize and honor their importance.
2. Note the use of lowercase “m” to denote the general concept rather than the specific cultural group.

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