

This Land is Our Land? This Land is Your Land.

Exploring the Decolonizing Journeys of White Outdoor Environmental Educators

By

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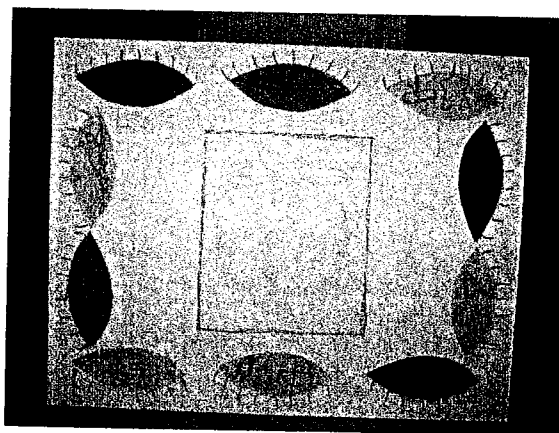
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Artifact by participant, John.

PREFACE

Situating Myself

My name is Emily Root. I am White and Euro-Canadian. I grew up in Pembroke, a small eastern Ontario town located on the traditional territory of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan. The great deal of time I spent with my family on the Ottawa River while growing up helped foster my feelings of connectedness to nature. Currently I am a graduate student at Lakehead University living in the Northwestern Ontario city of Thunder Bay, which is located on Anishnaabe land, the traditional territory of the Fort William First Nation. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience the beauty of both of these places and I am grateful to those who have been caretakers of these places.

My father's family is of German heritage and my Mother's family is British, Irish and Welsh, and while I have never felt strongly connected to those cultural traditions, I am beginning to recognize the legacy of those cultures in my life. On a cognitive level, I am aware of the enormous privilege that this identity has afforded me. However, I am only just beginning to understand the significance of that privilege on a deeper, emotional, level – how it has shaped my worldview and how it has impacted the lives of others.

Before beginning graduate studies two years ago, my identity was significantly tied to my life at Outward Bound, and specifically, for the last 3 years, to my role as a teacher at Outward Bound Canada College (OBCC). OBCC is a small, alternative high school that attempts to foster environmental citizenship and an understanding of cultural identity through an approach that is interdisciplinary, experiential, community- and

outdoor-based, and partially student-directed. Very much a life rather than merely career, OBCC allowed me to live closely with others who shared similar values: commitment to a lived connection to nature throughout all seasons, passion for learning with others (about ourselves and the world around us), creation of community, and celebration of our own Outward Bound traditions.

During the past few years of teaching at OBCC, I struggled with the task of being a White, outdoor environmental educator teaching Aboriginal content in Canadian history courses to non-Aboriginal students. I was aware, albeit on a somewhat superficial level, of the historic and contemporary oppressions experienced by First Nations peoples. I did not feel comfortable speaking “for” or “about” Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal issues in my classes. This feeling was heightened during three different semesters when we had an Aboriginal student in our class. My teaching partners and I attempted to include Aboriginal voices in our course through texts, art, film and the occasional cross-cultural experiences at Friendship centres and with First Nations communities. However, the expectation placed on us by the Ministry of Education to follow the content-heavy curriculum often led us to rush through units without enough time to delve significantly into important and complex cultural issues.

An even more difficult task for us was the issue of how to teach high school students about the concept of *identity*. We had a hard time understanding it ourselves, let alone conveying the concept and its relevance to our students. One day we had a pseudo-revolt on our hands as students protested an assignment about Canadian identity, claiming that cultural identity was of no importance to them as all that mattered was who they were as individuals. It was not until later that I became aware that this phenomenon

of individualism is a typically White Euro-Western response that stems from our inability to recognize our own culture. This individualism has grown to become the norm and is largely invisible to those who are a part of the dominant White culture (Graveline, 1998).

During the past two years I have had the opportunity to begin to more fully understand the challenges I encountered in my teaching practices. I have done so by exploring the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism and colonial attitudes in contemporary society and in my own practice. I have built relationships with and learned from Aboriginal peoples. I have come to acknowledge the people on whose traditional territories I live and work and I have tried to understand a more honest version of the current and historic social politics of those lands.

I came to the Master of Education program with a sense that outdoor environmental education practice needed to do a better job at disrupting the socio-cultural, political and economic forces underlying the environmental crisis. Most importantly, however, was my recognition of the extent to which the present environmental crisis and issues of Aboriginal justice are inextricably intertwined. Colonization and environmental degradation both stem from certain Western paradigm, which encourages the consumption of resources and assumes humans' ability and right to control and exploit nature, and which is vastly different from Indigenous ways of knowing based on the collective of relationships and the interconnectedness of all beings (Battiste, 2005; Cajete, 1999; MacGregor, 2004; Simpson, 2004). This realization guided me to the questions that became the focus of this study.

Overview of the Study

My own decolonizing journey has fostered a curiosity about the experiences of other White outdoor environmental educators who are engaged in the process of decolonizing their own practices and worldview. This qualitative study explored the nature of “decolonizing moments” in the lives of four White outdoor environmental educators. It addresses the overarching questions: *What is the nature of the decolonizing journeys of White outdoor environmental educators? And what life experiences facilitate this process?* The research process itself also served as a decolonizing experience as the study engaged both the researcher and participants in a reflexive experience that was intended to refine our decolonizing lenses and help us to further decolonize our teaching praxis.

The first two chapters, a review of the literature, draw on discourses from the fields of place-based education, critical pedagogy, ecojustice education, Indigenous education and decolonization, and provide a rationale for this study. Chapter one, *A Call to Decolonize Outdoor Environmental Education* explores the interconnections between the current environmental crises and systemic injustice faced by Aboriginal peoples. It examines the intersections of environmental education and Indigenous education and demonstrates the need to decolonize the field of outdoor environmental education. Chapter two, *Seeking Conceptualizations of Decolonization for White Euro-Canadians*, illustrates the complexities of decolonizing for White educators, reviews current conceptualizations of decolonization by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars, and calls for further research about decolonizing processes of White Euro-Canadian educators. Chapter three, *Research Design*, grounds the study in post-critical, decolonizing theory, provides a

reflexive explanation of the participant demographic, and describes the narrative, “life histories” methodology that framed the study as well as the creative interview methods that guided data collection. Chapter four, *Discussion of Findings*, begins with brief profiles of each of the participants and subsequently provides an analysis of the data by considering the participants’ conceptualizations of decolonization, the process of learning to recognize Eurocentric assumptions and White privilege, and experiences that facilitate decolonizing journeys including relationship-building with Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal allies and time on the land. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the thesis with a synopsis of the research outcomes and extends the current literature that conceptualizes decolonization for White educators and for place-based pedagogies.

CHAPTER ONE:

A CALL TO DECOLONIZE OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

This literature review examines the intersections of environmental education and Indigenous education and points to the need to disrupt Eurocentric practices in the fields of outdoor and environmental education. It explores the complexities of how White outdoor environmental educators can participate in decolonizing education and more specifically how non-Aboriginal environmental educators can work/teach in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and the land.

In Part 1 of the literature review I follow the arguments of those educational researchers who claim that the dominant Western worldview differs significantly from Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g., Battiste, 2005; Cajete, 1999; MacGregor, 2004; Simpson, 2004; Suzuki & Knudtson, 1992) and furthermore, that the environmental crisis and issues of social justice faced by Indigenous peoples are intertwined and stem from this Western colonial worldview (Barlow, 2008; Bowers, 2005; Graveline, 1998; McLaren, 2007; Orr, 2004; Rasmussen, 2002; Settee, 2000; Shiva, 2002; Simpson, 2002; Suzuki & Knudson). Consequently, I follow the argument that environmental education needs to address both socio-cultural injustice and ecological devastation as intertwined symptoms of the same root problem (Bowers; Chapman, 2004; Gruenewald, 2008; Orr; Payne, 2000).

I also argue that Eurocentrism remains prevalent in the discourses of critical pedagogy (Bowers, 2007; Marker, 2006) as well as outdoor environmental education research and practice (Bowers; Lowan, 2008). I will emphasize the call by some Indigenous scholars and educators for a foregrounding of Indigenous ways of knowing in

an environmental education for all students that reintegrates the concepts of *land* and *relationships* to a specific place (Barnhardt & Kawagely, 2005, 2008; Cajete, 1999). I will also discuss the concern about the potential for misappropriations in outdoor environmental education of traditional knowledge, ceremonies or the sacred by non-Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2005; MacGregor, 2004; Settee, 2000; Simpson, 2004).

I particularly draw upon David Gruenewald's (2003, 2008) "Critical Pedagogy of Place" as a framework to assist White outdoor and environmental educators to consider their teaching as Western practice in order to interrupt and shift them towards decolonizing their practice. Since I will argue that critical, place-based education needs to pay greater attention to Indigenous perspectives, I will illustrate the Indigenous origins of place-based, outdoor environmental education and the role of "place" in Indigenous education (Barnhardt & Kawagely 2005; Cajete, 1999; Marker, 2006). I will also offer examples of place-based education initiatives for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that have been informed by Indigenous knowledge and have led to greater cross-cultural and ecological understanding for all people involved (Barnhardt, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagely; Sorenson, 2008).

Understanding "Western" and "Indigenous" Worldviews

Fyre Graveline (1999) defines "worldview" as a collective consciousness or a collective understanding of the world shaped by environment and culture, a set of images and assumptions about the world, a distinctive view of reality, an epistemology. Marlene Brant-Castellano (2008), in a presentation at Lakehead University about Ethics in

Aboriginal Research, explained that a worldview shapes a person's values, ethics, protocols and individual behaviour.

There are many words used to refer to the problematic dominant worldview: "White," "Western," "Colonial," and "Eurocentric" are used variously in the discourses of Indigenous studies, decolonization, critical pedagogy, and socially critical environmental movements (Adams, 2000; Battiste, 2005; Graveline, 1998; Rasmussen, 2002). Diversity within Western culture makes it difficult to label this worldview as a monolithic category, yet numerous respected scholars do identify common underlying forms of Western, Eurocentric worldviews as contrasted to Indigenous worldviews. It is argued that aspects of Western worldviews have led to the social and environmental crises that we face in the 21st century (Adams; Battiste; Bowers, 2007; Graveline; Jensen, 2006, McLaren, 2007; Rasmussen; Shiva, 2002). Capitalism, rampant consumption of natural "resources," anthropocentrism, individualism, hierarchical power distribution, "progress," and the illusion of human autarchy are commonly discussed as problematic components of Western worldviews that have led to social and ecological injustice for people and other beings (Adams; Battiste; Barlow, 2008; Bowers; Jensen; Orr, 2004; Rasmussen; Shiva).

In her article, "You Can't be the Global Doctor if You're the Colonial Disease," prominent Mik'maw scholar Battiste (2005) explains her own choice of terminology:

I use the term Euro-centric, although others have pointed out the diversity of Europe as well as the diversity of those who have come under its dominion. So whether it is called Anglo-centric, Western, Euro-centric, or hegemonic colonial knowledge ... the structure manifests itself in common forms and has common assumptions that support it.... Eurocentrism is not just an opinion or attitude that can be changed by some multicultural or cross-cultural

exercise, for Eurocentrism is an integral foundation of all dominant scholarship, opinion, and law. As an imaginative and institutional context, Eurocentrism is the dominant consciousness and order of contemporary life. It is a consciousness in which all of us have been marinated. (p. 123)

Metis scholar Howard Adams (2000) provides a similar definition and explains the origin of modern capitalist and Eurocentric culture:

During the Renaissance, three forces, mercantilism, Christianity and racism, combined to form powerful Eurocentric myths or narratives. Although historians traditionally interpret the Renaissance as the pivotal period that ushered progressive and rationalist philosophies into Western culture, in reality it marks the birth of a colonial and White supremacist ideology that formed the foundation of European imperialism Today, Eurocentrism serves to create a consensus among the population that accepts free enterprise ideology and the racial stereotypes. (p. 42)

Derek Rasmussen (2002), a White author and former Policy Advisor to an Inuit organization in Nunavut, highlights that Western, Eurocentric epistemologies have spread beyond their cultural and geographic origins:

Given that the property-based individualistic civilization that characterizes the Qallunaat [Inuit name for Euro-Americans] emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, the words [W]hite, [W]estern or European denote its closest parentage and its place of birth, not the skin colour of its current adherents or its current geographical limits. (p. 85)

The literature illustrates that common problematic assumptions do underlie many diverse Western worldviews and there is indeed reason to analyze the implications of Eurocentric worldviews on outdoor environmental education.

Clear literature exists describing Indigenous ways of knowing. English terms used in the discourses of Decolonization, Native Studies and Indigenous Education commonly include “Indigenous knowledges,” “traditional knowledges,” “Indigenous ways of

knowing,” and “Indigenous worldviews” (Battiste, 2005; Cajete, 1994, 1999; Graveline, 1999, MacGregor, 2004; Simpson, 2002, 2004). Battiste (2005) reminds us to be cautious when trying to explain conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledges because they do not fit well into Western frameworks or English translations. Moreover, just as there is diversity within European and White cultures, there is a diversity of Indigenous cultures both within Canada and worldwide. Nevertheless, Indigenous knowledges do seem to be characterized by some common forms. Battiste (2005) provides the following explanation:

Knowledge of Indigenous peoples is embodied in dynamic languages that reflect the sounds of the specific ecosystems where they live and maintain continuous relationships... All Indigenous knowledge flows from the same source: the relationship of Indigenous peoples with the global flux, their kinship with other living creatures, the life energies as embodied in their environments, and their kinship with the spirit forces of the earth. (p. 128)

Hence Indigenous knowledge is a language of the land and communicates deep concepts. Since environmental educators often strive to help students create meaningful connections to the land, there is good reason for them to pay attention to Indigenous ways of knowing.

Bielawski (1990) asserts that Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge are dynamic:

Indigenous knowledge is not static, an unchanging artifact of a former life way. It has been adapting to the contemporary world since contact with ‘others’ began, and it will continue to change. Western science in the North is also beginning to change in response to contact with Indigenous knowledge. (cited in Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005, p. 12)

My intent is not to fix Indigenous knowledges or worldviews into a static monolithic category, but rather to acknowledge the common elements of Indigenous knowledge systems that differ from Western knowledge systems. In summary, this thesis will draw on the conceptualization of Indigenous knowledges as processes, living ways of knowing that are embedded in interconnected relationships rather than a set of discrete facts. Indigenous knowledge systems are complex systems from which humans are inseparable (Cajete, 1999; MacGregor, 2004; Simpson, 2002, 2004).

Colonization of People and the Land

To try to understand the meanings of Indigenous ways of knowing compels the researcher to grapple with the legacy of colonization. This is a highly relevant inquiry for environmental educators to undertake, particularly since patterns of colonization have always exploited both *people* and the *land* (Adams, 1999; Barlow, 2008, Bowers, 2007, Graveline, 1999; Gruenewald, 2008; McLaren, 2007; Settee, 2000, Shiva, 2002; Simpson, 2002).

Graveline (1999) describes colonization as both social and land oppressions:

Our degradation as humans is vitally interconnected with the continuing destruction of our Mother Earth, upon who our existence depends While some may equate the advancement of the Western way of life as progress, we must nonetheless acknowledge these calamities [poverty, illness, homelessness, hunger] as products of late multinational capitalism. (p. 7)

Initially, colonization displaced Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands, which were in turn cleared for settlement and resource exploitation to feed the burgeoning population and the consumptive desires of Imperial Europe (Rasmussen, 2002). As the

lands were stolen, Indigenous peoples often became disconnected from the land in which their culture, traditional knowledge and language were rooted. The devastation of the land jeopardized the traditional ways (hunting, fishing, gathering, travel) in which they had sustained themselves for thousands of years (Adams, 1999).

Today, as Aboriginal peoples celebrate their culture and resist oppression through efforts such as land claims, self-government, self-determination, Aboriginal education, residential school healing initiatives, community revitalization, and Indigenous research, there is concern about the ongoing impact of neo-colonialism and globalization on people and the environment. Leanne Simpson (2002) points to the interconnections between environmental devastation and neo-colonialism: “The root of many of the environmental issues facing Aboriginal communities lies in the process of colonization and subsequent colonial policies that continue to grip our Nations in contemporary times” (p. 1).

The harvesting, de-contextualization and sale of Indigenous knowledge by non-Indigenous peoples, including pharmaceutical, corporate and resource development initiatives on Aboriginal territory, continue to fuel the colonial legacy that exploits both land and people (MacGregor, 2004; Settee, 2000; Simpson, 2004). Economic trade systems devised or perpetuated by corporate neo-colonizers of wealthy nations force both the poorer nations in the global south to participate in unsustainable agriculture and global food production/distribution systems that destroy forests, croplands, rivers, and aquifers. The commodification and pollution of water by powerful multi-national corporations for purposes such as mining, soft drink production, and large-scale irrigation are further injustices faced by Indigenous peoples (and many others who also view water as a sacred life-sustaining element) that denies them access to this basic necessity of all

beings (Barlow, 2008). In the face of this neo-colonialism, it becomes extremely challenging for Indigenous peoples to sustain themselves in their communities and on their lands (Shiva, 2002).

Specific examples of environmental destruction faced by Aboriginal nations in Canada that can be considered neo-colonial exploitations include the following: airborne transportation of toxic substances in the Gwitch'in territory; flooding of the Pimicikamak Cree nation in Northern Manitoba for hydroelectric development; clearcutting of Haida and Gitsan Nations' forests; industrial contamination of Mohawk waters, air, land, fish and animals in Akwesasne in Southern Ontario; and traditional seed stocks of Metis farmers in Saskatchewan jeopardized by biotechnological invasions such as non-reproducing plants (Simpson, 2002).

Neo-colonization and environmental degradation continue to be inextricably intertwined and create the empirical settings of contemporary outdoor environmental education. Yet many educational theories do not adequately consider the implications of colonial-environmental interconnections.

Critical Pedagogy, Ecojustice, and Indigenous Education

Critical pedagogy, ecojustice, and Indigenous education research are three discourses that each address an interconnected socio-ecological crisis, but they do so through different theoretical frameworks, resulting in a significant dissonance of theories and pedagogical practices. A recent debate in the journal, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* between Chet Bowers (2007) and Peter McLaren (2007) highlights some of the disagreements around how best to address social injustice and environmental devastation.

Bowers was important in the development of ecojustice education movement while McLaren is one of critical pedagogy's most respected and prominent scholars.

Critical pedagogues such as McLaren declare themselves concerned with equity and social justice, strive to undo the damage of multiple forms of social oppression by helping people to become critically aware and capable of transcending, unequal power structures. Yet Bowers (2007) argues that the premises of critical pedagogical discourses of individual conscientization and transformation are Eurocentric and anthropocentric. First, he charges that critical pedagogy is based on the underlying assumption that critical reflection (which he links to Western tradition) is *the only* approach to non-oppressive knowledge, and that this assumption negates other cultural ways of knowing. Second, he argues that critical pedagogy is founded on the Western ideal of the progressive nature of change. He calls, instead, for greater conservation of traditions and intergenerational knowledge renewal. Third, he suggests that critical pedagogy reinforces the Western idea of the autonomous individual, which neglects the interconnectedness of the collective community. Finally, he argues that critical pedagogy is anthropocentric as it represents the critically reflective individual as the highest expression of life.

While Bowers wants critical pedagogues to become better aware of how their work may be perpetuating the very source of the oppressions they are trying to eradicate, others like McLaren respond that Bowers's theories of ecological justice fail to take into account today's realities of globalization and de-traditionalization. Indeed, McLaren (2007) argues that people living in a Western paradigm need to first become critically aware of the Western worldview in which they are entrenched before they can possibly embrace new (or traditional) ways of knowing and acting. McLaren posits:

You can respect cultural transmission and intergenerationally renew it, but why shouldn't you question it, that is, revisit it, and think such knowledge through for what it means at the present moment? What does traditional knowledge and its transmission mean for the specific activities of human beings in real contradictory social and economic relationships that function dynamically and in a variety of ways? (p. 1)

Other scholars call for greater collaboration between the fields of critical pedagogy and environmental education. Speaking to social justice educators, for instance, David Greenwood (formerly Gruenewald) (2008) argues that critical pedagogy should pay more attention to land and place-based pedagogies. He states that many educators who are concerned with cultural responsiveness ignore or resist environmental issues, and that multicultural and diversity education are often abstracted, institutionalized and decontextualized. He reminds us that since “the exercise of power, colonization, imperialism, and exploitation have always involved people *and* land, culture *and* the places that make culture possible... we need to ‘reinsert’ the land into our critical educational theories” (p. 146).

Philip Payne (2000) also calls for such collaboration, arguing that environmental education has not adequately considered the significance of the local, historical, social, cultural shapers of identity and how identity impacts students’ and teachers’ understanding of and relationship to the natural world. He points to aspects of the Western worldview (globalization, materialism/consumptive spirit, the corporate privatization of food, hyper-individualism) to illustrate some of the powerful forces that shape identity. Similarly, David Chapman (2004) argues that environmental education has not yet adequately addressed key systemic issues such as core inequalities of power and wealth.

However, many research traditions in the field of environmental education do work to integrate critical social and ecological perspectives (Kahn and Humes, 2009; Gruenewald, 2008; Russell, Bell and Fawcett, 2000). Gruenewald names ecofeminism, environmental justice, ecojustice, social ecology, and Indigenous education as fields that recognize poverty and violence as environmental problems and the interconnections of the social and the environmental. I would add environmental ethics, ecopolitics, and ecophilosophy to this list. Kahn and Hume illuminate this trend explicitly:

Significant theoretical inroads have been made over the past ten to fifteen years that have sought to ...reconstruct [environmental education] as an advocacy pedagogy capable of transformatively engaging with the socio-political and cultural contexts of environmental problems. (p. 182)

While they applaud efforts of environmental education scholars to integrate this sort of intersectionality into their research, Kahn and Hume also argue that this socio-ecological turn in environmental education has led to widespread anthropocentrism in the field. They propose a “total liberation pedagogy” that calls for environmental educators to “over throw speciesist relations across society” (p 182).

I would encourage *all* social justice and environmental educators and researchers, *including those concerned with anthropocentrism*, to pay greater attention to the discourse taking place in Indigenous education. Indigenous education research often disrupts both the social and ecological injustices stemming from colonization while emphasizing the inherent value of all beings, the importance of traditional and intergenerational knowledge renewal, and the contextualization of knowledge in particular communities and geographic places. Michael Marker (2006) distinguishes the Aboriginal perspective from that of social justice advocates and critical theorists and

highlights the Eurocentrism of critical pedagogy. He states that the critical theorists' emphasis on "political transcendence of self and negotiated, individualized identities of ethnicity, hybridity, and difference" (p.491) has in fact submerged the traditional, collective and place-based knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

He takes the argument further by critiquing the "placelessness" of Western worldviews. He predicts that collaborative efforts between Aboriginal scholars and critical theorists will work only if "[the critical theorists] foreground the interdependent mythic relationships of plants, animals, and humans in actual settings on the land. The placeless subjectivities of theorists must give way to a focus on intimacy with a collective experience on the land" (p. 492). David Orr (2004) also critiques the rootlessness of Western society and calls for a reordering of educational priorities to help students learn to live sustainably in the local places they inhabit.

In bringing together all of these contributions to environmental education, we need to consider both socio-critical and ecological perspectives as *place-based* and *contextualized* as well as relevant to *collective experiences* of communities (human and more-than-human) that are rooted in particular places (Fawcett, Bell and Russell, 2002). Environmental education needs to respond to culturally diverse ways of knowing and consider what traditions to conserve through intergenerational knowledge renewal. Encouragingly, the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* has made it a priority to expand the boundaries of environmental education research (Agyeman, 2002; Jickling, 2002) and has also frequently published the important work of Aboriginal scholars, including Peter Cole, Leanne Simpson, and Greg Lowan. Indeed, environmental education researchers across multiple disciplines are re-imagining approaches to

education that integrate both culture and environment. This movement is exemplified by a recent edited collection entitled, *Fields of Green: restorying culture, environment and education* (McKenzie, Hart, Bai and Jickling, 2009). While these important contributions are creating movement towards decolonizing the field of environmental education, I argue that many White environmental education researchers and teachers have more work to do in considering, *specifically*, their own Eurocentric colonizing lens and to seek to learn about Indigenous perspectives through their *own* work. With these goals in mind, I will now examine how White outdoor environmental educators have much to learn from people engaged in Indigenous education and decolonization.

Outdoor and Environmental Education as Eurocentric

I would argue that in practice, much outdoor environmental education still focuses on fostering students' connections to the land and on environmental issues more than on socio-cultural systems. More specifically, most outdoor environmental education organizations, programs and practitioners rarely disrupt Eurocentrism or include Indigenous voices (Lowan, 2008). Though often unintentionally, they frequently ignore, appropriate or misrepresent Indigenous culture. I have observed this directly in my own practice while working in the field for the past twelve years.

To begin with, it is not hard to observe that at many environmental or outdoor education centres or conferences, the vast majority of practitioners are Euro/White and the majority of content highlights the Eurocentric nature of the field. In outdoor environmental education, there remains a legacy of misrepresentation of Aboriginal cultures: so-called "Native" legends recounted around a campfire, romanticized and

inauthentic “Native council ring” ceremonies at many summer camps, canoe trips that romanticize Eurocentric versions of voyageur culture and fur-trade history, and vague or embellished stories about the origin and meaning of “generic Native” games and crafts (Hamilton, 2003).

Of course, not all Euro-Canadian outdoor environmental education programs exemplify such egregious cultural misrepresentations, but the question remains as to how many White outdoor environmental educators would be able to tell their students about the contemporary and historic culture of the specific group of First peoples in whose territory they travel? I recently witnessed this sort of Eurocentric ignorance during a meeting of outdoor environmental education teachers in Northwestern Ontario. When Lisa Korteweg of Lakehead University and Kaaren Daanenmann, a local Anishnaabe educator, asked the question, “On whose traditional territory is this meeting being held?” not one of the twenty White educators present could answer. Many of these and other Ontario educators teach about ecological principles, nature conservation, and species identification without any reference whatsoever to the local Indigenous peoples of the land.

One example of a program designed specifically with the intent of meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students is Outward Bound Canada’s Giwaykiwin program. A recent study of this program indicates that even thoughtfully designed Euro-Western outdoor programs that attempt to respectfully incorporate and respond to Aboriginal cultures may not necessarily serve as culturally appropriate for those involved (Lowan, 2009). The study highlights how canoe trips led by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, do not in themselves address the myriad complexities of decolonizing outdoor

environmental education. This critique does not mean to suggest that White outdoor and environmental educators should avoid learning about Indigenous cultures with their students, but rather reminds us of a neo-colonial legacy in outdoor environmental education and highlights the need for White educators to seriously and deeply decolonize their practice.

Leanne Simpson (2002) suggests that non-Indigenous peoples can learn a great deal from Indigenous peoples about disrupting the dominant, environmentally dangerous, worldview:

We have been advocating for social change for centuries, we are experts at resisting the power structure of the dominant society. We have resisted decades of assimilation policies. We have survived as Aboriginal peoples. Researchers and activists advocating for social change have something to learn from our people. (p. 144)

While White environmental educators can and should learn from Aboriginal peoples, it is also important for us to take responsibility for recognizing, understanding and questioning our own Western worldviews. As a collective, outdoor and environmental educators need to respectfully invite Indigenous voices and perspectives and disrupt the Euro-centrism in the field of practice.

Foregrounding Indigenous Ways of Knowing

As Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples recognize the limitations of the current, mono-cultural education system, some are calling for a foregrounding of Indigenous ways of knowing in an education for *all* students. Environmental educators have much to learn by listening to the Indigenous voices that are already re-imagining a

fundamentally different approach to education that would honour human-land relationships.

Greg Cajete (1999), for one, calls attention to the environmental thinking and learning that Indigenous peoples have been applying for thousands of years. He writes, “the serious exploration of [I]ndigenous education by designers of environmental curricula can bring important insights into the nature of ‘biophilia’ and its connection to learning in contemporary education” (p. 189). Biophilia describes the innate human desire to interact with other beings in the natural world and helps reconnect humans to the land. Cajete describes Indigenous education as:

education about community and spirit whose components include: the recognition of interdependence; the use of linguistic metaphors, art and myth; a focus on local knowledge and direct experience with nature; orientation to place; and the discovery of ‘face, heart, and foundation’ in the context of key social and environmental relationships.
(p. 189)

Oscar Kawagley (1998) also emphasizes that “Indigenous knowledge that is deeply rooted in the long inhabitation of a particular place can benefit everyone, from educator to scientist, as we search for a more satisfying and sustainable way to live on the planet” (p. 1). More recently, Ray Barnhardt and Oscar Kawagley (2005) noted that while Western and Indigenous knowledge systems are indeed divergent, in reality these systems often co-exist, in one person, one organization or one community, and for many Aboriginal people this duality leads them to feel as though they are living in two worlds. They argue that, “non-Native people, too, need to recognize the coexistence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems, and find ways to understand and relate to the world in its multiple dimensions and varied perspectives” (p. 9).

Encouragingly, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) note that there seems to be “a new generation of Indigenous scholars who seek to move the role of Indigenous knowledge and learning from the margins to the center of educational research, and thus take on some of the most intractable and salient issues of our times” (p. 10). Indeed, as Indigenous scholar Michael Marker (2000) writes:

Research on [I]ndigenous education is often framed as a glance into an ethnic community rather than a deep challenge to the mainstream values and goals of schooling. Indigenous knowledge and approaches to the natural world should become centerpieces for a much broader and substantive discussion rather than simply studying the Other. (p. 503)

White social justice and environmental educators need to consider and listen to the inherited wisdom of these Indigenous scholars.

TEK: The Appropriation of Indigenous Knowledge

As Indigenous culture and knowledge gains attention and credibility in environmental education research, there are valid concerns about the potential for appropriation of traditional knowledge by non-Indigenous peoples, fueled by a legacy of disrespectful research and colonial education practices. By making themselves aware of these legacies, White environmental educators navigating the waters of decolonization can take care not to perpetuate such forms of neo-colonialism.

Early global sustainable development initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s, and in particular the Brundtland report of 1987, highlighted the importance of Indigenous peoples around the world in achieving sustainability (Battiste, 2005; Higgins, 1998). As a result, the concept of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has proliferated into its

own academic discipline over the last two decades and has been incorporated widely into the fields of science and land management (Nelson, 2005). After centuries of resistance to oppressive colonial powers, many Aboriginal peoples initially responded to this interest with optimism, “seeing an opportunity to Indigenize environmental thinking and policy to the betterment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and to advance the agenda of de-colonization and liberation” (Simpson, 2004, p. 374).

Since then, however, TEK has become a concept that is discussed and employed largely in a Western scientific framework and does not necessarily or accurately reflect Indigenous ways of knowing (MacGregor, 2004; Nelson, 2005; Simpson, 2004). It has become another tool of colonial oppression as traditional knowledge is still frequently harvested from a community with little or no benefit to the people of that community. The sense of urgency to document Indigenous knowledge is often fueled by the Eurocentric “vanishing-race” theory of anthropology (MacGregor, 2004). Once documented, the knowledge is often de-contextualized and used to gain profit by the pharmaceutical, biomedical and resource extraction industries (Settee, 2000). Indigenous peoples are resisting this neo-colonialism by reclaiming Indigenous knowledge in many different settings: through academic discourse, through non-co-operation strategies related to land management, and by exercising intellectual property rights (Settee, 2000).

Another concern is the legacy of (questionably) well-intentioned, yet colonial Western scholars and educators who attempt to “save,” “rescue,” or “fix” Indigenous peoples and their communities. Even as Euro-Canadians finally begin to acknowledge the horrific and violent injustice of the residential school era, and as scholars increasingly

embrace collaborative and anti-oppressive methodologies, this pervasive attitude lingers.

Howard Adams (2000) describes this attitude:

Consistent with the self-image as 'world conqueror' is the western European self-proclaimed mandate to save the world with its 'special' qualities and knowledge that oblige it to shoulder the burden of guiding those less fortunate. This is the arrogant presumption in the western European self-image. (p. 46)

Derek Rasmussen (2002) further illustrates this arrogant attitude, alluding to the Eurocentrism of critical pedagogy:

[Euro-Americans] rush around the world proselytizing their alphanumeric fetishism, supposedly rescuing 'primitive' civilizations from their richly integrated physical-oral-mental cultures. Meanwhile they pat themselves on the back because they are in the igloo or under the banyan tree teaching liberatory pedagogy to the suffering locals. (p. 86)

As Indigenous knowledge gains recognition and credibility in education and educational research, it would be wise for environmental educators who wish to collaborate with Indigenous peoples to make themselves aware and critically reflexive of these neo-colonial stories by reflecting constantly on their own approaches to, and motivations for, collaborating with Indigenous peoples.

Critical Place-Based Pedagogy as a Framework for Decolonizing?

Place-based education has emerged as the educational component of the growing localism movement. It aims to help students learn from and develop connections to the local places in which they live. Much place-based education tends to foreground local environmental study, yet since *places* are where we experience both culture and environment, place-responsive education provides an opportunity to explore the political

and cultural environment as well (Gruenewald, 2008). In place-based education, concepts of *relationship* and *interdependence* are central, in contrast to the reification of *difference* and *diversity* that occurs in most social justice and culturally responsive education.

Gruenewald attempts to mediate the previously mentioned dialogue between critical pedagogues and environmental thinkers. Gruenewald's (2003, 2008) "Critical Pedagogy of Place" proposes an integration of the traditions of environmental and social justice education. Acknowledging the critique by Bowers (2007) and others that critical pedagogy is non-responsive to culturally diverse ways of being, Gruenewald explains that, "the intent of the phrase 'a critical pedagogy of place,' is to combine the critical tradition that has historically been concerned with human oppression, difference and radical multiculturalism with geographically and ecologically grounded cultural experience" (p. 149).

He calls for both *de-colonization*, which he "equates roughly with the agenda of culturally responsive educators of recognizing and undoing the damage of multiple forms of oppression" (2008, p. 149), and *re-inhabitation*, which he "equates roughly with the agenda of environmental educators of learning to live well in place without doing damage to others, human and more-than-human" (p. 149). He suggests questions to guide an inquiry of place: "What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored, or created in this place?" (p. 149). A critical pedagogy of place would re-situate classrooms and schools in relationship to their communities and local landscapes.

While Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place might seem to hold promise as a culturally relevant framework to help White educators decolonize their practice (Swayze,

2009), disappointingly, it does not include Indigenous perspectives. Cajete (1999) notes the importance of recognizing the Indigenous roots of many contemporary approaches to outdoor environmental education:

... many environmental educators, writers, and philosophers advocate getting back to the basics of relationship to the environment and to each other within communities. These ways of getting back to basics parallel the traditional practices of indigenous societies. Recognition of these parallels is appropriate since [I]ndigenous peoples around the world have much to share. (p. 190)

Gruenewald's framework is useful in that it speaks to and draws together multiple fields of educational research. To be an effective decolonizing tool for White environmental educators, however, a critical pedagogy of place requires further development to foreground Indigenous voices. Gruenewald (2008) states that he hopes

... to invite educators committed to social justice, anti-oppression and the non-neutrality of teaching into an expanded conversation about why educators must be responsive to culture and diversity and how we can be responsive through local inquiry and action. (p. 137)

I would like to encourage *non-Aboriginal* educators in the fields of social justice, environmental and critical place-based education to *further* expand the conversation by collaborating with Indigenous educators who are *already* re-imagining an education that disrupts the Eurocentric worldview, fosters a lived connection to the earth by conserving traditional knowledge, and does so in the context of a collective community living in a particular local place. Encouragingly, Gruenewald, in his latest (2008) publication does state in a brief footnote that increasingly he believes "Indigenous educational processes and epistemologies must be at the center of place-based, culturally responsive teaching" (p. 151).

Turning to Indigenous Education to Learn About “Place”

“Indigenous knowledge can be conceptualized as the web of relationships between Indigenous people and the ecological world at a specific location.” (Battiste, 2005, p. 132)

As the preceding quote illustrates, place is central to Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous education (Barnhardt, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagely, 2005; Battiste, 2005; Cajete, 1999; MacGregor, 2004; Settee, 2000; Simpson, 2002; Wane, 2001). *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local diversity*, a book recently edited by Gruenewald and Gregory Smith (2008), includes two chapters about exemplary place-based education initiatives that are founded on Indigenous knowledge systems and designed for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners: The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (Barnhardt, 2008) and STAR/Service to All Relations (Sorenson, 2008).

Barnhardt (2008) and Kawagely and Barnhardt (2005) describe the efforts of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network to develop and implement a culturally responsive education system for all Alaskan students that is grounded in local culture and places. The extensive curriculum framework facilitates the convergence of Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, two vastly different knowledge systems that are functionally interdependent. The Alaska Native Knowledge Network has reached beyond the surface of Indigenous “folk” culture to compare the deep knowledge of both Native and Western streams.

Additionally, Alaska Native Knowledge Network cultural immersion camps, such as Old Minto, provide an opportunity for the teachers, students and community members to learn from Elders, the land and each other. At Old Minto, people young and old, Native and non-Native, come together to participate in the on-going life of a traditional

fish camp: “What is learned [at Old Minto] cannot be acquired vicariously because it is embedded in the environment and the learning experience itself” (p. 116).

STAR is a place-based and service-oriented charter school located on the border of a Navajo reservation, thirty miles north east of Flagstaff Arizona. It was founded on the Navajo principle of K’e (interrelatedness and kinship) that helps students, staff, Elders and other community members engage in the task of creating a sustainable community (Sorenson, 2008). The interdisciplinary curriculum, which ranges from a dramatic arts-based exploration of historic events to science-oriented projects related to the school’s solar energy system and land reclamation efforts, helps students talk about deeply rooted historic and contemporary issues of racism and social injustice. Sorensen explains that given the widespread sense of alienation faced by many youth in rural tribal communities, it is imperative to re-instil in students an appreciation for cultural values and the understanding that true sovereignty is made possible not by government legislature but by community members who take good care of each other and the land.

As these two examples demonstrate, while place-based education is gaining attention amongst scholars in both fields, non-Aboriginal environmental and social justice educators have much more to learn from Indigenous educators. It is Aboriginal scholars who are striving to foreground Indigenous knowledge in educational discourse and practices. I invite environmental educators need to consider, more deeply, the ways in which their own pedagogies perpetuate the appropriation, misrepresentation and omission of Indigenous culture. Environmental educators have a responsibility to recognize and confront Eurocentrism and White privilege, build respectful relationships

with Aboriginal people and learn to teach honestly about (and with) the land and the people of the land.

The task of decolonization will be challenging for White educators who do not yet acknowledge or work to interrupt their inherent position as colonizers. Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place may provide a potential point of intersection to the fields of critical pedagogy, environmental education and Indigenous education. To be an effective decolonizing framework, however, it needs to include Indigenous voices and to acknowledge the Indigenous foundations of place-based education. Non-Aboriginal environmental educators should also seek to learn from the growing number of exemplary programs that are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and in particular from Aboriginal peoples in localized places.

As Barnhardt and Kawagely (2005) indicate, more research is needed about *how* non-Aboriginal educators might decolonize their own worldviews and how they might be encouraged to recognize the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge systems. As White environmental educators begin to take up the task of decolonizing their practice, more research is also needed about their experiences through the process of decolonization and about the nature of allied relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators striving to decolonize outdoor environmental education.

CHAPTER TWO:
SEEKING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF DECOLONIZATION
FOR WHITE EDUCATORS

In part two of the literature review, I explore the complexity of conceptualizing decolonization as a process for non-Aboriginal educators. I address the challenges faced by White outdoor environmental educators, often positioned as colonizers, who search for effective and respectful roles in decolonizing education (Bishop, 2002; Haig-Brown, 2000, Trowsse, 2007). I posit that the worldview of White people has also been colonized through our own schooling, and that this legacy calls upon us to interrupt and disrupt the ongoing internalized, normative Western worldview (Bishop, 2002; Simpson, 2004; Smith, 1999). I will examine the current conceptualizations of decolonization by Aboriginal scholars (Battiste, 2000; Graveline, 1998; Iseke-Barnes, 2007; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), including those that point non-Aboriginal educators in the direction of the complex task at hand (Battiste, 2000; Dion, 2007; Graveline). I argue that, while non-Aboriginal educators have a great deal to learn from these Aboriginal scholars about decolonizing, the Aboriginal conceptualizations of decolonizing do not describe the experiences of White Euro-Canadians who are attempting to recognize and overcome their own Eurocentrism, learn about Aboriginal culture, and build relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Next, I examine the complexities and existing conceptualizations of decolonizing for White people (Haig Brown, 2000; Rasmussen, 2002; Strong-Wilson, 2009; Tompkins, 2002; Trowsse, 2007). Finally, I identify the need for a more substantive conceptualization of the decolonizing processes of non-Aboriginal peoples that would provide appropriate, relevant, and much needed direction to White Euro-

Canadian educators learning to engage in the role of respectful allies with Aboriginal people.

Complexities of Decolonization for White Educators

Often positioned as colonizers, White Euro-Canadian educators may find it challenging to find effective and respectful roles in the process of decolonizing education. Celia Haig-Brown (2000) describes the challenge she faces as a White researcher engaged in decolonization:

As a white woman I continually question the possibility of working respectfully so as to address the injustices and inequities people live with on a daily basis. Ever conscious of the risk of merely 'colonizing better,' I ponder the possibilities of decolonizing: the interstices of appropriation and learning, of reciprocity and exploitation. (p. 76)

While I have been reflecting for a few years about how to respectfully integrate Aboriginal perspectives into my practice, I too continue to grapple with the dilemma of how to engage respectfully in decolonizing education as a White female environmental educator.

Yet, while White educators do need to be mindful of the pitfalls of appropriation of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing, it is equally important for them not to retreat from the colonial problem or ignore valuable Indigenous perspectives. We are all colonized and can all learn to disrupt oppressive dominant worldviews. We can search for effective and respectful ways to engage as allies in the process of decolonizing ourselves, and the education system in which we work (Bishop 2002; Simpson 2004; Smith, 1999). As Battiste (2000) states, "Eurocentrism is a consciousness in which all of

us have been marinated” (p. 124). White educators have a responsibility to work to recognize their colonial legacy and disrupt Eurocentrism in their practice.

As noted in the previous chapter, my experiences and the literature both indicate that there is great need to decolonize the field of outdoor environmental education and the practices of White Euro-Canadian educators. The literature also indicates that while decolonizing might be a difficult task for White educators, there have been inroads that point to possibilities for White educators to begin to decolonize their practice. Still, little has been written about how complex, decolonizing processes might be conceptualized by and for White Euro-Canadian educators. The decolonizing movement is situated largely within Aboriginal scholarly discourse that attempts to illuminate the social and political contexts of Aboriginal experiences, confront systemic injustices, revitalize culture, and centre Aboriginal knowledge systems as credible and valuable ways of knowing. As a result, most conceptualizations of decolonization have been written by and for Aboriginal peoples and do not make sense in the contexts of non-Aboriginal educators.

Conceptualizations of Decolonization in Aboriginal Contexts

The concept of “decolonizing” and the language of its discourse was introduced to me during a graduate course at Lakehead University taught by Judy Iseke-Barnes, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Learning. The course syllabus, entitled *Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Decolonizing*, provided the following conceptualization of what it might mean to decolonize:

[The course focuses] on decolonizing the mind by understanding the politics of colonization, de-universalizing language and language politics, examining politics and traditions and the practice of speaking out,

exploring Indigenous approaches to healing, and challenging colonized culture and suppression agencies.... Resources for decolonizing the mind include revitalization of traditional worldviews, honoring Indigenous knowledges, sustaining Indigenous languages, and challenging and reconceptualizing research practices. (p.1)

While I did indeed learn a great deal by participating in a class that utilized this particular understanding of decolonization, I grapple with whether or not this definition provides direction mainly to Aboriginal people. As a White educator I may be able to participate in some of the endeavours described above, such as understanding the politics of colonization, challenging colonized culture, or honouring Indigenous knowledges, however, other aspects of Iseke-Barnes's conceptualization of decolonizing, such as revitalizing traditional worldviews or sustaining Indigenous languages, could be at various times difficult, inappropriate, or impossible for me to participate in directly.

Graveline (1999) writes about transforming Eurocentric consciousness and also describes decolonizing from a distinctly Indigenous perspective:

Our peoples are moving beyond apathy...victimization
Embracing Resistance...Cultural Renaissance...Self-determination
Revitalizing...Reclaiming...the Gifts of our Ancestors.
Our-Story is being told in Circle form
Hear us speak Stories of Survival...Resistance
What fuels our fires?...What keeps us strong? p. 34

She elaborates on decolonizing processes for Indigenous peoples:

Decolonization requires and allows reclamation of voice.
....We are reclaiming our voices. Through voice we speak/write of our acts of resistance, the healing and empowering values of our Traditions and the role of the European colonizers in the destruction of our communities. Through voice we are gaining our own sense of conscious reality and providing another lens through which Eurocentric educators may view themselves. Once our voices become heard in the struggle, the ground shifts.
p. 41

Again, this Indigenous conceptualization of decolonizing is different than my own story of decolonizing, which is not one of struggle, survival, or cultural revitalization.

Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, a renowned Indigenous scholar, is perhaps the most often cited scholar within decolonizing discourses. She describes decolonization as political, spiritual, social and psychological, and conceptualizes it as part of a complex and widespread Indigenous social movement that “involves a revitalization and reformulation of culture and tradition, an increased participation in and articulate rejection of Western institutions, a focus on strategic relations and alliances with non-Indigenous groups” (p. 110). While Tuhiwai-Smith’s conceptualization speaks mainly to Aboriginal peoples, it also does point somewhat towards the role of non-Indigenous peoples to become allies in the decolonization process.

The conceptualizations of decolonizing articulated by Iseke-Barnes, Graveline, and Tuhiwai-Smith describe important processes relevant to cultural revitalization and self-determination by Aboriginal peoples. I am not in any way suggesting that these conceptualizations are problematic with respect to decolonization by Aboriginal peoples. And, in fact, White Euro-Canadians can learn a great deal from these conceptualizations by becoming aware of and learning to respect and support, as allies, the initiatives of Aboriginal individuals and communities. However, White Euro-Canadian educators really need to do deep decolonizing work of their own that is different from the decolonization work taking place in Aboriginal communities. As Euro-Canadian scholar Derek Rasmussen (2002) writes, the task “is not just cease to do evil, but also learn to do good – at home. We need to address our own deficiencies, not rush off to fix somebody else’s” (p.92).

Since the decolonizing movement grew out of and remains largely situated within Aboriginal communities and discourses, my own journey has caused me to grapple with the question of whether or not there is a role for White educators to participate in decolonizing education and what that role might look like. During my participation in two graduate courses taught by Iseke-Barnes, I was grateful for the assistance she provided in working through this dilemma and for helping me understand that indeed there is decolonizing work for White people as well. Yet, despite the deep learning that occurred for me during this course, I am aware that there exist very few conceptualizations of decolonisation, described by and for other White educators.

Decolonizing for Non-Aboriginal People: Conceptualizations by Aboriginal People

Some Indigenous scholars have described aims of decolonizing that do need to be taken up by non-Aboriginal people, but since the focus for Indigenous scholars, rightfully so, is on revitalizing and centering Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, their work does not describe the long and complex process by which White Euro-Canadian educators might learn *how* to engage in these tasks. Battiste's (2005) description of decolonizing education is one such example:

In schools we must engage in a critique of the curriculum and examine the connections between and the framework of meanings behind what is being taught, who is being excluded, and who is benefiting from public education. We must centre Indigenous knowledge by removing the distorting lens of Eurocentrism so that we can immerse ourselves in systems of meaning that are different from those that have conditioned us. (p. 125)

Aboriginal scholar Susan Dion (2007) focuses her work directly on the changes that need to occur in the teaching practices of non-Aboriginal educators teaching in Ontario classrooms. She writes:

Teachers, curriculum planners and school librarians are entwined in perpetuating a perspective that sustains the view of First Nations people as objects. This can and must change.... Teachers can begin by including First Nations subject matter in all areas of the curriculum and by expanding the study from the exclusive focus on the pre-contact periods to look in depth at what happened post-contact and at the relationship between the First Nations and Canadians. (p. 342)

Dion's work calls attention to the great need for Euro-Canadians teachers to shift their teaching practice towards approaches that are more honest and respectful of Aboriginal peoples. While she provides specific direction for appropriate ways for Euro-Canadians to teach Aboriginal content in their classrooms, her work does not fully examine the decolonizing experiences that are necessary for White Euro-Canadians to be able to teach in more respectful ways. Collectively, non-Aboriginal educators and scholars need to continue to articulate our own conceptualization of the process of disrupting our Eurocentric worldview.

Graveline (1998) in *Circlework: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, provides a rich and comprehensive analysis of the decolonizing impact of exposing non-Aboriginal students to Aboriginal worldviews, pedagogical approaches (such as circle work, the medicine wheel, story telling), and spiritual practices. She writes extensively about the importance of building learning communities that support caring, sharing, honesty and respect. However, while non-Aboriginal educators have a great deal to learn from Graveline's (1998) conceptualization of decolonization, her message is directed

mainly towards Aboriginal educators working with White middle class students, as exemplified in the following passages:

The difficulties in teaching from First Voice... are primarily context related...as are the following contradictions about introducing forms of Aboriginal philosophy and pedagogy to non-Natives in a non-Aboriginal context. (p. 234)

Talking Circle in a non-Native context
Can become a Negative Hurtful experience...
Some wish our silence.
Project their Fear as our Negativity.
“Facilitating” Circle is complex.
Simplicity is an Illusion.
Caution is wise
(p. 235)

Conceptualizations of Decolonizing By and For White Euro-Canadians

Joanne Tompkins (2002) offers one of the few substantive scholarly conceptualizations of the decolonizing process for White people from the perspective of a White Euro-Canadian scholar and educator. The themes of her work resonate with those of the Aboriginal scholars previously mentioned, in particular Graveline (1998). In her article, “Learning to See What They Can’t,” she describes her decolonizing work with White educators as involving first and foremost intrapersonal and interpersonal work that validates emotions as part of knowledge and that creates an atmosphere of trust and openness amongst the group of White educators with whom she works. Other parts of the process that she identifies are naming power and privilege, hearing voices seldom heard, and building relationships. She also highlights that the process requires taking risks and positions herself as a continual learner.

She writes that her work with White educators in rural Nova Scotia involves

...working with participants to name power and privilege with a view to articulating and critically examining their own biography...and...making spaces for participants to be able to hear the voices and stories of people within Mikmaw and African Nova Scotian communities in rural Nova Scotia...At the crux of the work of decolonizing White educators' conceptions of race and inequity is their conception of knowledge. Colonialist conceptions of knowledge equate knowledge with truth. It is 'out there', it is largely uncontested, and it happens to coincide with the beliefs of the dominant group. Having White education leaders see that the knowledge base and the social relationships in schools are constructed around issues of power and privilege is essentially the task at hand. (p. 410)

Tompkins's work is central to the field of decolonizing the practices of White educators. Indeed, it serves as an excellent example of the kind of work that needs to take place in communities throughout Canada. Tompkins's work, however, focuses on White educators who do not yet recognize their privilege, power and Eurocentric assumptions and it also focuses on her own experiences as a facilitator helping them to recognize these issues within the context of a relatively short (semester-long) course. The question remains, what other experiences throughout the life histories of White educators facilitate their decolonizing journeys?

A number of other non-Aboriginal scholars contribute to the discourse that conceptualizes decolonization for White people in the context of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. Rasmussen (2002) suggests that to decolonize, White Euro-Canadians first need to examine the problems inherent in our own culture:

As long as Euro-America needs eighty percent of the rest of the world's resources, we [will] go next door and bully people to get it... If our way of life is causing most of the problems that the rest of the world has to deal with, the best thing we can do is deal with our own way of life. (p. 86)

This passage highlights the interconnection between Euro-America's resource consumption, the unequal power distribution that favours Euro-America, and global social oppression, a good reminder to environmental educators of the need to consider social inequity in conjunction with inquiry into the environmental crisis. He provides a contextual example of the need for White Euro-Canadians to examine their own culture by suggesting that White teachers in the Arctic should drop the illusion that they are there to teach the Inuit and, instead, focus on learning about White behaviour, in particular, the problems associated with current Eurocentric models of education.

There are a number of key traits that make it difficult for White people to deconstruct their own Eurocentrism. When White Western culture is reflected all around us, we often hold deeply rooted assumptions that the "White, mainstream" way is "right" or "normal," which leads to our inability to recognize our own culture as distinct and our own privilege (Trowsse, 2007). Tompkins (2002) states that, "Part of the challenge of doing anti-racist work with White educators is the task of leading people to see what they have, up to this point in their lives, been unable to see" (p. 409). As well, many White people approach multiculturalism with a learned "colour-blindness," meaning they choose to pretend not to notice another person's culture as distinct (Trowsse, 2007). Choosing to ignore another person's cultural heritage, rather than acknowledging and honouring it, sends the offensive message that they should pretend to be White. Finally, White people often stereotype people of other cultures through defensive humour, forcing them to respond to that ignorance (Trowsse, 2007).

Aside from disrupting Eurocentric culture, another way in which White people can engage in decolonizing is by working to understand our own location and worldview

in relation to the Indigenous peoples with whom we live and work. An example of such a collaborative initiative is the work of Haig-Brown (an Anglo-Canadian and faculty member at York University), Laara Fitznor (a Cree woman and faculty member at OISE/UofT) and Lori Moses (a woman from the Delaware Nation and graduate student at York University) who worked together to guest edit an issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* in 2000. Their editorial, “(De)colonizing Academe: Knowing our Relations,” demonstrates the individual and collective reflexivity of the group that helped them to understand their different histories, their different relationships to the Mississauga Anishnaabe territory where they were all coming together, and their common goals. Through the process of working together across difference in an intentionally reflexive way, they learned from each other and came to a deeper respect for how they work together (Fitznor, Haig-Brown, & Moses, 2000). White environmental educators working to decolonize their practice would no doubt learn a great deal by embracing this constant critical reflexivity.

My own decolonizing experiences have involved building respectful relationships with Aboriginal peoples, learning about Aboriginal culture and perspectives, acknowledging that the land on which I live and teach is somebody’s traditional territory, and learning the history of what has taken place socially and politically on that land. At the same time, it has also involved learning to recognize the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism and colonial attitudes that exist in contemporary social institutions; understanding the implications of Eurocentrism; working towards disrupting Eurocentrism within my own thought patterns, assumptions and actions; learning to recognize ways in which I am privileged; and finding ways to share that privilege with

others. Learning to decolonize is complex and difficult, and no doubt a life-long task. I have tried to approach it with humility, reflexivity and a desire to learn. I have engaged in discussions with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal professors and peers. I have chosen courses and readings that will help me build my understanding. I have started to notice and name the Eurocentrism I encounter on a daily basis. Above all, I have tried to recognize my own Eurocentric lens while remaining vigilantly aware that as a White person I am unlikely to notice its extent. The journey for me so far has frequently been emotional. I have been confronted with Eurocentric attitudes amongst fellow students, faculty, friends and family.

While there exists a number of scholars, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who describe in part the challenges and complex processes of decolonizing for White Euro-Canadian educators, more research is needed into the long term decolonizing journey that takes place throughout the lives of some White people. What experiences prepare White people to eventually be able to recognize power, privilege and Eurocentrism? And what experiences support continuing, deeper decolonizing journeys once that recognition has been made? What unique challenges do White educators face on their decolonizing journeys and what experiences facilitate the decolonizing process?

This study contributes to and extends the current literature that addresses decolonizing processes for White educators by examining the life histories of four educators who recognize Eurocentrism and colonial attitudes in their own worldviews and practices and who had been actively working to become respectful educators *prior* to participating in the study. The study provides a deeper analysis than what currently exists by considering the participants' experiences that occurred over many years that

eventually led them to recognize and acknowledge Eurocentrism, as well as the subsequent experiences in which they have engaged in order to actively continue their decolonizing processes.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The preceding reviews of relevant literature indicate a clear need to decolonize the field of outdoor environmental education and draw attention to the lack of substantive conceptualizations of decolonizing processes for non-Aboriginal educators. In response to the paucity of literature about decolonizing processes of White Euro-Canadian educators, this qualitative study examines the life histories of White outdoor environmental educators who are engaged in the process of decolonizing their own practices and worldviews. The study inquires into the nature of “decolonizing moments” that occurred throughout the lives of the participants and the researcher. It attempts to answer two overarching questions: *What is the nature of the “decolonizing” process of White outdoor and environmental educators? And what life experiences facilitate this process?*

The research process itself intended to serve as a decolonizing experience. The study engaged both the researcher and participants in a reflexive experience to refine our decolonizing lenses and help us to further decolonize our teaching praxis (action informed by reflexive inquiry).

Theoretical Framework

The study is situated in a decolonizing (Smith, 2005), post-critical (Lather, 2008) framework informed by research as “praxis,” that is, critical reflection inextricably linked and collaboratively applied to political action in the real world (Freire, 1970).

Post-Critical Research

Patti Lather (2007, 2008) identifies three eras of work and praxis in the field of critical pedagogy. The first era, Praxis 1.0, inspired by the work of Freire, embraced a liberatory approach to research where (often Western) researchers worked with marginalized groups of people to help them become aware of, and ultimately overcome, forces of oppression (Freire, 1970/1993). The pitfalls (and even arrogance) of attempts by Western scholars to “rescue” or “emancipate” those at the margins, have long been acknowledged.

In the second era, Praxis 2.0, a multitude of voices from the margins articulated their own situated knowledges and became empowered by claiming space within academic discourse. In this era, various collectives have worked hard to advocate for the validity of their own unique ways of knowing, their own epistemologies. This Praxis 2.0 era also had the effect of flattening out academic discourse through a multiplicity of (competing) ideas being considered equally valid (Lather, 2008).

Lather (2008) suggests that we are now approaching a third era in critical education research, Praxis 3.0, which she terms “the post-critical or post-enlightenment era.” She argues that in order to move into other ways of knowing, we need to first embrace the possibility of “not knowing” rather than being so certain of the validity of our own situated knowledges and praxis. Reminding us that our ability to think in a certain way is only possible because another way of thinking has been left out, she recommends that we consider the history that has enabled our own way of thinking. Lather (2008) explains that there simply is no place of innocence – that all viewpoints and praxes are engaged in a dynamic of power and privilege. During a conference

presentation at the University of Windsor (July, 2008), Lather called for researchers to move into a less heroic space and reflexively interrogate, “What does it mean to ruin other peoples’ knowledge in order to assert my knowledge as the answer? How am I part of the problem? How does my thinking narrow the world?” Praxis 3.0 or “trying to think without the thing you think you can’t think without” (2008) is Lather’s suggested response. In other words, she calls for us to turn the critical lens on ourselves, and question our own taken-for-granted assumptions, invested foundational categories, and the rhetorical moves we make in academic discourse. Lather invites researchers to “get lost” (2007) or to explore the furthest limits of our knowing, to admit uncertainty and to experience the discomfort, confusion and vulnerability of *not* knowing, particularly in the face of the “Other.”

Her insights into the post-critical era or Praxis 3.0 highlight a fluid critical reflexivity that I consider to be foundational to the decolonizing process and to praxis becoming culturally responsive. To move into other ways of knowing, to further “decolonize” ourselves and reconsider our praxis, the participants and I sought to recognize and embrace moments of vulnerability, discomfort and uncertainty that may have occurred throughout our lives or that we encountered (again) during the reflexive research process.

Indigenous and Decolonizing Research

The study is also rooted in an Indigenous or Decolonizing research paradigm. Indigenous research honours Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. It acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings and recognizes the social, political and historical

experiences that have shaped, and continue to shape, the lives of Aboriginal peoples (Steinhauer, 2002). Wilson (2001) indicates that, beyond “ways of knowing,” axiology (morals and ethics) is an integral part of an Indigenous methodology. He explains that knowledge is relational and shared with all of creation or ‘all our relations,’ and that researchers need to focus first and foremost on their accountability to all of their relations (e.g., living, non-living, spiritual and universal) when conducting research. Indigenous research decolonizes by privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal peoples that have been silenced through colonial oppression (Smith, 1999). It is important in Indigenous research for the researcher to tell his or her own story and to identify the location from which he or she is writing.

There is much discussion in the literature as to whether or not a non-Indigenous person can or should engage in Indigenous research since she or he will not bring an Indigenous worldview to the work. Many respected Indigenous authors acknowledge that there is a role for non-Indigenous scholars to play in the decolonizing research.

Simpson (2004) writes:

Academics who are to be true allies to Indigenous Peoples in the protection of our knowledge must be willing to step outside of their privileged position and challenge research that conforms to the guidelines outlined by the colonial power structure and root their work in the politics of decolonization and anti-colonialism. (p. 381)

Indigenous research is usually that which involves Indigenous peoples and communities directly. My research focuses on White environmental educators who have worked on the land –the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples– with or without direct participation by Indigenous peoples. However, since the research is an attempt to contribute to the decolonization of environmental education and foregrounding of

Indigenous ways of knowing, it was imperative to maintain a decolonizing lens throughout the research as well as to reflexively interrogate this decolonization throughout.

Participants

Through my circle of contacts from my experience in the field of outdoor environmental education, I approached potential participants and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. With those who indicated interest, I negotiated through conversation the terms of their participation. I made clear to them the purpose of the study, their rights as participants (anonymity, confidentiality, the right to withdraw from the study at any time), and what would be required of them during the study. This information was provided to participants in writing in the form of an information summary and consent form, both of which are included in the appendices (A & B). All participant names have been changed to pseudonyms as have any names of people mentioned in the participants' testimonies.

The participants in this study included four individuals (two male, two female), ranging in age from late twenties to early thirties, who self-identify as White Euro-Canadians and outdoor environmental educators. They all have experience working in the field with students, though they are not necessarily currently employed in that capacity. They are familiar with the concept of decolonizing and have been somehow involved in the process of disrupting Eurocentrism and engaging with Indigenous peoples and perspectives.

I want to be clear that my intent for the study is not to distinguish one particular group of White educators for “having arrived,” for having “successfully decolonized themselves” or for being somehow “enlightened” amidst a culture of Eurocentrism. Rather, participants in this study are aware of their own implication in the colonial project and consciously attempt to shift their worldview and enact a decolonizing praxis. They recognize that the process of decolonizing is lifelong and deeply layered. Participants were in fact chosen because of their desire to engage in the study as a process to further decolonize themselves and the field of outdoor environmental education.

Rationale For Participant Demographic (Researcher Reflexivity)

Outdoor Environmental Educators

With an overarching aim of this study to contribute to decolonizing the field of outdoor environmental education, it made sense to choose outdoor environmental educators as participants. Yet, beyond the fact that the study itself is situated in the discourse of outdoor environmental education, it seems to be that White outdoor environmental educators may have a unique propensity to engage in decolonizing. As previously noted, experiences that may facilitate decolonizing for White people include engagement with the land (Graveline, 1998) and deep interpersonal and intrapersonal work (Tompkins, 2002). From my thirteen years of experience working in the field of outdoor environmental education, I am well aware that connectedness to nature, interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal growth are all central values of the micro-culture of outdoor environmental educators. Given that there is probably a unique propensity for outdoor environmental educators to engage with themes of decolonizing, a

study of this participant sample may provide insight into the kinds of experiences, beliefs and attitudes that could help other White educators begin to decolonize their practices.

“White,” Euro-Canadian Educators

The decision to choose all White participants for this study was initially a difficult one for me to make. Andrea Fontana and James Frey (2005) highlight the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher in order to address the complexities of research design decisions:

... interviewers need to be reflexive; that is, they need to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment. By doing so, they will heighten the understanding of differences of ideologies, culture, and politics between interviewers and interviewees. (p. 71)

As ideas for the design of my study emerged, I found myself engaged in a particularly difficult decision that continues to require a great deal of reflexivity. The decision I faced was whether or not to include both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal educators in my study. While at first thought it might seem obvious that a study about decolonization must include Aboriginal participants, the decision-making process (which included months of conversation and reflection with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peers and professors) highlighted a number of complexities. Recall that Rasmussen (2002) writes that before doing good, first you must learn to stop doing harm and that as researchers we should study our own culture first. As well, White people engaged in decolonizing journeys face their own unique set of complexities that are different from those faced either by other settler cultures or by Aboriginal peoples. Finally, it should not be the burden of Aboriginal people, who have their own important decolonizing work to do, to help White

educators sort out and overcome our Eurocentrism (Korteweg, personal communication, 2008).

As a result of these many reflections, and with some trepidation, I made the decision to study an all White group of participants. I envision this research as a necessary first step to prepare White educators to participate in a much greater dialogue that, without a doubt, MUST include Aboriginal voices. It is my hope that greater self-awareness and understanding of our own past experiences might help prepare us for future learning from and with Indigenous peoples.

Methodology

This study was guided by narrative inquiry, which rests on the assumption that through the telling of stories we come to understand (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry is an excellent fit with the experiential learning process given it involves re-telling the story of an experience, reflecting on that story to drive meaning and applying what is learned through the reflection process to new situations (Kolb, 1984). Experiential education is often a foundational component of outdoor environmental education. Participants in the study were all experienced facilitators of experiential learning and I felt that they would be highly capable of the reflection and meaning making processes inherent in narrative inquiry.

More specifically a “life history” methodological approach was employed within the broader narrative inquiry methodology. The purpose of this approach is to “place biography at the centre of teaching practice, the study of teachers and the teacher education process” (Carter & Doyle, 1996, p.120). Through life history research,

“processes of learning to teach, along with teachers’ work experiences, instructional choices, and ethics toward teaching, are apprehended through teachers’ life spans and life stories” (Johnson, 2007, p. 299).

Some researchers use the terms life history and life story interchangeably to refer to the narrative of a person’s life from birth to present. The term “life story” can also be used to refer to a narrative about a specific significant aspect of a person’s life, a story told in his or her own words. A life story could also describe an epiphanal event or a turning point in one’s life (Chase, 2005, p. 652). The life stories explored in this study will focus on significant decolonizing events or influences that served as epiphanies and/or turning points in the participants’ lives.

Life history research is an appropriate method for investigating decolonizing journeys of White environmental educators because it explores “how individuals construct identities, make sense of important events in their lives, and represent these events to others” (Johnson, 2002, p. 155). The life histories approach has been previously used to document the influence of early childhood experiences on the construction of a teacher’s personal identity and their subsequent actions in the classroom (Johnson, 2002).

Methods

In any study, the researcher faces the overwhelming responsibility of making research design decisions that inevitably influence both the ethical nature and the results of the study. Framing the research problem, selecting techniques for interviewing, interpreting the real life events of the participants and choosing how to represent the

stories shared by the participants are all complex choices for the researcher to consider (Hertz, 1997, p. 712). While a life history approach to research does invite self-representation of the participant during the interview, the dilemma remains as to how the researcher might accurately interpret and represent the rich narratives of the participants. Creative interviewing and polyphonic data analysis assisted in addressing these complexities in this study and is described later in the chapter.

Prior to the first main interview, participants were asked to create visual representations of their life histories using a variety of art materials. They were encouraged to try to identify moments or influences in their lives that may have been part of their decolonizing process, as well as to remember the “places” (people and landscapes) where these moments/influences occurred. They were also invited to assemble “artifacts” of decolonizing life events: photos, maps, letters, emails, journals, a paddle, or any other object that would help to elicit memories and enrich the narrative.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher and the participant. To begin, the participants were asked to explain their understanding of the concept of decolonizing. Next, they were given the opportunity to explain the narratives associated with their life history map and artifacts. They were encouraged to explore the meanings associated with the narratives they told. The interviews were open-ended and guided by the narratives that each participant shared. Examples of questions that were asked to draw further depth from the narratives included:

- What dilemmas or moments of confusion or uncertainty have you encountered while being on the land or associated with your outdoor environmental education work?
- What emotions have you experienced through the process of decolonizing?
- Describe frustrations/challenges that you faced with respect to your decolonizing journey.

- What role have cross-cultural experiences played in your decolonizing process?
- Who have been the people who have influenced you most on your journey?

To ensure accuracy of representation, and so that I could achieve further depth of understanding, I provided a transcript of the interview to each participant, who was invited to clarify and elaborate on the interview transcripts and reflect on the interview process itself as a decolonizing experience. Andrea Fontana and James Frey (2005) describe this entire process as creative interviewing, stating that:

In creative interviewing, these reports go well beyond the length of conventional unstructured interviews and may become 'life histories,' with interviewing taking place in multiple sessions over many days with the respondents. (p. 709)

Through the creative interviewing process, the data for the study comprised of the participants' life history maps and their chosen artifacts or objects of story-telling; the audio or video recordings of the interviews and their transcriptions; notes taken by me during the interviews; subsequent informal communication between the participants and me after the initial interview; and, reflective journal entries by me of my own decolonizing experiences. Interestingly, none of the participants made any changes or additions to the data from the transcripts of the interview. While the initial design of the study provided for the possibility of second and third interviews with the participants, the length (which varied from two to four and a half hours) and depth of the first interviews, combined with the feelings of the participants that they had shared everything they wished to during those first interviews, led to the decision that subsequent interviews would not take place.

As another way to ensure that the data accurately represent the perspectives of each participant, Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest polyphonic data analysis; they quote Krieger's (1983) description of the concept:

... the voices of the respondents are recorded with minimal influence from the researchers and are not collapsed together and reported as one through the interpretation of the researcher. Instead, the multiple perspectives of the various respondents are reported, and differences and problems encountered are discussed, rather than glossed over. (p. 709)

To analyze the data, I re-read the transcripts while noting as many distinct emergent themes as possible. Next, I created larger categories to help organize the themes. I then organized sections of text from the testimonies/narratives of each participant (in his or her own words) according to category and theme, combining, creating or distinguishing categories and themes as necessary. In accordance with polyphonic interviewing, I attempted to leave the voices of the participants intact.

The use of creative interviewing and polyphonic data analysis became two very useful approaches that helped me answer Lather's call for post-critical research. I, myself, am also emotionally engaged in a decolonizing journey, but in order to honour the stories of my participants' life experiences and their resulting ways of knowing, I needed to find ways to acknowledge and sit with the emergent tensions, discomforts or uncertainties in order to encourage us all towards decolonizing our praxis. Creative interviewing and polyphonic data analysis, combined with ongoing and vigilant reflexivity, helped with this challenging task, as did the previously well-established relationships of trust and mutual respect that existed between my participants and me.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In Chapter four, section one, I provide a brief overview of the profiles of each of the four participants. Section two, *Participant Understandings of Decolonization*, examines the participants' own understandings of the concept of decolonizing as compared to current conceptualizations discussed in the literature review and particularly as both an intrapersonal and interpersonal process (Tompkins, 2002). Section three, *Pivotal Moments of Decolonizing Journeys* identifies two common pivotal moments that served as catalysts in the participants' decolonizing processes: the moment at which they became aware of their decolonizing process and the (earlier) moment that they retroactively identified as the beginning of their process. Section four, *Refining the Decolonizing Lens* explores the process for Euro-Canadians of coming to recognize Eurocentrism and White privilege. I discuss the ways in which Euro-Canadians can experience anxiety, confusion and fear to varying degrees throughout the decolonizing process, and the ongoing challenge to admit Eurocentric ignorance and learn from mistakes. Section five, *Facilitating the Journey*, explores three broad categories of experience that seemed to facilitate and support the decolonizing journeys of the participants: Exposure to Aboriginal Culture and First Voice Perspectives (and in particular Relationships with Aboriginal People), Relationships with Non-Aboriginal Peoples, and Time on the Land.

Section One: Participant Profiles

Kim

Kim is a 33 year-old female White Euro-Canadian of Polish heritage on her mother's side and of European descent with a long family history in the Canadian Maritimes on her father's side. She grew up in urban Southern Ontario and attended a high school with a mainly White Euro-Canadian student population. She completed an undergraduate degree in Physical Education at a university in Ontario. She also completed a Bachelor of Education at a different Ontario university.

Kim taught for three years in South America, where she first encountered the concept of Indigenous territories and began to recognize her White privilege. Next, Kim taught for one year at an alternative, interdisciplinary, experiential high school that was outdoor-based. It was at this school that she met the three other participants in this study. Throughout her adult life, Kim frequently worked as an outdoor environmental educator, leading wilderness trips for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. The focus of the school and the wilderness trips was often on inter- and intra-personal relationships skills such as healthy conflict resolution, leadership, giving and receiving feedback, self-esteem building, decision-making, and the creation of community.

In 2005, she moved to a community in the Northwest Territories where she still lives. She spent the 2007/2008 academic year in southern Ontario completing coursework for a graduate degree in Aboriginal health and subsequently returned to the Northwest Territories.

Mary

Mary is a 27 year-old female White Euro-Canadian of German heritage. She grew up in a large Southern Ontario urban centre with very limited exposure to Aboriginal people or culture. During the late 1990s, she attended a high school with a culturally diverse student population and was heavily involved in school groups that fostered appreciation of difference and peace. Immediately following high school, she completed a Bachelor of Physical Education degree at an Ontario University that she describes as “not diverse” and “very White.”

Mary worked extensively in the tree planting industry for the past eight years, both as a planter and within positions of leadership and staff management, mostly in northern Ontario. As a result of her tree planting experiences, she worked for one summer as leader of an Aboriginal youth employment program based on promoting silviculture skills. She has also worked as a wilderness educator for the past seven years, leading canoe, hiking and winter trips for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. She was a residential staff person for the same alternative high school where Kim taught, and incorporated interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship skills both at the school and on the wilderness trips she led.

In 2007, Mary completed a Bachelor of Education, with a special focus on outdoor, experiential, and ecological themes. Her teaching placements took place in northern Ontario, first in an urban elementary school that had a student population of approximately 50% Aboriginal students, and secondly in a smaller community in a support classroom for Aboriginal high school students. She is currently a master’s student at a faculty of education and continues to guide extended white water canoe trips during

the summer months. She often spends her leisure time outside with friends who also enjoy the outdoors.

John

John is a 29 year-old male White Euro-Canadian partly of Irish heritage. He grew up in a rural, small town in south-central Ontario where he played freely in the bush surrounding his family's home. He grew up amidst a culture of hunting with some friends and some family members exemplifying attitudes of entitlement to land and resources, making derogatory comments about the traditional peoples of the land, and lacking appreciation for the animals as living beings. While he shuns the way in which some of his friends and family members engage disrespectfully in hunting, he has returned in adulthood to a practice of hunting for some of his own food, but with attitudes of much greater respect.

John completed his B.Sc. in Biology at an Ontario university, as well as a Bachelor of Education with a focus on outdoor, experiential and ecological themes. Interestingly, both of these university experiences occurred at the same institutions attended by Mary and Kim, albeit at different times.

John has been working as a wilderness educator for seven years, also at the same organization as Mary and Kim, with a focus on skills such as healthy conflict resolution, leadership, giving and receiving feedback, self-esteem building, decision-making, and the creation of community. He spent three years as teacher of the alternative high school there that was experiential, interdisciplinary and outdoor-based and designed curricula around the theme of environmental consciousness. With the same organization, he has led trips in south central Ontario and northern Quebec and NWT with Aboriginal youth. He

is a skilled paddler and wilderness instructor and continues to guide extended canoe, hiking, and dog sledding trips for youth and adults. He now acts as a mentor and trainer for new staff and instructs high level paddling courses. Some of the activities he enjoys outside of work include spending time outdoors with friends, practicing yoga, making maple syrup, and practicing traditional skills such as tanning hides and tracking animals.

Luke

Luke is a 30 year-old male White Euro-Canadian. He grew up in suburban southern Ontario. He worked during the summers as camp counsellor, activity director and senior staff member. For the past 7 years he has lived in a northern Ontario urban centre where he completed an undergraduate degree in Outdoor Recreation, a Bachelor of Education in outdoor, experiential and ecological education (in the same program but at a different time than Mary and John), and a masters in environmental Education. He is currently a 1st year PhD student in education at the same university.

During his B.Ed., Luke completed a teaching placement at the same alternative high school that was interdisciplinary, experiential and outdoor based where the other three participants and I all worked at various points in time. During the completion of his masters degree he worked as well at an Adventure-Based Education centre facilitating ropes course activities and training.

Section Two: Participant Understandings of Decolonization

Participants were invited to participate in this study because of their demonstrated commitment to engaging with both the interpersonal/intrapersonal/cultural (Graveline,

1998; Rasmussen, 2002; Tompkins, 2002) and land-based (Cajete, 1994, 1999; Graveline, 1998; Gruenewald, 2008) themes of decolonizing. Since they were asked to reflect on, describe and discuss their personal decolonizing journey, I began by asking them to explain their understandings of the concept. Like me, Kim, Mary, and Luke were introduced to formal concepts of decolonization through participation in graduate level academic courses, although their ability to engage with these deep concepts is rooted in their experiences and relationships with Aboriginal peoples, communities and land. Kim's explanation, in particular, highlights both "interpersonal relationship" and "intra-personal reflection":

[My decolonizing journey] is directly related to my experiences of Aboriginal culture and relationships with Aboriginal peoples.... my process involves undoing my biases, undoing my ignorance or lack of knowledge... I'm trying to increase my knowledge of Aboriginal culture.... I also think it's recognizing my privilege in certain situations, which I don't think I've always done. It's also being able to ask new and different questions and the ability to recognize when I'm making an assumption and to let that assumption go and try to make [fewer] assumptions.

Kim also described two extremes of her process, the deep challenges and the rewards:

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

Mary articulated a similar understanding of the concept as involving recognition of Eurocentrism in our interactions with people, yet she extends the concept to include recognizing Eurocentrism in our interactions with the *land* as well:

I guess I think of the word decolonization as trying to reverse a colonial attitude. I would also say trying to get away from the Eurocentric viewpoint.... I think a big part

of colonialism is a Eurocentric idea and a Western idea of doing things and viewing the world...decolonizing can be an awareness of the way you are with people and with the world that you travel in...it comes out mostly with people because that's where our interactions are most obvious but also in our work [that takes place] in the woods and our way of being outdoors and the way we interact with the nature around us...we can decolonize in that interaction too.

Like me, Mary also felt that the language she acquired through a graduate level course focussed on decolonizing helped her to explore a broader level of understanding about her experiences with Aboriginal peoples:

My decolonizing language came from taking a course at university. It was one of my favourite courses that I've ever taken because it started to give me language and understanding and a broader scope to the awareness I'd been building [about Aboriginal culture].

Unlike the other participants, John's conceptualization of the word decolonizing did not come directly from his own academic experiences, but rather from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal friends who shared this discourse with him during discussions about his process of learning with and from Aboriginal peoples in other settings. He described his understanding as follows:

I guess the essence that I've gathered is that still pervasive in our Western and North American worldview is a colonizing attitude which... roots back to the Western invasion of Canada ...and the attitude of coming and conquering this new land...seeing it as there for the taking and a land of plenty. A decolonizing perspective is that we need to first identify that [this colonial attitude] is prevalent or at least present in our thinking and then start to remove it from our way of thinking if we are to arrive at a new relationship with the First Nations people of North America.

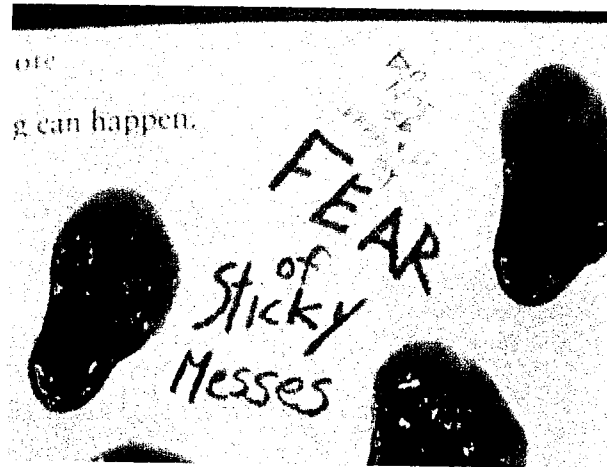
John's description shows that decolonization requires understanding the social and political historic roots of contemporary colonial attitudes. His overall impression of his own process highlights the necessity, challenge, and deep introspection of the decolonizing process:

I think we just have to accept that if there weren't issues then there wouldn't be a reason to do this work and we have sort of grown up in this [Eurocentric] view and it's been our norm and confronting it will be hard and it will sort of reach into all aspects of us.

In contrast to the other participants, Luke has had less experience with Aboriginal culture and fewer opportunities to build relationships with Aboriginal people. He encountered the concept of decolonizing during a graduate level course taught by a non-Aboriginal instructor committed to decolonizing teacher education. He quickly grasped the essence of the concept and its relevance to and importance within his teaching practice. He is now beginning to seek opportunities that allow him to learn about Aboriginal culture and build relationships with Aboriginal people. He also discussed the link between historic and contemporary events:

I think that it means to acknowledge that we're living on land that is not our own. [I consider the difference between] accountability and responsibility... With respect to stuff that happened 500 years ago, I can't really be responsible for that...but I can be accountable. And so I think the act of decolonizing is about showing your accountability for the ills of the past and trying to make that right.

Luke's artifact (on the following page) reflected the following metaphor for the decolonizing process that encapsulates the fear and uncertainty sometimes experienced by EuroCanadians:



I had told a story twice in my class [about avoiding accountability for spilling jam at age 5 and making a sticky mess] and I started thinking about jam as a metaphor for “sticky messes” that we find ourselves in [as adults] and how the “becoming paralyzed by fear” makes the problem all the more difficult and painful to deal with later on ...like when you let the jam sit and stick and dry. So I think from my perspective I think that’s where EuroCanadians are at right now - in the place of recognizing that we have this big sticky mess on our hands in terms of decolonizing, and not really knowing how to go about scraping the jam up.

The participants’ specific understandings of decolonization illustrate that, while each participant may be decolonizing at different depths, they do have a shared conceptualization of decolonization that was generated through experience and subsequently shaped by and articulated in a language that exists mainly in the academic realm. Their testimonies demonstrate that they understand the emotional growth required in deconstructing colonial attitudes and practices while re-constructing respectful relationships with Aboriginal people and the land and building new knowledge about Aboriginal culture. Overall, the participants felt that the decolonizing journey, while emotionally tumultuous and at times difficult to navigate, was nonetheless an important process in which Euro-Canadian outdoor environmental educators need to engage.

Section Three: Pivotal moments of Decolonizing Journeys

As they retold their life histories in relation to decolonization, the participants identified pivotal turning points of their decolonizing processes. Particularly notable were two distinct points: the moment of becoming aware that they had been and were still engaging in a decolonizing process or journey, and the (earlier) moment when they felt they actually began to decolonize in a significant way. Participants also identified a phase in their lives prior to the start of their decolonizing journeys that could be characterized as experiences that may have “set the stage” or prepared them to eventually embark on the decolonizing journey.

Although an analysis of these few specific turning points will not provide a complete conceptualization of decolonizing processes or the rich and complex array of experiences that facilitate decolonizing journeys, it does begin to suggest the existence of some common forms or structures of the decolonizing journeys of White outdoor environmental educators. As well, such an analysis might help to identify points during the process when participants may have been particularly receptive to and ready for engagement with new ideas and can offer insights into the nature of key experiences that serve as significant decolonizing catalysts.

During the interviews, participants chose to begin their narratives by telling the stories of these distinct pivotal moments. The fact that participants identified clearly the points at which they became aware of their journeys seems to indicate that recognition and naming of the journey helps students to reflect more deeply on the experiences they have learned from and helps them to acquire a language and framework with which to derive meaning from those experiences. Addressing this data first before examining

other themes attempts to honour participants' own re-tellings of their journeys. Later, in Section four, *Facilitating the Journey*, I will more closely examine the experiences that led participants to these turning points and paint a more complete picture of the participants' journeys.

I was not until Kim was traveling outside of Canada as an adult, on land that very clearly was not her home place, that she began her decolonizing process. In South America she met Indigenous peoples who have a fundamentally different historic and contemporary connection to their land and the place where they live:

I don't think I started the decolonizing process until I went to South America. So that's after my elementary education, after my high school education and after my university education and after teacher's college.... That's just when I started asking those questions ... The second year I was [in South America] I went on a hike to an area where it was mostly Indigenous populations, and I didn't get it. I was hiking with three [local citizens] who were trying to tell me, "Well these are the Indigenous. These are the Indigenous." I asked, "What do you mean these are the Indigenous? Aren't you Indigenous?" "No." They were trying to explain it to me and it took me a really long time to figure out what they meant.

In this instance, it was through dialogue with other non-Aboriginal people that Kim became aware of Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories. She went on to say that once she was made aware of issues of Indigenous injustice in South America, she was very interested in learning more and often asked about land politics when she traveled throughout South America.

Kim identified two subsequent turning points that occurred years after her initial experiences in South America that helped her to recognize, retrospectively, the

decolonizing journey she had been experiencing, her move to a large community in the Northwest Territories and two years later her pursuit of a Master's in Aboriginal health.

When I came to [the NWT], the very first two months I was here was a very steep learning curve for me. Probably sixty percent of [the community] is Aboriginal. I've never before lived in a community with so many Aboriginal people.

My professor talked on the first day [of my Master program] about whose land we were on. I had never done that before in [Southern Ontario cities] ...this was a revelation for me. When I was in the Northwest Territories I thought about it all the time, but in Ontario, I had never thought about it. This class got me so excited to realize I'm going to open so many questions for myself that I've never even thought of asking before.

The fact that Kim experienced *excitement* about the prospect of learning to decolonize demonstrates an openness to learn that she described as related to her recognition of systemic colonial attitudes and her desire to engage in meaningful personal work required to disrupt Eurocentrism in her own thought patterns and practices.

Interestingly, the turning points in Kim's journey seemed to be mainly related to the recognition of the traditional territory on which she was living. The fact that she learned to ask this question in South America and then re-learned to ask this question anew in her subsequent communities in the Northwest Territories and southern Ontario affirms that the decolonizing process takes a long time.

John was in his early twenties and working at a small summer camp when his worldview first began to shift after listening to a guest speaker who was visiting the camp. John reflected on this moment with a tone of concern that he was unaware of the cultural background of the guest speaker. Referring to the guest speaker's presentation that John perceived at the time as an Aboriginal perspective, he explained,

...that whole idea just totally shook my brain and my world for quite a while and had some fairly significant impacts on my behaviours and my thoughts for a few years and even still reaching to this day. And I kind of wish I knew a little bit more about him... he was definitely professing sort of First Nations perspectives and ideals and things that I would attribute to that culture... it certainly got me thinking about another way and another perspective and another potential way of interacting with and relating to the earth and the natural world. ...I can't even verify that this was a First Nations person sharing this with me ... and yet it was so impactful at that time... in my ignorance I could attribute it to a different worldview that I identified as being a First Nations perspective.

The cultural identity of the speaker at John's camp is not clear from this short narrative nor is it possible to determine whether or not his presentation was respectful and accurate. Interestingly, however, John's example does seem to indicate that exposure to Aboriginal culture and perspectives can have a significant and long-lasting impact on one's decolonizing journey regardless of whether or not the teacher is Aboriginal.

Despite not knowing the cultural background of the person who first sparked his interest in learning about Aboriginal culture, John identified a significant turning point on his journey as reaching a point of uncertainty about his own ability, as a Euro-Canadian, to teach about Aboriginal culture and history:

Being a Canadian History teacher was about getting to a place of not knowing and of being confused, and challenged, and not really certain how to proceed, and of wanting to proceed in the best possible direction but not really knowing where that is or where that should go.

John's sentiments of uncertainty and not knowing were very common to all participants and will be considered more deeply in section three. What is interesting about John's testimony here was that it was these feelings of uncertainty and not-knowing that allowed him to become aware of his decolonizing journey and which led him to want to learn

more about Aboriginal culture and how to teach Aboriginal perspectives respectfully as a Euro-Canadian.

Mary identified that the beginning of her journey occurred at a point in her life when she began to spend time on the land with groups of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal co-instructors in the context of leading canoe trips for youth with a well-established Euro-Western outdoor environmental education organization:

The first year things kind of started to change for me was the summer of 2005 when I had the opportunity to lead a canoe trip [for Aboriginal youth participants]. It was a 21-day course and it was huge for me because I was in an interesting position of being lead instructor - because technically I had the most certifications and skills - but then all of the students were First Nations students and both my co-instructors were First Nations.

Greg Lowan (2009), in his analysis of a similar course for Aboriginal youth run by the Euro-Western outdoor education organization, Outward Bound, argues that such courses tend to be Eurocentric in nature. He questions the appropriateness of delivering Euro-Western outdoor education experiences to Aboriginal students. With more decolonizing experience than she had at the time, Mary now recognizes that some aspects of the course were certainly problematic and Eurocentric. At the same time, she points to this experience as *her* first opportunity to be exposed to Aboriginal culture and to build respectful relationships with the Aboriginal youth and her co-instructors. While she was placed in a role of ultimate responsibility by the organization due to her experience and qualifications, she also took the role of a learner throughout much of the trip with respect to Aboriginal culture and ways of being on the land:

I think what really made it work was both of us were extremely open to learning from each other. And I don't

know if I can pinpoint anything specifically except that there was this openness there, for all of us.

The “openness” that Mary described referred to the attitudes of learning embraced by everyone on the trip, including the Aboriginal students, most of whom had grown up in southern Ontario towns amidst predominantly Western, Euro-Canadian culture with little exposure to or awareness of their own Aboriginal cultural traditions. Mary felt that despite the Eurocentric aspects of the course, there were positive opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversation with the other Aboriginal students and instructor about themes of identity and Aboriginal culture.

While Mary had been engaged in the processes of learning about Aboriginal culture and learning to recognize Eurocentrism for quite some time, it was not until taking a graduate course about decolonizing that she became aware of her experiences as part of a larger process of decolonization:

[The point of becoming aware of a decolonization process] is usually far from the start I think. I think I probably wouldn't have been able to sit down and identify it until that decolonizing course, because then it comes back to language. I think it's all about having a way to identify the journey for sure... Now I can look at my journey so far and how I was led towards understanding that concept better.

Mary's pivotal turning points occurred when she first had the chance to build friendships and relationships with Aboriginal people and again when she was supported to explore more deeply her awareness of Aboriginal culture and her own experiences, with an Aboriginal professor who taught themes of decolonizing. Throughout her journey, Mary's attitude of openness to learning seemed to be a key factor that facilitated her process.

Unlike the other three participants, Luke did not identify one distinct experience as a starting point of his journey. He felt that his journey could be characterized as a lifelong consistent building of small experiences. He did point to one particular turning point; his move to Thunder Bay allowed him to engage for the first time with Aboriginal people in his community.

Living in sort of predominantly suburban southern Ontario – the opportunity for, on a day-to-day basis particularly, engaging with First Nations people was very rare. I would say that having gone to school in [this northern city] I've had some opportunities to do that ... maybe not in official ways, but living in [this city] there are Aboriginal people living in the community.

While he did not want to identify a distinct starting point to his journey, Luke did recognize easily the point at which he became aware of his decolonizing journey:

I only really started thinking about decolonizing as a concept this summer when I took the PhD course this summer. There was a talk by an Aboriginal gentleman who runs the Native student centre on their campus, which is called the Turtle Island Centre. He said that when White people ask him what they can do to help with the problems they have caused he says the biggest thing that White people need to do is just make acknowledgement.... that this is someone else's land that we're living on. I think that I'm sort of at the very beginning of this process and ... as an educator I feel as though I want to talk about it ... and not have answers necessarily... but I think that we should talk about it.

Luke's pivotal turning points echo the experiences of Kim and Mary, in that he encountered the concept of decolonizing in an academic setting and that he desired to learn more. His testimony resonates with Kim's pivotal turning points, both moving to a community with a high population of Aboriginal people and coming to understand the

importance of acknowledging traditional territory. At this pivotal turning point he also shared John's experience of uncertainty and not knowing.

Overall, the decolonizing journeys of the participants in this study can be characterized by three distinct phases: 1) experiences that set the stage for the decolonizing journey; 2) an unconscious decolonizing journey; and 3) a conscious or intentional decolonizing journey. While some early experiences that set the stage for the decolonizing journey were outlined in the participant profiles, these experiences were not deeply explored by the participants during interviews and due to the scope of this study will not be explored further. The unconscious decolonizing journey described by the participants seemed to be characterized by shared experiences with Aboriginal peoples, immersion in Aboriginal communities, exposure to Indigenous worldviews and culture and an openness to learning throughout. The shift by participants to a conscious phase of the decolonizing journey seems to have been catalyzed by exposure to conceptualizations of decolonization, introduction to a language with which to describe and name their decolonizing experiences, and the recognition of (and desire to disrupt) their own ignorance and Eurocentrism, including making acknowledgement that the land where they live and teach is someone else's land.

Section Four: Refining the Decolonizing Lens

Recognizing Eurocentrism and White Privilege

Adams (1999) describes Eurocentrism as the biased notion that European peoples are culturally and politically superior to all other peoples of the world. Part of the decolonizing process is to gradually refine one's ability to recognize manifestations of

Eurocentrism, colonizing attitudes and ignorance (Battiste, 2005; Graveline, 1998; Tompkins, 2002; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). In fact, Aboriginal scholar Graveline, in *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, argues:

If one can be acculturated to hold dominant views, they can also be unacculturated. I ask: How can students, steeped primarily in hegemonic Eurocentric consciousness, become aware of the nature of their cultural conditioning? I consider this to be a necessary beginning on the journey of change in attitudes and behaviours towards peoples from our communities. The Western foundations, upon which modern-day society rests, must not stand unchallenged. Students, many of whom are White and middle-class, need to explore the legacy of their Eurocentric culture and recognize its impacts on their lives and our lives – personally and politically. (p. 90)

This part of the participants' process required, at first, exposure to more overt examples of Eurocentrism, often pointed out initially by Aboriginal friends and colleagues. Once they became aware that Eurocentrism does indeed exist, they gradually began to notice ever-more subtle examples and came to increasingly recognize it within their own assumptions and behaviours. The testimonies presented here illustrate the varying degrees to which participants have been able to refine their decolonizing lenses as they reconsider, retrospectively, the Eurocentrism of their previous experiences.

Kim's three examples show a progression towards being better able to recognize Eurocentrism:

While living in the Northwest Territories I helped lead a Mackenzie River canoe trip. During the trip my friend Andrew, who is Gwitch'n and from Inuvik, told me about a story called the Mad Trapper. Andrew and I discussed the story because he said a lot of people are really ticked off that this is the story that everybody knows. They wonder why this White guy is so sensationalized. And I recognized that *I* am a part of that. [Before my conversation with Andrew] I had thought, "Wow...that's such an interesting

story that's so cool. I really want to read it." The story isn't known for how awful the Mad Trapper was to the communities and how the communities' lives were completely altered and disrupted because of this one man, how the only way the RCMP caught this man was from the help of people like Andrew's grandfather who just knew the land inside and out. There's so much more to the story that gets missed.

Later, while at graduate school in Southern Ontario, I did a presentation with two friends of mine who are Aboriginal on new-age-ism and the appropriation of knowledge. I loved working with them on this project because they really opened my eyes to how Aboriginal culture is sold...and totally misrepresented. I told them my story [of teaching a culturally inappropriate activity] at a campfire and how people at the camp where I had worked as a teenager all had camp names [such as] 'Cherokee' and we were laughing, but also recognizing how that is still happening. ...That was another part of my decolonizing for sure.

More recently, I was telling my mom's sister about the residential schools and she was not interested in hearing about that and got quite defensive and angry ...She kept taking it really personally [because of the hardships her own family had faced]...so it was really interesting to see her reaction.

Initially Kim needed help from her friend Andrew to recognize Eurocentrism in the legacy of the Mad Trapper story, which serves as a poignant example of the pervasive problem of the anonymity and lack of recognition by name of specific Aboriginal peoples in history text books, museums, art galleries, photographs and historical accounts. Later, at school, working with Aboriginal friends, Kim was able to admit Eurocentric mistakes she had made as a camp counsellor and in her teaching practice, mistakes which had been pointed out to her at the time by an Aboriginal student. In the final example, Kim was able to easily recognize, on her own, the Eurocentrism of her aunt and the pervasiveness of colonial attitudes.

The interview process served as an opportunity for participants and I to continue to refine our decolonizing lenses. One of John's stories illustrates the complexity of the task of coming to recognize and admit one's own Eurocentrism, despite the intention to do so. I asked him whether or not he would consider his involvement in learning and practicing "traditional" skills from and with a group of other White people to be a form of cultural appropriation or at all Eurocentric in nature. In his response, he differentiated between the following two examples:

The [work with] hides and bow drill and tracking have all been predominantly learned from other White folks. ...For me [practicing traditional skills] is a way to connect to the earth, to simplify and to build self-reliance. I certainly have admiration and a great respect for [their First Nations origin]. I struggle to wrap my head around [my practice of traditional skills] as something that could be adversely affecting someone and yeah... ideally I'd love to learn traditional skills and activities from a First Nations person.

I had a conversation with [a female Euro-Canadian friend] about her use of traditional medicines, like the sacred medicines ... sweet grass or sage or tobacco or cedar ...She'll often pick sweet grass and make a braid and use it as part of her own spiritual practice. I have had a few opportunities to smudge with First Nations people ...and I always had this feeling of it being quite an honour and quite sacred when I'm invited to participate in that, but using the medicine on its own isn't the same to me and I don't feel entitled to it. I question where is the line between recognizing these medicines as something that has been used for a really long time and has great properties ...and then the question of what entitles one to that and what does one need to do in order to be able to use those – do [Aboriginal people] need to give me permission? I don't feel like I have the knowledge or understanding in a really complete way of the uses or the power of those and so that makes me feel uneasy about that sometimes.

John certainly recognizes that he is not the keeper of knowledge about sacred medicines, and use of such medicines by his Euro-Canadian friend makes him feel uneasy. Yet, his attempt to distinguish whether or not it is appropriate for him to engage in the other traditional skills activities as a White person could be considered problematic, primarily because he bases his distinction on the degree to which he perceives the various practices as *spiritual*. First, cultural appropriation is not solely linked to the sacredness or spirituality of a particular practice; as Graveline (1998) states, “Central to the act of appropriation is the misrepresentation or partial representation of an idea or artifact without recognition of the Traditional sources of knowledge or inspiration” (p. 236). While John does acknowledge the skills of tracking, tanning animal hides, and traditional fire-making as being from a First Nations origin, they are in this instance being practiced outside of the context of a specific local culture or place and without John having established relationships with the people from whose culture and land these practices originated.

Different perspectives do exist amongst Aboriginal people as to what exactly constitutes appropriation, and the question of whether or not John’s practice of traditional skills is offensive, may be answered differently by various people. Another aspect of his reasoning also exemplifies Eurocentric thinking. John based his distinction, in part, on the assumption that the skills of tracking, hide-work and fire-making are somehow less spiritual than the use of traditional medicines, which fails to acknowledge that for some Aboriginal peoples, these activities are indeed spiritual in nature. Karen Dannenmann, during a 2009 presentation to an outdoor education class at Lakehead University,

explained that gifts of the animals, being in the bush, and connectedness to the earth simply cannot be separated from the spiritual realm.

Gregory Cajete (2009), during a presentation at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, however, made distinctions between four different aspects of Indigenous knowledge that could help to clarify the distinction that John may have been attempting to make. The first, *traditional or sacred knowledge*, is handed down through stories, is specific to a particular family or clan and is often meant to be private. Secondly, *revealed knowledge* (that which is revealed through ceremony, ritual, visions) is also described by Cajete as private and not generally shared with non-Aboriginal people. Yet, Cajete also stated that the other aspects of Indigenous knowledge (*empirical knowledge* and *contemporary knowledge*) could be particularly relevant to solving some of the real problems faced by all communities today. He describes *empirical knowledge* as that which is gained through careful observation and practice over time and is very connected to living in a particular place (such as weather patterns and plant cycles). *Contemporary knowledge* is that which is gained through experience and problem solving and is most closely linked to higher education or is often accessible through academics.

Together, John's anecdotes, the consideration of some of his potentially problematic reasoning, and Cajete's description of various aspects of Indigenous knowledge, illustrate a multiplicity of perspectives. This underscores the complexity of the task faced by Euro-Canadians to recognize Eurocentrism and to figure out how to engage respectfully with Aboriginal cultural traditions and Indigenous knowledge systems.

In another example John demonstrated his awareness of the Eurocentric tendency to project stereotypical expectations onto Aboriginal identities. He identified assumptions he had made earlier about Aboriginal peoples as problematic and Eurocentric.

And I think I went into that [canoe trip] experience with a bit of a romantic ideal of what life might be like [for Aboriginal youth] and certainly witnessed a whole other way that they lived, which was pretty shocking. I think I expected them to be a certain way. I expected them to hold a certain set of values...especially towards the land and towards the things they were harvesting along the way ... that they would be a lot more connected and not be engaging in some of the [destructive behaviours] ...I guess that sort of expectation of what First Nations people should be... is Eurocentrism.

John did not comment further on what expectations he may have had of Aboriginal youth in other contexts outside of a canoe trip at that time, for instance in a shopping mall, school or university, but this example raises the question as to whether or not the context of a canoe trip (which in itself is certainly part of a romanticized image of Aboriginal culture) played a role in reinforcing John's stereotypic and Eurocentric expectations of the Aboriginal youth he was to encounter. This, and other examples throughout the interview, demonstrated John's genuine commitment to looking for previous attitudes or practices that may have been Eurocentric and a willingness to accept feedback when challenged to further reflect on and examine potential Eurocentrism.

Mary clearly had already reflected, retrospectively, about the Eurocentrism in the courses where she had worked with Aboriginal youth. She shared three anecdotes that also demonstrate the continuous refinement of one's ability to recognize Eurocentrism:

Yeah, there were aspects of Eurocentrism... the outdoor education courses are Eurocentrically run, cause it's very much a focus on personal growth and development ...the 'I can do anything I want' idea – which I've grown up with

and so I hold on to, but we can definitely break that down into being a very Eurocentric way of seeing the world. ...I think as instructors if we had had the awareness to challenge that within the course that would have been amazing, but I don't think any of us were there.

[The First Nations Youth Employment Program] was very much a Eurocentric program ... trying to expose them to ways to be successful in our culture. [By helping them develop skills for jobs in the resource extraction/management sector].

And so in my first [student teaching] placement Eurocentrism really shone through ...there were probably 50% Aboriginal kids. And I just felt that [the teachers] gave no consideration to teaching [the Aboriginal students] in a way that was different from other non-Aboriginal kids.

Like the progression illustrated by Kim's stories, Mary's comments also seem to indicate a gradual refinement of her ability to recognize Eurocentrism. She did not recognize the Eurocentrism of the outdoor education courses or the Aboriginal youth employment program at the time, but could do so upon later reflection. By the time she did her first teaching placement she was able to recognize Eurocentrism as it occurred in the moment. Further, her testimonies demonstrate her understanding that the values of individualism and neo-liberalism can be considered Eurocentric, although she does not name these Western values specifically.

As Luke has refined his decolonizing lens, his interpretation of cultural appropriation has shifted somewhat. He seems more prepared to seek out the advice of knowledgeable Aboriginal people when there is a question of what is most respectful and appropriate. The following story took place while he was in the Bachelor of Education program:

We painted a mural in the faculty of education. There are the seven teachings of the grandfathers painted on the wall.

...When we painted the mural, the words on the wall were sort of an add-on idea that someone suggested at the end. ...I actually kind of opposed the idea because I had anxiety that we were appropriating them without really consulting anyone. I seem to remember saying that we should do some investigation about what might be most respectful and appropriate and then the next time I came back the words were half painted on the wall already and so then I let it go... Now I think that I might push harder on saying that if we're going to do this we need to make sure that we're doing this well.

Aside from recognizing Eurocentrism, the decolonization process involves learning to recognize the privilege afforded to White Euro-Canadians. Kim elaborated on two experiences when her own White privilege became evident to her. First, she described her reaction to the unjust firing of the principal at the school where she taught in South America:

After our principal was unfairly fired, I was talking to the teachers in the staff room. It was a huge mess and no one would say anything about the injustice and so I went in and I used all the words that everyone else would be cited [disciplined] for using. That's where I totally started recognizing I have privilege [in South America] and I bet I do in Canada as well. I had the privilege of getting my anger off my chest, of going [to the administration] and saying this is totally unfair.

The privilege Kim experienced in this instance was that she did not have to fear any repercussions from her actions, whereas the non-White teachers had such a fear of repercussion that they refrained from speaking up against injustice.

The reflections of the participants illustrate the gradual process of coming to recognize both Eurocentric assumptions and White privilege. For the participants, the process required commitment, openness to learning, and a willingness to accept feedback. Their ability to recognize and admit Eurocentrism initially required assistance from

friends and colleagues (some of whom were Aboriginal and others who were non-Aboriginal allies also engaged in the process of deconstructing Eurocentrism). As participants became better able to recognize more subtle examples of Eurocentrism, their retrospective perceptions of past experiences shifted and helped them to see the great extent to which colonial attitudes exist.

Feeling Stuck and the Fear of Not Knowing

My own experiences, and those of the participants, reveal that once White Euro-Canadians recognize Eurocentrism, they often become fearful of making more mistakes that might expose their ignorance, offend, or perpetuate harm. While not every White Euro-Canadian experiences anxiety to the same extent, John's testimony captures the essence of this common experience:

[Teaching at an alternative school] was a time when it was a struggle for me ... I didn't know the best way to teach [Aboriginal perspectives]...what do I do? Where do I go from here? How can I move from this place? To a large extent I think I'm still in that place of not knowing how to best proceed ... There are things that I don't think about because I haven't even gotten to the point of questioning it yet... but I know those things are there...how do you start that conversation? There's that uneasiness that's hard to get by and I often wonder, "Is this appropriate?" or "Should I even say this?" and, "If I say this am I really illustrating my ignorance or am I being insensitive or insulting?" ...Sometimes there is that sense of shame or darkness around not being able to be more aware.

Like John, Luke's anxiety seems to be related not so much to learning about Aboriginal perspectives, but rather communicating them authoritatively to others in his role as an

educator: With respect to presenting a class about decolonizing in the Outdoor Education course he currently teaches at a faculty of education, Luke articulated:

I was afraid about that class. Compared to all the other topics and themes that we discussed throughout the course, it was the only one that I had any anxiety about – like what would I deliver, how was that...how could I as a Euro-Canadian outdoor educator deliver that with credibility and also be respectful. And I think that's the fear... but I felt it was important to talk about decolonizing. And then in the weeks prior to it I really didn't know what I was going to talk about... I thought about inviting an Aboriginal person to come speak, but at the same time I didn't want to invite an Aboriginal scholar to talk about Aboriginal Outdoor education in a token sort of way.

Despite the fear and anxiety that some White educators feel as they learn from and work with Aboriginal peoples, learning from experience, including learning from one's mistakes is an important part of the decolonizing process. It is important for White educators not to allow themselves to become paralysed or to simply avoid the challenging task of learning about and teaching Aboriginal content and building respectful relationships. Susan Dion (2007) argues that "the perfect stranger stance," that is, claiming ignorance and therefore disconnection from Aboriginal issues and peoples, causes many White teachers to simply avoid the challenging topics about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships in Canada. She asserts that this is not a respectful way to teach and encourages the White teachers with whom she works to teach more honestly in order to help students understand deeper historical and contemporary issues faced by Aboriginal peoples.

John Ralston Saul (2008, personal communication) also argues that White people need to work to overcome the fear and anxiety often experienced while decolonizing. While he acknowledges that Euro- Canadians have a lot of listening and learning to do

and that true appropriation (such as the patenting of Indigenous knowledge by non-Indigenous people or the copyrighting by anthropologists of Indigenous oral testimony) is a genuine concern, he also argues that Aboriginal peoples, having found strength and resilience within their communities, increasingly wish to share their culture on their own terms.

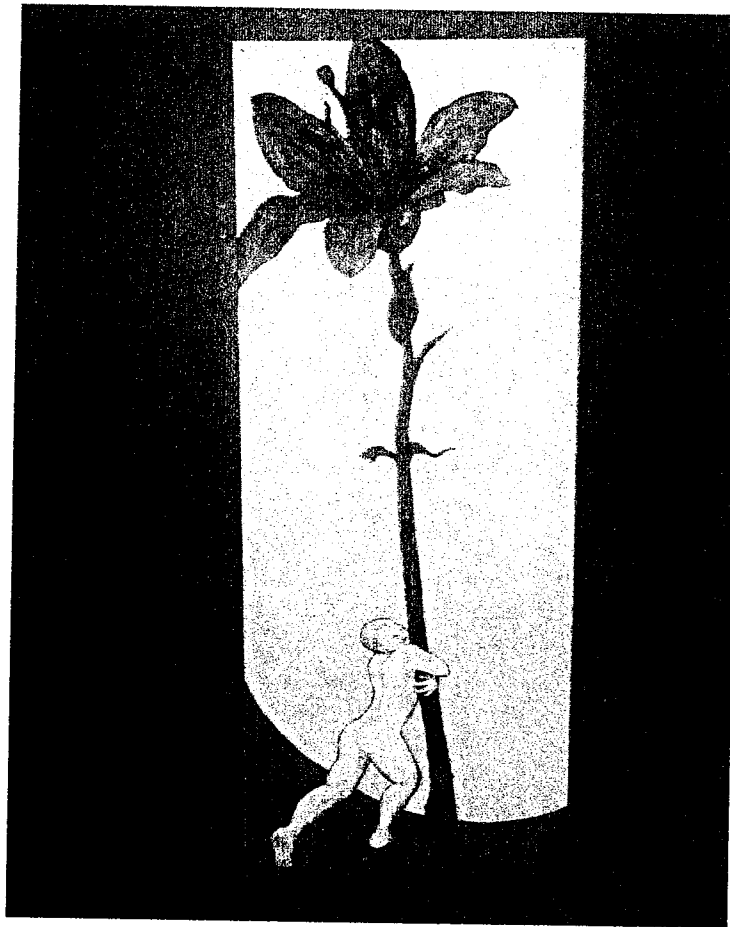
Regardless of whether or not White Euro-Canadians have reason to be nervous and at times fearful, this study indicates that these sentiments do indeed exist. Any reconceptualizations of decolonizing for White people, or decolonizing teacher education pedagogies, needs to therefore take into account and address these feelings of fear and anxiety in order to overcome paralysis, avoidance and the perfect stranger stance.

Opportunities to be Vulnerable and Learn From Mistakes

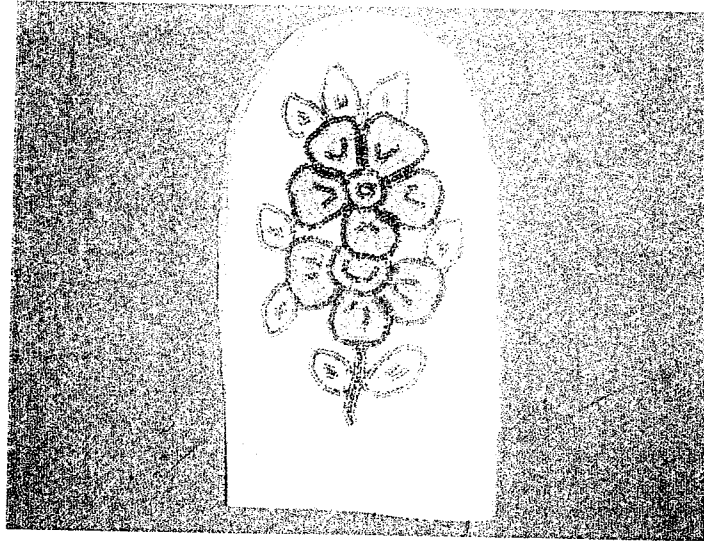
Despite the fear of making mistakes and the complexity of refining one's ability to recognize and admit ever-more subtle examples of Eurocentrism and White privilege, learning from experience, including from one's mistakes, is an important part of the decolonizing process. It is important for White educators not to allow themselves to become paralysed or to simply avoid the challenging task of learning about and teaching Aboriginal content and building respectful relationships. Like Dion (2009) and Saul (2008), Ethel Gardner, Chair of the Aboriginal Education department at Lakehead University, has explained that the avoidance of teaching Aboriginal content by White educators is itself an egregious mistake (personal communication between Gardner and Korteweg). Indeed, participants in this study were grateful for experiences that have

allowed them to expose their vulnerabilities in a supportive environment. They all indicated that they learned immensely from their mistakes.

Kim stated emphatically that her mistakes were a very valuable part of her learning and she provided two artifacts that served as a metaphor to convey this:



I guess what it represents is the importance of my making mistakes...the person represents me just being super grateful of my mistakes. So maybe the flower could represent my mistakes and how mistakes are ugly but they're also so important in my growth.



Another one of my artifacts is the moccasin top (shown above). There are tons of mistakes in there that you can't see, but it's so beautiful anyway. So I'm hoping that even though I'm making all of these mistakes, hopefully it's making me a better person to be able to recognize where my biases are and how entrenched they are and that I have to really work to undo them. It's not something that just happens. It's not a lazy process. It takes a lot of work and it's exhausting and it's emotional. Just like making that art. That beading is really hard and you're using, you know, just the tiniest muscles in your hand and your hands cramp up and when you make a mistake it sucks and it takes forever to fix and...I just thought it was a neat metaphor for the whole decolonization process.

One of Kim's narratives describes how she felt early in her decolonizing journey when an Aboriginal student helped her to recognize a significant mistake she made while teaching a class. This story reflects the process symbolized by the mistakes she made while beading her moccasins: The experience of realizing the deep entrenchment of her own Eurocentric attitudes was emotional. Her mistake required time to work through, and ultimately allowed her to grow from the experience:

I did that ridiculous closing activity ...something about the Great Spirit and...ah...it's so embarrassing...I introduced it as, "This is how a chief closes a campfire." And I said the words and I did actions and then taught everyone. It was

something like... "The sun sets" and...it's just awful...
"Our council...with this our council will end." I had learned it as a camp counsellor. We all learned it and did it at every campfire. Afterwards, Suzie, who was the only Aboriginal student in the class, approached me and said, "You can't do this." She asked the questions, "Whose land are we on?" and, "Was that a chief who lived here and was that actually how he would close the campfire?" ...The next day I apologized to everybody. And really explained why I was apologizing and why I wanted everyone to see that that was a really big mistake of mine. I was devastated. I was really upset. I was very embarrassed. I remember I thanked Suzie for highlighting to me that I shouldn't be doing that. And I told them where I had learned it and I told them that I can't believe that I had never questioned that before and I never realized how wrong that was and how many kids I did that with and...I was very ashamed and I just shared all of that with the group, hoping that they would also learn from my mistake. I really wanted to recognize Suzie for being so brave for approaching me.

In this instance, Kim was particularly grateful for the direct, yet gentle, way in which Suzie spoke to her about the issue.

Kim also elaborates on a supportive relationship much later in her journey that allowed her to be vulnerable and learn. She described her hesitation when invited by an Aboriginal colleague to help co-ordinate a canoe trip for Elders and youth. At the time, she had only recently moved to the community in the Northwest Territories.

I felt like a total outsider. Very few people knew me in this community. Mark [Aboriginal colleague] wanted me to coordinate those meetings – and I just said I'm not sure that I'm the right person to do that. What he said that really struck me was, "You don't have to know everything about our culture and you don't have to feel so uncomfortable about it. What you do know is your own culture so you could share that with us...yes there are certain protocols that you should definitely follow, but..." He was just really relaxing and he was so gentle. He conveyed that we were going to do this together. So I appreciated that it's okay to feel comfortable sharing your own culture because that's what we do too.

In this instance, by embracing feelings of vulnerability, Kim learned that when Aboriginal people request labour, skills or expertise from a White person, they do so knowing what they expect of that White person. They do not want non-Aboriginal people to decline invitations to participate because they are not First Nations themselves.

Overall, Kim made it clear that her capacity to learn from the mistakes was in part due to the supportive guidance she received.

Mary shared a story about making a mistake that gives insight into why it can be intimidating for White people to ask questions that may expose their Eurocentric assumptions:

I remember having a conversation with [a female Aboriginal co-instructor] ... [I was still] struggling with questions about the Aboriginal kids [in the Youth Employment Program] getting paid for 'summer camp' – not appropriate– but I said something like that to her and I could just see her face...it hurt her...and my intention was far from that. I didn't want to hurt anyone, I just didn't know how to ask the question. I still don't always know how to ask the questions but I'm getting better at knowing when and who to ask the questions.

The awareness that what we say and do could hurt, disappoint or anger another person, despite our best intentions, makes it difficult at times to ask challenging questions or engage in dialogue about sensitive topics. Mary's Eurocentric perspective that existed at the time was that it might be unfair to White students that the Aboriginal students were being paid to participate in summer camp, an experience that White kids would not get paid to participate in. The anecdote of her mistake raises the deeper issue that White Canadians are not receiving decent education about the unjust realities lived by many people related to unequal power distribution, economics and class.

John recognizes the significance of Dion's (2009) argument that taking the perfect stranger stance is not a respectful way to teach and realizes that part of his decolonizing process is to confront his deeply engrained Eurocentric assumptions and patterns of ignorance, despite the discomfort he may feel in so doing. He comments on this research process to illustrate how difficult this can be:

When you asked me to do this that was sort of the place that I was coming from and recognizing that it would allow me an opportunity to engage further in this process ...even participation in this study...makes me vulnerable in exposing areas I don't know about and in exposing things like beliefs or perspectives that I may have or that may come out in my thinking that I don't even realize I have.... and to [take the risk of having] them thought of as ...well the sort of predominant view which takes on this negative connotation. To catch yourself in those thoughts can be a challenge.

For White Euro-Canadians striving to decolonize their practice, feelings of nervousness might never disappear completely. By consistently embracing feelings of vulnerability and remaining open to learning from mistakes, non-Aboriginal Canadians can become more comfortable in admitting their ignorance, first, and then learning how to be respectful when engaging with Aboriginal peoples and culture. Kim received the following compliment after a presentation that allowed her to recognize how much she had learned on her journey thus far:

I just really located myself during the community presentation about the Mackenzie River Youth trip. I had learned how important that was at graduate school...I also brought a lot of [Aboriginal] voices to the presentation. And after the presentation, Marie Battiste and another woman that she works with, they just gave me a really nice compliment and said that it's so important that I did that... and they said they felt like they were listening to those peoples' voices. And I thought, "Oh my god, I didn't even really think about that when I was putting the presentation

together,” but it happened that way. And I understood what they meant because all of the other presentations which were specifically about Aboriginal populations, it wasn't the Aboriginal voices being heard it was the presenters'. I really appreciated that feedback because I was very nervous that she was sitting there in my presentation. It made me super nervous!

Decolonization for White Euro-Canadian educators is a process of learning to recognize, admit or disrupt Eurocentric attitudes, ignorance, meta-narratives, assumptions and practices. It also involves learning to recognize the privilege that White Euro-Canadians feel entitled to in almost all aspects of everyday life and finding ways to live more equitably with others. From my own experience and my interactions with many White educators, students and pre-service teachers, as well as the testimonies of the participants, it is evident that Euro-Canadians often feel nervous, anxious or uncertain about how to learn with and from Aboriginal peoples and how to build respectful intercultural relationships. They are fearful of exposing their ignorance and of offending Aboriginal people, yet they in fact do offend by not stating their ignorance and subsequently striving to learn.

Aboriginal people are increasingly keen to share their culture with other Canadians because indeed they have important perspectives, knowledge and traditions that shape the Canadian society. As Battiste (2000) writes:

The real reason for including Aboriginal content in the curriculum is not so that Aboriginal students can compete in some imagined world, but rather because settler society is sorely in need of what Indigenous knowledge has to offer. (p. 201)

Rather than succumb to the “perfect stranger” stance (Dion, 2009) and avoid the challenge of teaching about Aboriginal peoples, teachers should strive to confront

historical and contemporary misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Despite the discomfort that they often feel, Euro-Canadian environmental educators who embrace feelings of vulnerability and risk making mistakes will no doubt learn a great deal and move towards a more respectful and honest teaching practice.

Section Five: Experiences That Facilitate Decolonizing Journeys

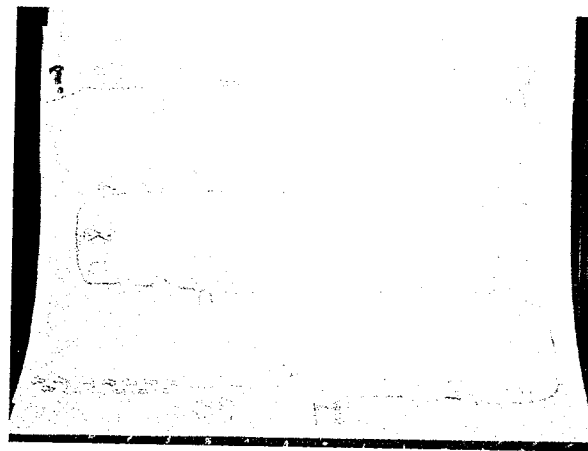
Decolonization involves *both* deconstructing the Eurocentric worldview *and* constructing respectful inter-cultural relationships (Gruenewald, 2008; Tompkins, 2002). These two broad interconnected processes are equally important and seem to occur concurrently, each supporting and enriching the other. This section explores three broad themes stemming from the participants' narratives about experiences that seemed to facilitate their decolonizing journeys. Part A explores the influence of being exposed to Aboriginal Culture and First Voice Perspectives through meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people, time in Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal perspectives within academic courses, exposure to the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples, and exposure to issues of Aboriginal justice. Next, Part B examines the role of relationships amongst non-Aboriginal people who are also on decolonizing journeys, the experience of inviting other non-Aboriginal people to embark on the journey, and the importance of embracing and celebrating one's own family and cultural traditions. Part C considers the decolonizing impact of spending time on the land, of coming to acknowledge the traditional people of the land, and of traveling the land with Aboriginal students and co-instructors.

Experiences That Facilitate Decolonization Part A:

Exposure to Aboriginal Culture and First Voice Perspectives

I) Meaningful Relationships With Aboriginal People

The participants' narratives made it clear that their relationships with Aboriginal people, especially ones characterized by trust, mutual respect and open honest dialogue, led to the deepest learning throughout their journeys. Kim highlighted this most emphatically; here is how she described the following artifact:



My artifact really has to do with relationships and I find that my decolonization process has to do with the discussions and the relationships I have with the people who actually bring things to light for me.... It's one thing to read about this stuff and to go to school about it, but, really a lot of my stories have to do with the relationships I've made with people while I was in school, or the relationships I've had with my profs, and the relationships I have with people here where I work... I think I would understand it by reading it, but I have a more holistic understanding of it because I have a relationship with someone who has experienced it.

Mary and John echoed Kim's sentiments:

M: That summer was all about exposure and relationships and asking questions about Aboriginal culture... I think I'm impacted most by person-to-person engagement.

J: And for me it has been those relationships and connections that have motivated or inspired me or made me question.

Kim, Mary, and John all elaborated on the nature of their relationships with Aboriginal peoples that served as the most significant decolonizing experiences. All three described relationships that they built with their Aboriginal co-instructors on wilderness education trips and with their Aboriginal students in both classroom and outdoor settings.

i. Relationships with Aboriginal co-instructors.

At the outdoor education organization where Kim, Mary, and John all worked and where Luke completed a teaching placement, the co-instructor relationship is a very unique relationship. Two staff members are paired to work together to plan for and deliver a wilderness expedition. While on wilderness trips they are responsible for the physical and emotional safety and well-being of up to twelve youth, for ten to thirty days at a time. In this intense working environment, and as each other's only peers during that time, co-instructors find themselves relying on each other for support twenty-four hours a day.

The micro-culture of this organization often leads to meaningful relationships forming quite quickly, that are unique from other friendships or working relationships. Open, honest, respectful communication usually flows easily. Staff members value and encourage the giving and receiving of feedback on a regular basis with attention to care and support, for both self and others, and with the goal of self-awareness and growth. There is a commitment to resolve conflict in a healthy manner. Instructors often create an atmosphere of appreciation and each individual's unique personalities and strengths are celebrated. Whether they have an interest in, for example, technical skills, natural history, facilitation

skills or global issues, staff members are usually curious people who are keen to learn and share their enthusiasm for learning with others. In short, the instructors valued the kind of environment that Tompkins (2002) describes as necessary to do deep decolonizing work, a small group setting that is cooperative, interpersonal, democratic, and participatory. This aspect of the micro-culture of outdoor environmental educators might help to explain the great extent to which these participants valued, and were able to learn from, their relationships with their Aboriginal co-instructors.

Kim described the roles that she and her co-instructor played:

We approached the trip really differently and I loved working with Jeremy [my Aboriginal co-instructor] because he had a lot of questions about the organization and how we did things and it felt like that trip for Jeremy was, “Kim, you do things and I’m going to watch and I’d like to learn and I’ll jump in when I can but I really want to understand what [this outdoor education organization] does,” whereas I wanted to approach the trip as, “I see so many issues with how [this outdoor education organization] does things, lets do things differently.” And so we balanced both of those, which was really nice....

Kim greatly appreciated the dialogue that she and Jeremy had throughout their trip. The juxtaposition between the way in which she was accustomed to leading a wilderness trip and the approach Jeremy brought to the experience helped her to recognize the Eurocentrism of the approach typically used by the organization. The dialogue also helped her to recognize ways in which their seemingly different worldviews resonated as well:

I continued to engage in these conversations with him, and I’m sure I wouldn’t have recognized a lot of my Eurocentric approaches without his feedback, because he’s bringing a completely different worldview ...not completely different, I think we saw eye to eye on some things but in other areas he’s bringing a completely

different worldview than I am, for instance with regards to the issue of water purification. I definitely made sure that I tried to engage in these discussions the entire trip.

One particular experience on the same trip illustrated the extent to which mutual respect had been developed between Kim and Jeremy. She described her reaction to a situation on the trail that was deeply important to Jeremy that she knew she did not fully understand. The situation required that Jeremy make a difficult decision that would have a significant impact on the rest of the group. To respect Jeremy, who was not a participant in this research, the details of the incident were intentionally omitted from Kim's anecdote, yet what is significant about this story is Kim's internal thoughts and the dialogue and respect that existed between Kim and Jeremy:

I guess what was great for me was to see my reaction to that decision that he was going to make...and if that had happened two years ago, before I really started to dive into this decolonizing process, I think my reaction would have been full of anger and it would have been all about me...I was recognizing that those things could definitely be monopolizing how I could be approaching this situation. And of course those [Eurocentric thoughts] came through my head. But I recognized them and I didn't really act on them. I thought, "Of course, he's not thinking about that right now because this is way more important to him. And I will never understand how important this is for a member of a [particular] Clan. That's just not something that I would understand. And I'm not going to try to pretend that I understand, but I'm going to let him make the decision..." And that's what I did. And he knew how I felt... [In our debrief after the trip] he really appreciated it and said he was so grateful that he really felt he could make either decision and it wasn't going to damage our relationship. He had been really worried about that. In the midst of it all...he had asked, "Is this going to damage our relationship?" and I said, "No. It really sucks, but it's not going to damage our relationship." And I really meant that. So...I was just...I recognized how much I had changed. And I felt really happy.

Kim recognized that she might never fully understand Jeremy's perspective as an Aboriginal person, but she was able to respect it nonetheless. This experience served as an opportunity for Kim to reflect on how her perceptions and actions changed as a result of her decolonizing journey.

Mary described a very similar relationship with her Aboriginal co-instructor, Corey, and was inspired by both his enthusiasm for sharing his cultural knowledge and by the open dialogue and atmosphere of learning from one another.

I was pretty lucky to work with Corey [a First Nations wilderness instructor] because he is just so fired up and in touch with his culture, but also so open to talking about it that for him and me especially we just had a really neat relationship. He learned a lot from me just in terms of the organization's way of doing things... But for me we just had these huge long conversations about First Nations culture and I felt like I could ask any question at all. And I felt like we established such a great relationship.

Kim's and Mary's stories both illustrate examples of cross-cultural relationships that were dynamic and co-operative. In these examples, *both* of the instructors played the roles of teacher and learner. Together they were able to discuss what was being taught and learned and how this cross-cultural exchange was taking place. Fitznor, Haig-Brown and Moses (2000) described a similar process of coming to know themselves as "three people with vastly different histories and relations" and working "together in good relation to one another" through the process of editing one issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*. They wrote:

We learned from one another and came to deeper respect for how we work. Although there are days when the idea of working well together across all our differences as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people may seem close to impossible, this particular constellation proved to be rewarding for all three of us. (p. 75)

The relationships described in the participants' narratives are characterized by a sense of mutual respect, trust and commitment to learning across differences, which allowed participants to feel comfortable engaging in dialogue about cross-cultural issues.

ii. Relationships with Aboriginal students.

Often teachers and students meet one another in school settings that perpetuate conventionally defined student-teacher roles. In such instances, student-teacher relationships are usually mediated by preconceived stereotypes of those roles. Outdoor environmental educators, more so than mainstream teachers, tend to encounter students in alternative learning environments where the conventional hierarchical relationships between student and teacher are less defined. In the alternative outdoor education high school where all of the participants in this study were involved, students and staff lived together in a community setting and frequently traveled together on wilderness expeditions. Educators and students built deeper relationships than they would in a conventional school setting that often lasted beyond the school year and developed into true friendships.

John spoke about one Aboriginal student in particular, Suzie, with whom he built a meaningful relationship over the course of an entire semester and eventually throughout many years. Suzie is the same student who bravely spoke up to inform Kim of her mistake in performing a fabricated so-called "Native" campfire closing. John's relationship with Suzie exposed him to a new reality he had never encountered before, the struggle for identity that Aboriginal youth can face and the complexity of the concept of self-identity:

I think of a particular Aboriginal student...and it was really interesting to witness her trying to explore what that meant to her and how that influenced her personality and her understanding of the world and I can remember certain things impacting her really differently than they did a lot of other people based on her understanding of herself and her identity as being First Nations... and I don't know that I ever fully understood ...but just recognizing that there was that turmoil over sense of self and cultural identity based on her mixed culture.

Like Kim, in her relationship with her co-instructor Jeremy, John recognized that he did not fully understand the perspective of his student, yet he was able to learn something about the struggles faced by First Nations youth from his experience of not knowing.

Kim appreciated immensely her relationship with Suzie and Suzie's mom, who happened to be a professor in Aboriginal Education at a southern Ontario university. She was grateful for the support she felt from the student's mom to talk about how to teach Aboriginal content respectfully:

I remember having discussions with Suzie quite a bit that year. And I specifically remember having great discussions with her mom about [the mistake I had made by fabricating a so-called 'Native' campfire closing activity]. We talked about how important it was not to do those kinds of things...She opened the door and offered to speak with us more on basically our decolonization process I think...I also remember her highlighting some Indigenous authors from our area.

Kim also commented that her relationship with Suzie of mutual trust and respect allowed her to be honest about her own feelings of discomfort with respect to her lack of knowledge:

I think... I was super conscious all the time of how we were doing things in our classroom. I think that's the reason why we included Indigenous education into some of our coursework, like...*Halfway Man*. ...I remember talking with Suzie about one of the lessons I was going to do... I

remember saying, “I’m uncomfortable on how to approach this, can you help me?” And asking her, “Well what did you think of this book?” I know I asked her, “How can we approach this in a respectful way?”

During the interview, this anecdote sparked a conversation about whether or not there were times in which the school staff relied too heavily on Suzie (who was the only Aboriginal student in the class and who had a very mature understanding of the world around her) for her perspective about how to teach Aboriginal course content. Kim recognized, in retrospect, that there is once again a fine line between imposing “expert status” on a student simply because he or she is Aboriginal and welcoming or learning from the perspective a student chooses to offer. She recalled Suzie’s reactions to her requests for advice:

I think there were times when she didn’t know what to say. And I think there were times when she didn’t give me much direction. But I felt like at times she gave me lots of direction. I think it just depended on either what I was asking or her readiness. Or maybe she would recognize something and just didn’t know how to bring to light how biased I was being or maybe I was being so over the top that she didn’t know what to say, which I hope wasn’t the case.

Dion (2009) reminds educators not to expect students to be experts about their culture or other Aboriginal cultures. They may not have knowledge of their cultural traditions nor is it their responsibility to teach others. It is the responsibility of teachers to educate themselves so that they can teach honestly and respectfully about Aboriginal history, politics, and culture while at the same time creating an inclusive atmosphere in a classroom that welcomes Aboriginal students (and all students) to share their perspectives when they wish to do so.

Not all of the experiences that the participants had with their students were built on mutual trust and respect. John had a very different experience working with Aboriginal students on a canoe trip early in his decolonizing journey. He described the powerful impact of being perceived as the stereotyped “other”:

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

This experience for John seemed to impact him as strongly as his later experiences where he was able to build respectful relationships with Aboriginal students. Understanding, experientially, what it might be like to be stereotyped and recognizing oneself as implicated in the culture of White privilege and a colonial legacy allowed John to better understand, to some extent, the source of deep resentment he thought was felt by his Aboriginal students.

For the most part, participants' relationships with their students and co-instructors were characterized by mutual respect, trust, open-communication and a commitment to learning. These relationships seemed to provide a space for people from different cultures to discuss difficult cross-cultural issues in a supportive and caring atmosphere. Participants had been invited to learn about Aboriginal culture and supported to learn from their mistakes. While outdoor environmental education is undoubtedly often Eurocentric in nature, the unique micro-culture that values respect, dialogue and learning, may be one of the factors that set the stage for White Euro-Canadian instructors to be receptive to decolonizing moments. At the same time, Euro-Canadians must not expect

that they can control the nature of their relationships with Aboriginal peoples. White Euro-Canadians have a great deal to learn from those relationships that do not grow to become open, trusting and reciprocal.

II) Time in Aboriginal Communities

The participants' relationships with Aboriginal co-instructors and students took place mainly in the Euro-Western setting of an outdoor education organization's wilderness trips. Participants also found that visiting or living in Aboriginal communities served as decolonizing experiences. While the time they spent in Aboriginal communities may not have led to the same depth of relationship as did their experiences with outdoor co-instructors and Aboriginal students, visits to Aboriginal communities provided opportunities for participants to learn about Aboriginal culture, witness Aboriginal cultural revitalization and experience being a minority.

John talked about his experience taking some of his White students to visit a reserve in Eastern Ontario. Upon hearing that the small group of students was interested in learning about their culture, a local family invited John and the students to stay in their home for a few days. During this time, various members of the community taught them crafts, shared traditional food and generally offered a glimpse into life on a reserve in southeastern Ontario. John felt hopeful about the impact of the experience for his non-Aboriginal students:

It's been through being able to connect with and meet people and having those students spend time with that family from [that reserve]. I hope that...will allow them to get beyond at least some of the borders that exist and some of the boundaries that can be put up between different cultures.

Mary and John had a shared experience visiting an Aboriginal community together for a few days at the end of a personal canoe trip in northern Quebec. There they were welcomed by community members who spoke about the local impact of hydro-electric dams and who invited them to eat some of the goose they were roasting in a traditional way. Mary described the impact of witnessing a major injustice on Aboriginal land in this community:

I went on a canoe trip with friends in northern Quebec, which is interesting because I definitely wasn't thinking about education or decolonizing...once again it was awareness and exposure... being in a community. We started our river trip in a displaced community. The town was on the mouth of the Rupert and the big thing in that community was the damming of the Rupert River. They had moved the whole town in order to flood an area for a dam. All of a sudden it was bringing together a big issue I had read about with an actual community... It provided some understanding about government and community interactions and just how it is way more complicated because money gets involved and land ownership and questions about who makes the decisions for the land. Even though I spent barely any time in that place – like on the river and in that community...now when I hear about anything happening on that Quebec side of the James Bay, my interest is captured so much more because I was there ...it makes such a huge difference.

Clearly, exposure to the interconnections between issues of Aboriginal and environmental justice has left a lasting impact, which subsequently helped to draw Mary's attention to other similar issues of injustice. Korteweg and Root (2009) argue that environmental educators have a responsibility to expose their students to the realities of Aboriginal land-based politics:

In Canada, *all places* are Aboriginal traditional lands and it is Aboriginal peoples who are living in those sites of environmental struggle, politically resisting the

contamination of their local environments. It is the responsibility of critical place-based, eco-justice, and environmental education to recognize and foreground Aboriginal politics, issues and pedagogies in their approaches. (p. 5)

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

While shorter visits to Aboriginal communities served as decolonizing experiences for the participants, Kim's experience actually living in an Aboriginal community for four years required her to learn a great deal in a short period of time:

When I came to [the NWT] the very first two months I was here was a very steep learning curve for me. Probably sixty percent of [the community] is Aboriginal. I've never before lived in a community with so many Aboriginal people.

As her testimonies throughout this study indicate, she continues, after four years, to encounter decolonizing moments in all aspects of her life in this northern Aboriginal community. While she currently works mainly from an urban centre in the Northwest Territories, she has come to understand the importance of actually visiting the small communities with whom she works:

It helps to develop relationships when you actually go to the communities... There's a huge importance that you go and get out of the office and go to the communities that you're working beside. ... Here the phone does not develop relationships as easily as with someone who is non-Aboriginal and who is used to developing relationships over the phone. So to actually go there is so important.

Kim continued by discussing an artifact, a photograph of her truck, and conveyed the importance of traveling over land when going to visit remote communities. By driving to the communities rather than flying, she experiences both the land and the people traveling and living on that land:



I sent you a picture of our truck. The car is so important here because we're so remote. And to drive to a community instead of flying to a community has so much more weight and value to the trip. And people love to hear that you drove there. And they love to hear the stories of your drive and what you saw and what you did and where you stayed...doing a drive is also so much more impactful than flying... because you're actually driving and experiencing the distance and the land and bumping into people on the way. You end up meeting the same people. ...I'm able to drive the ice roads for 130 km in the winter ... I find so much value in that.

Notably, the impact of Kim's experience came partly from traveling the land itself, but also from the human interactions that took place along the way and from the relationships that flourished once she arrived in the remote communities through the sharing of stories about her trip to get there.

For participants, spending time in Aboriginal communities gave them an opportunity to witness the realities of life for some Aboriginal people. In some instances, these experiences highlighted the importance of relationship-building while in others, they provided an opportunity to understand the complexities of the interconnections between issues of Aboriginal and environmental justice. In all instances, time in Aboriginal communities provided participants with the experience of being immersed in a place where their Western culture was not the norm and where they were the minority, a rare occurrence for most White Euro-Canadians.

III) Exposure to Aboriginal Perspectives in an Academic Environment

Kim, Mary and Luke all spoke about the decolonizing impact of engaging with Aboriginal perspectives and pedagogies in academic settings. They had the opportunity to participate in classes taught by professors who were skilled at facilitating the complex issues that are part of the decolonizing process. During their graduate university experiences Mary and Kim found themselves, at times, in a culturally different space than they were accustomed to and came to appreciate cultural rituals that professors shared with the class, such as smudging and singing. They were challenged to adapt to learning through circle work, an unfamiliar pedagogical approach. They experienced learning from professors who taught in a way that developed a sense of community and trust amongst students. Finally, they were introduced to literature by Aboriginal authors and came to value the decolonizing impact of those works.

Kim reflected on how her initial perception of, and frustration with, the Aboriginal pedagogical approach eventually shifted:

All of the students met [with the Aboriginal instructor] on the first evening. And...my impression was, "This is so unorganized." It just felt like a waste of my time. And I was so judgmental.... Then I had his class again a week later [and] he blew me away! I loved this class. And we sat in a circle with just chairs every single class. There were twenty of us...And he teaches using an Aboriginal worldview... He was trying to share that with us so that we could see how he teaches differently than we probably do. I'm so driven by an agenda [when] I'm teaching...entering a class where there is no agenda and for him to let go...and *I* would call it letting go – I don't know that he would...but to teach that way would mean for me to let go of my personal agenda. The class was not *his* agenda. It was *our* agenda. We morphed into this community. You know...a circle does that. And you and I know very well what a circle can do, but to do that... for an entire course, I had never done that before. And the trust that was there...so many people who were quite quirky and there was some racism going on and we would call each other on it...just the trust that I never developed outside of [the alternative outdoor education school where we all worked previously]...I felt like there was trust at [the alternative outdoor education school], because of the tight community, but, I've never experienced that elsewhere. And never respected a teacher more.

Kim's decolonizing experiences in an academic setting seemed to be related to her exposure to an Aboriginal professor who was skilled at employing Aboriginal pedagogy and facilitating the decolonizing journey. Her description of the community atmosphere in her class echoes Tompkins's (2002) description of the need, in decolonizing work, for a space that is cooperative, democratic and conducive to developing interpersonal relationships.

Mary related two stories that also indicate the significant role professors might play in students' decolonizing journeys. Her stories also seem to convey that the extent to which an academic class taught by an Aboriginal instructor might be decolonizing depends on the professor's ability to facilitate the process and the students' readiness to

engage with the concept. First, she described her anticipation for and disappointment in the Aboriginal Education course she took during her Bachelor of Education year:

Then I was in teacher's college. I was really looking forward to taking the Aboriginal education course, because I had been building a lot of awareness through my experiences and I was so ready to learn more deeply about it and I was so disappointed. First of all, it was not just Aboriginal Education, it was Aboriginal and Multicultural education. But I think this is where my awareness made a really big difference because I was so keen to learn and I was aware of the issues, but the problem is that so many people from southern Ontario come up here for teachers' college and they have no awareness. I was shocked. I only ended up having only 4 classes on Aboriginal education, total. In which we were just shown movies. There was no critical examination, there was no probing ...I never felt like the discussion was very good...I don't think the class was facilitated to delve into the issues. And then there was no kind of second step into... "What does this have to do with our practice of teaching?"

In contrast, the graduate level course that she took one year later provided a greater opportunity for her to explore the complexities of her own experiences in a deeper way.

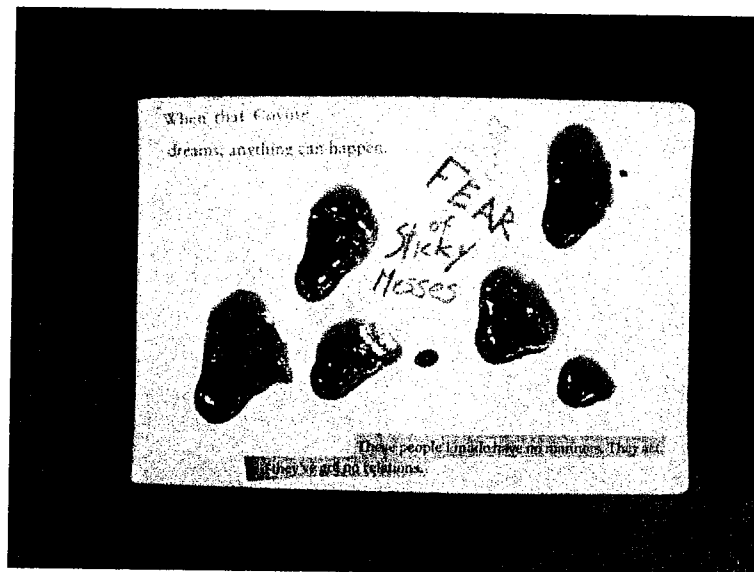
She explained:

... it brought lots of things together...the course I found hard at times because of the way the professor ran it ... in terms of having the talking circle - you could only speak when it was your turn. That was really eye opening because that was not a style that I was used to ...I do appreciate that she ran it in kind of a decolonizing way... I felt culturally like I didn't fit in but the professor addressed that and challenged us to identify our feelings towards the articles and to situate ourselves...I think it was an excellent course. It was one of my favourite courses that I've ever taken because it started to give me an understanding and a broader scope to the awareness I'd been building [about Aboriginal culture].

Mary's experiences with two very different approaches by Aboriginal instructors indicates that it is not simply exposure to professors who happen to be Aboriginal that

allow for deep decolonizing to take place, but rather that exposure to instructors who are skilled facilitators and who incorporate Aboriginal pedagogies is most effective.

Luke's engagement with the concept of decolonizing during one of his PhD courses helped him to recognize the influence of Aboriginal literature with which he had been previously engaging and how it may have helped him come to understand some of the contemporary cross-cultural issues that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. He explained two quotes that he incorporated into his artifact:



The story-based work in my master's thesis is from people like Peter Cole and Thomas King [referring to quotes on his artifact]. "When that coyote dreams anything can happen" and that's from *Green Grass Running Water* by Thomas King. So in picking that I was just thinking about dreams and stories as the potential for moving forward and dealing with the kind of sticky messes that we're faced with. ...And at the bottom it says, "There's people and they have no manners. They act as if they've got no relations." Which is from a parody *Columbus Story*, also by Thomas King. So I guess I've been engaging with Aboriginal literature for a while, but I don't think that was in a decolonizing...well,

maybe it was in a decolonizing way, I guess I just have never thought of it that way.

Luke's experience indicates that exposure to literature by Aboriginal authors can have a decolonizing influence even on those who are not yet aware of the decolonizing journey. This supports Dion's (2009) argument that non-Aboriginal teachers should teach using literature and resources that convey Aboriginal representations through the voices of Aboriginal writers, artists, and film makers.

While John did not encounter themes of decolonizing in an academic setting himself, he recognizes how the influence of academic work of others, including this study, has impacted him:

I think that your work and the academic work of Jeff and others ... and my own personal experiences in working with the young people have got me to the point of at least asking those questions and of thinking that yes I would like to do something.

For him, participating in this study provided an opportunity for learning and allowed John to take the initiative to try to move forward from that place of "feeling stuck" and "not knowing how to proceed."

While Aboriginal influences are increasingly finding their way into conventionally Western academic institutions, universities do remain largely Eurocentric. As a result, White Euro-Canadian students have the privilege of feeling relatively safe and comfortable in the Western university setting. It could be that participants were able to engage in such deep decolonizing experiences in academic settings because this was an environment where they felt more at ease encountering Aboriginal culture. As well, some professors within academic institutions tend to encourage critical thought, so participants

may have found themselves in a setting where it was culturally acceptable to speak up and challenge Eurocentrism.

Mary and Kim both spoke appreciatively about the significant impact of their experiences in academic classes facilitated by Aboriginal professors. An important question that these anecdotes raise is: when should Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people come together to do decolonizing work and when should they engage in this work separately? Joanne Tompkins and Susan Dion, at the 2009 Lakehead University Faculty of Education Graduate Student Conference, both articulated that within decolonizing processes it is appropriate, at times, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to work separately and at other times for them to engage in decolonizing work together. Graveline (1998) distinguishes the different purposes of working at times together and at other times separately: “While homogeneity may encourage self-disclosure, heterogeneity in the group allows the experience of difference necessary to challenge hegemony” (p. 90).

Without a doubt, Aboriginal people should not be given the burden of responsibility for helping White Euro-Canadians decolonize; Aboriginal people have pressing work of their own with respect to strengthening their cultures. Yet, at the same time, it would be Eurocentric to claim that Euro-Canadians are even *capable* of decolonizing without the help of Aboriginal peoples who have an important perspective to offer. Kim stated, “I don’t know if I could decolonize without the help of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.” Mary and Kim were fortunate to encounter Aboriginal professors who welcomed them to join the cross-cultural classes. While White Euro-Canadian graduate students cannot *expect* or *direct* these deep, cross-cultural learning experiences, they will no doubt learn a great deal about themselves, about

Aboriginal culture and the process of decolonizing should they choose to participate gratefully and openly when the opportunity is generously offered.

IV) Exposure to Aboriginal Cultural Strength and the Resiliency of Aboriginal People

The participants' exposure to Aboriginal culture in the communities where they have lived and traveled, in academic environments, and through their relationships with Aboriginal colleagues, students, friends and professors, have exposed them to the strength and resilience of Aboriginal people as well as to issues of Aboriginal justice and the daily struggle of many Aboriginal peoples in the face of extensive Eurocentrism. Participants have been exposed to such examples through dialogue with Aboriginal people, observations while visiting communities, participation as allies in community events, and art, film and literature.

i) Exposure to examples of cultural strength.

There is certainly a need for White Euro-Canadians to better understand issues of Aboriginal justice and to learn a more honest version of the history of violence and oppression that Aboriginal peoples have endured as a result of colonization through, for example, the residential schools, the sixties scoop, and forced assimilation. Yet in acknowledging the atrocities that have indeed taken place and the appalling living conditions in which many Aboriginal peoples are forced to live, a common pitfall is for White Euro-Canadians to position Aboriginal peoples as weak, oppressed or victimized (Smith, 1999).

By witnessing the reaction of one of her Aboriginal classmates who was fed up with hearing “depressing statistics” about herself, Kim became more aware of what it is like to be perpetually positioned as a victim. She began to consider the impact of *what* information is being presented in classes and *how* it is being presented:

One of my friends [in the class] was Aboriginal and later on when we developed a trusting relationship, she said to me, “I cannot handle the statistics. Like that’s me. Like it’s so fucking depressing to sit there and see all these depressing statistics about me all the time.” ...I had never made that connection until she brought it to light to me... Did I change my perception of my friend? Well, not just my friend, but the people in the classroom, I think everybody. You just become more aware that information affects me in this way, but how might it affect that person?

Misrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples as weak and oppressed serves only to perpetuate colonial attitudes of Euro-Western superiority. White Euro-Canadians should also turn their attention to the myriad examples of the strength and resiliency of Aboriginal peoples.

The findings throughout all of the themes presented thus far has already included rich examples of strength: the increased presence of Aboriginal students and professors in academia who are bringing their own worldviews and pedagogies to the university setting; the celebration of cultural traditions by youth, such as drumming, dancing and music; leadership in outdoor education organizations; and renowned writers, to name just a few. Following are three examples of experiences that helped to shift participants’ perceptions about the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples.

Kim told a story about meeting a residential school survivor and watching a film with him about residential schools:

We met and talked a little bit and he told me that he was a residential school survivor and so we ended up watching the movie together. And, oh my god, I was bawling so hard, I was so upset. And he, at the end of the film, was consoling me. ...It was just very subtle and he just asked me if I was ok. And I thought, "Wow...it seemed so kind of him to be asking me that," and it made me cry even more, because, if anything, I should be asking him if he's ok. He's the one that experienced it. I'm the one who's ashamed of it.

In this situation, Kim was surprised to find herself being offered support by the person she had initially perceived as "the victim." This small incident alludes to the common misconception held by White Euro-Canadians that they are somehow capable of "saving" others who have been victimized (Rasmussen, 2002). While I would not go so far as to say that Kim felt she should be a "saviour" to this Aboriginal man who had survived residential schools, it does seem as though she experienced the societal expectation that in this situation she should have been the person exhibiting the most strength.

John described the strength and resilience he witnessed amongst some of the youth on various canoe trips that he led later in his journey as compared to some of the earlier groups that he worked with:

I would say that I saw a far greater degree of hope and just energy and vitality and enthusiasm for what lies ahead... The youth had a really strong cultural identification. ...Some of those students were very actively seeking their traditional language and culture...they practiced the dancing or singing...I think they still had a quite a lot of traditional on-the-land time – whaling is a really big thing with their families. That was really for me, just about starting to see that sort of hope and that sort of energy.

He began to realize that much of the hope and enthusiasm of the youth came from being able to practice their cultural traditions.

Mary was introduced to the importance of traditional languages and witnessed the resilience of a community whose young children were speaking fluently in Cree:

The community was so welcoming and I think it was also neat because talking to people in Waskaganish was my first exposure to the issue of the losing of language and it was awesome, all these little kids were speaking Cree and we learned that further north there was even more Cree...

Together, these examples of strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples remind White Euro-Canadians that Aboriginal peoples across Canada are not victims in need of being saved. Rather, they are proud peoples who have been capable, within their own communities, of preserving dynamic traditions such as dancing, singing, hunting practices and language, despite the colonial adversity they have faced.

ii) Exposure to examples of the resilience of Aboriginal people in the face of adversity.

When Euro-Canadians adjust their perceptions of Aboriginal peoples in such a way as to recognize and acknowledge the strength and resilience of Aboriginal cultures, communities, and individuals, they may begin to interpret issues of Aboriginal injustice in new ways. The participants told of numerous experiences that helped them better recognize the strength of their Aboriginal friends, students, and community members who were forced to respond to and overcome challenging social barriers.

John and Luke both spoke of experiences that led them to witness the harsh realities of life for Aboriginal peoples both on remote reserves and in urban settings:

John: Another element that came out through [the canoe trip with Mishkeegogamang youth] was just the harsh reality that those young folks were living under...and hearing their stories and hearing about their life and the conditions that they lived under.

Luke: I think coming to an urban center in northern Ontario I was exposed to the poverty that some urban Aboriginal people are living in.

The ability of Aboriginal youth and urban community members to thrive in the face of such adversity exemplifies their personal strength and the strength of their communities and cultural traditions.

Kim came to recognize how unresponsive the Euro-Western university setting can be to the cultural needs of Aboriginal students. With reference to a Cree friend at University in Toronto, she explained:

...her integration into the university culture was so hard. She spent all of her time at the First Nations House... a house for First Nations students that offered support and programs and cultural activities. She just wished she could go to school there because she felt right there. ... We talked a lot about how Aboriginal students feel when they come to universities. Because universities are definitely not aware of Aboriginal needs... A lot of attention is paid to international students. That was her observation.

She elaborated on what she learned about the institutional barriers that Aboriginal students face in the university setting and their important work in the fight for recognition of traditional knowledge as a valid and valuable way of knowing:

A lot of the thesis topics [of Aboriginal students] are not respected, are not accepted or not understood. The battle for recognition of traditional knowledge is the plight of most of the Aboriginal grad students. I've learned how difficult it is for Aboriginal students to find a prof that will work with them and then to find a whole bunch of profs that will support their thesis defence or be on their thesis committee. It's just one hurdle after another.

Outside of academia as well, Aboriginal peoples are speaking out against the injustices that they have endured. Kim witnessed the strength of the families of missing Aboriginal women who courageously shared their stories in a campaign for justice.

We were invited to come and listen and participate so that we could hear what is happening. And it just absolutely blew me away. Families came to tell their stories about how their daughter disappeared and how nobody did anything about it. And these were all Aboriginal women. The focus group wanted to know, they wanted to count and name all of the Aboriginal women who have gone missing and are not accounted for and what's the number now, it's like 800, it's atrocious. And so to be a part of that campaign and focus group was remarkable.

After relating this anecdote during the interview, Kim was quick to point out that had these women who had gone missing been White and from southern Ontario, much more would have been done by the police and law enforcement agencies to ensure that they were identified and accounted for. This is yet another example of the privilege that White Euro-Canadians so often take for granted. As Euro-Canadians decolonize, they are increasingly able to recognize that the Western tendency to portray Aboriginal peoples as victims who are oppressed is an inaccurate and offensive representation. Clearly many Aboriginal peoples living in both rural and urban areas do face adversity in many aspects of their lives. However, their ability to respond to such adversity in their own way highlights their strength, courage, and patience. Rather than ignorantly and arrogantly assuming that Aboriginal peoples and communities need help to overcome adversity, White Euro-Canadians need to show respect for the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples. Further, White Euro-Canadians need to consider the ways in which they are implicated in creating the social and institutional barriers that challenge Aboriginal peoples.

Experiences that Facilitate Decolonization Part B:

Relationships with non-Aboriginal peoples

While exposure to Aboriginal culture and building relationships with Aboriginal peoples is an imperative of decolonizing journeys, the role of relationships with non-Aboriginal peoples is also important. Relationships with other non-Aboriginal peoples who are also already on decolonizing journeys can provide a significant source of support for White Euro-Canadians. Participants spoke as well about the desire to invite other non-Aboriginal colleagues, friends and family members onto the decolonizing journey and the impact of their varied reactions to being introduced to the concepts of Eurocentrism and White privilege.

1) Relationships With Non-Aboriginal Allies

Kim clearly articulated the role of allied non-Aboriginal people also on decolonizing journeys in supporting her own journey:

Maybe I've made a mistake or somebody else is going through a decolonization process, so having that relationship where we can talk about that, I think that's a very big part of my process... I think it's so important... like even when I had discussions with you... It was so nice to share things with people who are...interested in learning about the same stuff right now...and I don't know if everyone would understand.

Kim's words point to an aspect of the journey that can be very challenging: As people decolonize, their worldviews shift and as a result it can be difficult or frustrating to relate to others who do not seem to recognize Eurocentrism or care about disrupting it (Jensen, 2006). Developing a relationship with someone else who has had resonant experiences and who understands similar ideas can be helpful.

Kim also commented on the importance of having a Euro-Canadian role model for guidance when learning to decolonize. She felt lucky to meet such a person when she moved to the Northwest Territories:

I was very lucky to have worked with Amanda [a non-Aboriginal education consultant] for so long when I first arrived here because I was a blank slate really, especially to all of the issues here in the Northwest Territories – they're quite different than what they would be in Ontario. She is an ally. She is very well respected.

Mary, on the other hand, realized that she has lacked a Euro-Canadian mentor in her decolonizing process and wishes that she had been able to develop such a relationship:

I haven't had an educational role model to work with. ...if I want to seek people out there would probably be some people there. Like I can think of Daniel [a White educator significantly engaged in decolonizing his teaching practice] for instance. If I'd had the opportunity to work with him more I think he would have been a huge role model for me.

No doubt more Euro-Canadian mentors who are already decolonizing their practice, and who can assist educators newer to the journey are required, which underlines the significant need for the development and implementation of decolonizing pedagogies in teacher education.

The process of coming to recognize deeply rooted racist and Eurocentric assumptions within one's own worldview can raise some extremely difficult emotions. The opportunity to speak with someone who has experienced and understands the extent of these emotions can be a very important part of the journey. Such a relationship may provide an outlet to talk about having made embarrassing mistakes, work through confusing or contradictory ideas and gain new knowledge. It may also provide direction and inspiration to those who are at earlier stages of the journey.

II) Being a Mentor and Inviting Others onto the Journey

While some participants themselves seemed to be in search of mentors to learn from, they in turn have also served as role models for others and have learned a great deal by inviting other White, Euro-Canadian friends, students and family members to engage in decolonizing experiences.

While working at a college in the Northwest Territories, Kim encountered a situation where she and an Aboriginal colleague witnessed a culturally offensive act by a White visitor who was unaware of the inappropriateness of her behaviour:

This other [Euro-Canadian] woman from the community who came to join us [in a Nordic walking fitness program at the college]... She jumped in [during warm-ups] and pretended to drum dance...A lot of the students were really uncomfortable...I quickly changed the activity...The teacher spoke with the students shortly after it happened and they sort of addressed it themselves ...Nobody ended up talking to the woman who did it...And so I went and talked to her afterwards. I had asked the teachers to do it and they're just so busy planning for the next day, and I said, "Do you mind if I go and talk to her?" and they're, like, "Sure." They were kind of happy because they were so busy but they also knew that it would be important to tell her. And so I talked to her and she cried and wanted to apologize to the students... So anyway, I thought that that's a part of my decolonization too is not letting things slide and not being afraid to tell people. I said, "I know you have very good intentions." And she said, I'm the most non-racist person ever! I love all people...I respect all cultures"...and I just told her, "I understand that..." and she was very defensive and I just said, "I understand that, but sometimes good intentions are not enough."

Kim came to realize through this experience that Aboriginal people must not be made responsible to teach White people how to act respectfully. Although Kim needed to be reminded by her Aboriginal colleagues that they had other more important tasks to focus

on at the time than to correct this woman's offensive behaviour, she did quickly take on the work of addressing the issue herself. Kim recognized that part of her decolonizing journey is to speak up in the face of Eurocentrism and explain to other White Canadians what it means to be culturally respectful.

Kim also had the opportunity to witness her mom embark on a decolonizing path as a result of the experiences Kim herself was having:

All [my mom] does is watch tv. Since I moved to the north she watches APTN, night and day... She just wants to learn about everything about the north. ...She really likes to watch [APTN] because she knows that I go to [communities like the ones she sees on tv]. It's really great because my mom is decolonizing...because of the show, and because of me. And because I went to school in southern Ontario last year and spent more time at my mom's house, I would come home and tell her stories about ...the same stories I'm telling you, especially about residential schools and ...she bawled her eyes out. ...It's really interesting to have these discussions with her. And some stuff I think she's not ready for or she's not interested in talking about, but she's so empathetic.

Kim found the opportunity to share decolonizing moments with her mom to be very rewarding. Her statement provides an important reminder of the need to also respect the journeys of others. Kim recognized that her mom would proceed in her own time. By knowing and respecting the limit to her mom's readiness to understand, rather than trying to explain it to her all at once, Kim avoided overwhelming her mom. In fact, Kim also described how a person could become closed and defensive if they are not yet ready for or feel supported in the decolonizing journey:

I guess I just continue to share my process with people who I think are interested and I think will understand. I've tried with people who aren't interested and don't understand and recognize that I'm kind of barking up the wrong tree

sometimes, because I elicit anger. I have elicited anger in a family member before.

She indicated that while such instances of resistance are frustrating, rather than become discouraged by the angry or disinterested reactions of others, she tries to recognize them as reminders of just how deeply colonized we all are.

Luke also described a situation where he was not entirely sure how hard to push his students to think about a decolonizing concept or what their reactions were when he did push harder:

With my students I was trying to push the concept of, well, how would this guest speaker be qualitatively different from what we've always done as a way of having the Aboriginal 'Other' come to the gym for an hour and talk to the whole school in a really decontextualized kind of way. Maybe some of them understood what I was getting at, but I know it was actually one of the first times in the class where I tried to push an idea harder than just a little bit. Because I really wanted people to engage with the idea that, I think, that just having a guest speaker come to your class is probably not enough to be called decolonizing. And I think some people got it but I think a lot of people were a bit bemused.

Kim's and Luke's examples speak to the importance of developing supportive and mutually respectful relationships with people who may be invited on the decolonizing journey. Indeed no one person can force another to "change" his or her beliefs. Yet, it is the responsibility of non-Aboriginal allies to lead by example and to engage in the difficult work of challenging the Eurocentric ignorance of other non-Aboriginal people.

III) Relationships in Which to Celebrate One's Own Cultural Heritage.

Finding supportive relationships with other White people who share similar decolonizing journeys, and also inviting other White people on the journey are not the

only kinds of relationships that are important for White Euro-Canadians to build with one another. It is equally important to build relationships with friends and family, that help us to celebrate our own cultural rituals, be they traditions from a particular ethnic heritage or those created within one's own immediate family.

Through the process of decolonization, it is quite tempting to become very critical of "all things Western." Kim explained this phenomenon:

At one point I realized I'm so critical of everything. I still feel that way. Nothing is good enough now, like I look for the wrong in everything I read and the glitches. I can probably find something wrong in everything and I don't need to always do that all the time.

In striving to see Eurocentrism and White privilege more clearly, it is tempting to create monolithic categories of what it means to be White/Western/Euro-Canadian or what it means to be Aboriginal. White people, as they decolonize, learn to recognize the multiplicities that exist within Aboriginal cultures. Yet, the refinement of their critical decolonizing lens can obscure the fact that multiplicities exist as well in Western culture. Sometimes it is necessary to relearn that not "all things Western" are bad.

The time Kim has spent up north in an Aboriginal community has helped her to value her own cultural heritage and traditions:

I feel very pulled to my home and my traditions ...and my family and my culture now... [Being in an Aboriginal community] made me very proud of being Polish. When I do a presentation I always say who I am, where I'm from, and where my parents are from. And I just think that's so important because that's what a visitor does [in Aboriginal communities]. No matter where they're from they always recognize their culture and their family and who they are. I just think it's so special. I definitely learned to do that here, because people are so proud of their culture here, and I thought ...I haven't been proud of my culture the way I think I should be. ... My older cousins lived with my

grandparents so they had a different experience that I'm quite jealous of. I feel like I missed out. I'm angry at myself that I would not look forward to visits with my grandparents as much as I did as I got older. You're just not engaged in your own family, your own culture until later...until you mature and recognize the importance of that. Now I find that I want to participate in all those events that my family does.

At times it seems as though Euro-Canadians are drawn to rich Aboriginal cultural traditions because they have lost or do not recognize the traditions they have within their own families and cultures. For Kim, however, the experience of immersion in an Aboriginal community taught her about the importance of knowing one's own heritage and locating one's own cultural roots.

There are many contemporary examples of cultural revival taking place within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal cultural revival is often described as playing an important role for Aboriginal peoples in their processes of healing from the experiences of colonization (Graveline, 1998; Smith, 1999). While the decolonizing journey is in part a process of learning about and respecting the cultural traditions of others, another aspect is learning about and embracing the positive cultural traditions from within one's own family and history (Bishop, 2002). At a recent professional development seminar of the American Educational Research Association (2009), I asked Dr. Oscar Kawagley, a well-respected Yupiak scholar from Alaska, to help me understand what it might mean for non-Indigenous peoples to engage with Indigenous knowledges. He responded by saying, first and foremost, to "be myself" and that perhaps engagement with Indigenous knowledges and peoples would reawaken within me ancestral memories of a time when my own people lived in greater harmony with the natural world. This is perhaps an important lesson Euro-Canadians might learn from Aboriginal peoples.

Experiences That Facilitate Decolonization Part C: Time on the Land

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

Knowledge of Indigenous peoples is embodied in dynamic languages that reflect the sounds of the specific ecosystems where they live and maintain continuous relationships.
...All Indigenous knowledge flows from the same source: the relationship of Indigenous peoples with the global flux, their kinship with other living creatures, the life energies as embodied in their environments, and their kinship with the spirit forces of the earth. (p. 128)

While they certainly do not hold Aboriginal worldviews, it may be that the participants' reverence for the natural world and their understandings of humans as "inseparable from the land" created a point of resonance between the micro-culture of outdoor environmental educators and the worldviews of many Aboriginal cultures, which in turn could have been one of the reasons why participants were particularly receptive to decolonizing moments.

In their editorial about working together across cultural differences and knowing themselves in relation to one another, Fitznor, Haig-Brown and Moses (2000) quoted Wilson: "*Wetaskiwin does not mean we own this land. It means you too can come in and live here in peace. We share this land together*" (p. 75). They stated that "this

understanding of the land that incorporates its spirituality and all its other complexities is where we begin our work of decolonizing” (p.75).

Graveline (1998) also argues that White people can decolonize by engaging with the land, personally and with students. She suggests moving a group outside so that they may experience a physical reconnection to our Earth Mother:

We are told by our Elders: ‘Go out into nature in a quiet way. Listen. What do you feel from the earth, the trees, the sky, the sun, the rocks, all the natural elements around you?’ ...we are all interconnected by a form of environmental/ecological consciousness, which is becoming increasingly necessary to revitalize as our Earth Mother is dying from overuse and abuse. (p. 184)

Despite their reverence for the land, which might resonate with the worldviews of Aboriginal peoples, outdoor environmental educators are often not aware of, or they may choose to ignore, the historic and contemporary social politics that impact the traditional people of the land, and by extension, the land itself. It often seems very easy for White folks to “love” the land but difficult for them to “love” the people of that land (Korteweg, 2008, personal communication). Luke described this interconnection that he feels outdoor educators need to learn to recognize:

I think there is an intimate connection between outdoor education and the land and the interconnections between colonization and the land and decolonization and the land – there are sort of parallels ...if there’s no acknowledgement that the land we’re teaching on is stolen, then the teaching isn’t really as valid or it’s like there’s a lie attached to that. I think the aim of outdoor education is never really going to be achieved unless there’s sort of this honest acknowledgement that the place where we live wasn’t always ours.

Kim first began to think about the politics of the land when she was traveling in South America:

When I would travel through South America I would... wonder if the land was a part of the initial guerilla warfare and I would ask those questions to the people I would travel with and they didn't always know the answers. I would often ask, "Is this ELN territory or is this FARC territory?"

It was not until much later in her decolonizing journey that she began to ask the same questions while traveling in Canada. She described the impact of asking those questions while on the land:

I started questioning, specifically, how in outdoor education I would travel the land but most of the time the goals of the outdoor program were interpersonal and intrapersonal - those were the things I tended to focus on in my courses. And never was it a huge focus to really think about - "Where am I traveling, whose land am I traveling, what people still travel this land, where do they live and what's the history of this area?" None of that had been a priority wherever I worked; therefore, it was never a priority for me. And so I began to ask those questions of myself and specifically my outdoor educational practice. And my big observation was, "God, how much I've missed." So...that was disappointing but also enlightening as well because now I think I do things quite differently.

Kim's anecdote describes the paradox that exists in the micro-culture of outdoor environmental education. On one hand, outdoor environmental education exemplifies a strong commitment to community building and the sort of interpersonal and intrapersonal work that was described by Tompkins (2002) and Graveline (1998) as central to decolonizing. As well, there is clearly a strong connectedness to the natural world, which resonates to a certain extent with Aboriginal peoples' worldviews. These two factors might make outdoor environmental education a fertile site for the project of decolonization of White Euro-Canadians. On the other hand, the missing link, which could be key to understanding why outdoor environmental education remains

fundamentally Eurocentric, is the ignorance of White outdoor environmental educators about the interconnectedness of the land and the traditional people of the land, including the historic and contemporary politics of the land.

In the following four anecdotes, Kim elaborated on some of the specific ways in which her practice as an outdoor educator was influenced as a result of asking questions about the traditional people of the land where she was living and traveling, and as a result of spending time with Aboriginal people on the land:

...so the way that we had to plan that youth trip was so different than any trip I had been a part of elsewhere. Most of the youth were Aboriginal and they were all from a community called Fort Simpson and so they were not going to eat this food on the menu that I usually pack out.

...Many of the youth were non-swimmers and the fact that life jackets just aren't a part of the culture posed another challenge with respect to insurance and liability. There is a high incidence of drownings in Aboriginal communities in the north, yet Elders never wore lifejackets and Elders continue to say, "We don't need to wear a life jacket."

The way the day ran on the trip... the kids are used to this backwards time... I guess White people call it backwards time... I don't know if all the communities call it backwards time, but some of my youth this summer called it backwards time. They basically are up all night and then go to bed... They wake up at like 2 pm or 4 pm or something. It's the evening and through the night that they're most productive and most active and you kind of have to be because it's the midnight sun.

...the water purification question... Jeremy [my Aboriginal co-instructor] felt really uncomfortable that we were being asked by the Euro-Western organization to purify the water and he said it's quite disrespectful to go to someone's land and assume that their water is dirty. And he himself had never... he's done at least one canoe trip every summer of his life since he was a baby and never cleaned the water, never purified the water, no matter where he's gone. And so that was a very big issue for him... It was really

interesting...we talked about it so much. And I finally did it. I finally felt comfortable dipping my water bottle in the river and not purifying it and feeling ok with it. It was a huge step for me.

Interestingly, the preceding narratives describe learning that took place partly as a result of the fact that Kim was working with Aboriginal co-instructors and or Aboriginal youth, and partly from the fact that they were engaged in activities that took place on the land, activities that were influenced by long-standing cultural traditions of how to live well and travel safely on the land. These experiences illustrate the interconnections between the land and the human cultural traditions that stem from the land and remind outdoor environmental educators that learning to live well on the land includes learning to live well with the people of the land.

Evidently, spending time on the land is an important part of the decolonizing journey. The participants' feelings of interconnectedness to and reverence for the land may have initially led to feelings of kinship with Aboriginal peoples who held similar beliefs. Through their decolonizing journeys, however, they were able to recognize to varying extents their earlier ignorance about the traditional peoples of the land. They began to wonder about the social history and contemporary politics of the traditional peoples who were intimately connected to the land as well. By spending time on the land with Aboriginal students and co-instructors, the participants encountered situations where the conventional practices of their Euro-Western organizations were evidently culturally inappropriate.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

All lands in Canada are the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples and part of our history is about colonization by European settlers of Aboriginal peoples and the land. As such, all Canadian land or places are deeply, historically and politically, Aboriginal. While outdoor environmental education has increasingly recognized the interconnections between socio-cultural issues and environmental crises, I argue that scholars in the field should pay greater attention to issues of Aboriginal social justice, specifically. By building allied relationships with Aboriginal peoples and communities and learning about Aboriginal history, cultural traditions, story-telling, and Aboriginal epistemologies, non-Aboriginal educators may start to acknowledge that current environmental controversies are also Aboriginal controversies and realize that greater movement towards decolonizing outdoor environmental education is needed.

In his framework for critical place-based education, Gruenewald (2003, 2008) refers to *decolonization* and *re-inhabitation* as the two principles for shifting environmental education towards a more culturally diverse and critical environmental education. In Canada, “decolonization” has a highly political significance with numerous socio-political implications. For most non-Aboriginal Canadians, decolonization is an uncomfortable and difficult, yet deeply important process, part of reconciliation for the ongoing tragic legacies of residential schooling, the sixties scoop of illegal off-reserve adoptions, and long court battles for recognition of First Nations’ traditional and cultural rights. Despite references to decolonization, Gruenewald has only recently begun to point to Aboriginal scholars’ perspectives in his own work (2008) and he has yet to describe

specifically how non-Aboriginal environmental educators might build relationships of alliance with local Aboriginal peoples.

As with Gruenewald's lack of focus on Aboriginal peoples, Bowers et al. (2001) work on eco-justice does not delve into the specific contexts of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. Ecojustice calls for the redress of environmental racism, the renewal of non-commoditized traditions, and responsibility to future generations, all of which *already* take place in Aboriginal contexts. Moreover, Indigenous education often disrupts both the social and ecological injustices stemming from colonization while emphasizing the importance of traditional and intergenerational knowledge renewal and the contextualization of knowledge in particular communities and geographic places. But where is the explicit mention of Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal ways of knowing in critical place-based and eco-justice education? How are these scholars demonstrating the process of decolonizing in their own environmental education approaches?

I am working to understand my own role as a White middle-class educator in this volatile time of continuing land exploitation for resources on traditional territories, a federal Official Apology by the government for the residential school era, the start of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, and greater Aboriginal activism to protect Aboriginal lands. We are in a time of dire need of re-conceptualizing Aboriginal-settler relations, environmental politics and, most certainly, outdoor environmental education specifically. Like the participants in this study, I am working to decolonize myself in a slow and long process, fortunate to have the support and generous friendship of Aboriginal colleagues, graduate students and community members, but also aware of the incredible privileges I carry. With privilege comes the responsibility to change, as much as possible, the

ongoing colonial legacies and discrimination in public schooling, faculties of education and in outdoor environmental education.

As the testimonies of the participants demonstrate, however, the decolonizing journey for White educators is complex. How do non-Aboriginal educators ask for reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples when we continue to encroach, degrade and damage (often beyond repair) their traditional lands, which in turn threatens, ignores, or disrespects their traditional ways of life and culture? How can outdoor environmental educators, who claim great respect and even reverence for nature and for the land on which they live and teach, expect eco-justice when they often disrespectfully ignore the traditional people of the land and the injustices they face as they courageously resist industrial “development” and environmental destruction of their traditional territories? Indigenous scholar Battiste (2000) reminds us that Aboriginal worldviews consider Aboriginal people, their language, and knowledge systems as deeply interconnected with the land: to show respect to the land requires respecting the traditional people of the land.

In response to these complexities, I turn to the findings of this study and extend Gruenewald’s (2008) principles into an outdoor environmental education context, recognizing that we live and teach on Aboriginal traditional land and as such need to consider how we might build relationships of alliance with Aboriginal peoples of the places where we live. I encourage non-Aboriginal outdoor environmental educators to critically (re)-examine their teaching practices and re-think their pedagogies on Aboriginal traditional territories. I would hope that through such reflexivity educators might come to recognize historic and contemporary land politics and learn from the distinct land-based epistemologies and traditions of local Aboriginal peoples. Leesa

Fawcett (2009) describes a field course that took place in the Australian outback that encouragingly points to a decolonizing approach to outdoor environmental education.

She writes,

...we were a diverse ethnic group journeying, with permission from Aboriginal elders, through a land wrought with competing claims by Aboriginal people and global mining companies. Together, we witnessed bounding rock wallabies, poisonous snakes, the wonder of rock paintings, emotional growth and emotional meltdowns. Afterwards, outside the classroom, long after the term ended, people stayed in touch as they were flung out into peace marches, teaching, parenthood, environmental activism, love affairs, and more walking in the bush and around the world.... Our very act of bush walking...created a messy, fragile interdependence and political statement....The actions of teachers and learners designing and attending a bush course can be seen as stark political resistance to the corporatization, social control, and commodification of knowledge that is besieging many universities. (p. 233)

Creating a decolonizing learning experience can be challenging and Fawcett cautions that, “Vigilance is required always in our resistance to cultural domination in teaching and learning situation; such as the ubiquity of Euro-centric-only curriculum” (p. 234).

This study contributes to the existing literature by broadening and deepening conceptualizations of both critical place-based education and decolonization for White Euro-Canadians. This study found that *decolonization* (or *decoloniz-ing*, as is perhaps a more appropriate term to describe an initiative that is life-long) is a gradual process of deep change where educators grapple with: recognizing the pervasiveness of Eurocentric colonial attitudes in contemporary social institutions and in their own assumptions and practices; recognizing privilege; overcoming anxiety; and learning to act in ways that do not continue the injustices, oppressions, attitudes of dominance, or political entitlement that non-Aboriginal culture is soaked in. *Re-inhabitation* (or *inhabit-ing*, since non-

Aboriginal people are often in a beginning stage) is a politically loaded term that outdoor environmental educators need to consider humbly and in consultation with Aboriginal peoples. I believe that the process of *in-habiting* by settler-Canadians needs to include building relationships and alliances with Aboriginal communities by acknowledging that we live and teach on Aboriginal traditional territory, by studying Aboriginal history and contemporary politics, by acknowledging and working for Aboriginal traditional rights, by recognizing traditional knowledge as legitimate knowledge, and Aboriginal worldviews as distinct and equal in value to Euro-Western worldviews.

For participants, the concurrent processes of *decolonizing* and *inhabiting* was conceptualized as a continuous, life-long “decolonizing journey” that was grounded in early life experiences, shaped (at first unknowingly) by exposure to Aboriginal culture and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people, and subsequently catalyzed by the pivotal turning point of becoming aware of and articulating their own processes of decolonizing. Participants invariably faced anxiety and uncertainty as they first began to recognize their own Eurocentrism and White privilege that was associated with fears of exposing ignorance, offending, and creating further harm. Gradually they became increasingly able to recognize more subtle manifestations of Eurocentrism in social institutions and the assumptions and behaviours of their own family, friends, and themselves.

Their decolonizing journeys were facilitated by three main factors: exposure to Aboriginal culture and first voice perspectives; relationships with allied non-Aboriginal people; and time on the land. Participants were immensely impacted by: meaningful relationships with Aboriginal students and co-instructors and the time they spent in

Aboriginal communities; exposure to Aboriginal perspectives and pedagogies in academic environments; and exposure to examples of the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples. Equally important for the participants were their relationships with non-Aboriginal allies, some of whom served as peers and/or mentors who could offer supportive understanding about decolonizing and provide direction or examples about how to decolonize one's teaching practice. At other times participants found themselves impacted by their own respons/ability to teach other non-Aboriginal people about respectful relationships with Aboriginal people. For some participants, the decolonizing journey has led them to a greater appreciation of their own family and cultural traditions. Finally, and perhaps most significant to outdoor environmental education was the decolonizing impact of spending time on the land *with* Aboriginal people and acknowledging that the land on which they live, travel and teach is someone else's traditional territory. This acknowledgement may be the key catalyst for outdoor environmental educators (who are "ripe" to embark on decolonizing journeys with their established values of human-nature connectedness and intra- and inter-personal relationships) to recognize the Eurocentrism of their field and begin to decolonize their practice.

I hope that environmental educators who are engaged in reintegrating socio-cultural and environmental education will look beyond the prominent Western frameworks such as a critical pedagogy of place and ecojustice. I encourage non-Aboriginal outdoor environmental educators to decolonize their own pedagogical approaches by turning their attention to Indigenous directions for culturally responsible ways of teaching in/of the land with Aboriginal peoples. How might environmental

educators humbly learn from pedagogies that have grown from the places – the people and the land – from the people who speak the Indigenous language of the land – where we are living, where Aboriginal communities have always lived since time immemorial? These pedagogies *already* centre Aboriginal epistemologies honouring human-land-spirit interdependent relationships, and examples and research of this type of environmental education include: an “Ecology of Indigenous Education” (Cajete, 1994), “A Pedagogy of the Land” (Haig-Brown & Dannenman, 2003), “A Medicine Wheel Pedagogy” (Toulouse, 2008), and, “A Pedagogy of All Relations” (Bishop, 2007).

With this study and its more substantive conceptualization of decolonization of White Euro-Canadians as a life-long and complex journey, the questions remain: What is the role of teacher education programs in decolonizing non-Aboriginal educators? How might White, Euro-Canadian outdoor educators already teaching in the public school systems and outdoor environmental education organizations become politicized in such a way as to be able to acknowledge that they live and teach on Aboriginal traditional land? How might engagement with Aboriginal land-centred pedagogies prepare allied non-Aboriginal educators to become role models for their non-Aboriginal students and colleagues? And how might allied non-Aboriginal environmental educators work to centre Indigenous pedagogies while respecting Indigenous peoples as the keepers of traditional knowledge?

While reflecting on my own processes of learning to decolonize and to live well in this place, I have been perpetually curious as to how the involvement of non-Aboriginal environmental educators working as allies in cases of Aboriginal justice might be perceived by Aboriginal community members and activists. After one large rally in

Toronto, Chief Donny Morris of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (March 2008), who was sentenced to 6 months in prison for his role in peacefully defending his community's right to say "No" to mineral exploration on their land, was interviewed from his cell in the Thunder Bay jail. He offered the following observation about the shifting in Aboriginal – non-Aboriginal relations:

When you think of when the settlers first came, they tried to slaughter us. Why? For the mineral riches on our land like gold and now it is happening again. I have been thinking about what it means that non-Indians are organizing all this support for us. I am thinking about that a lot here. I haven't seen this kind of thing in the past. It's like all of you are becoming Indians. The Canadian government tried to assimilate us for generations and now it is the opposite that is happening. You are all starting to think like us about the Earth.

I am also reminded of what Winona LaDuke (1999), the American-Anishinaabe activist who fights for land justice, had to say about Aboriginal peoples' activism in the protection of the land and the role for more non-Aboriginal allies:

We have seen the great trees felled, the wolves taken for bounty, and the fish stacked rotting like cordwood. Those memories compel us, and the return of the descendants of these predators provoke us to stand again, stronger, and hopefully with more allies. We are the ones who stand up to the land eaters, the tree eaters, the destroyers and culture eaters. (p. 121)

Indeed non-Aboriginal environmental educators, in particular, have a significant role to play in helping future generations of non-Aboriginal students learn to be allies, to *decolonize* their Western worldviews and learn to *inhabit* their communities through respectful relationships with Aboriginal peoples.



Finally, I share this photograph taken from the top of Oiseau Rock, a stunning 500-foot cliff located just upriver from Petawawa on the Ottawa River. I have been visiting this special place every summer since I was two years old. As a child it was a place to spend time with my parents, family, friends and playmates. Travelling by sailboat, we enjoyed many family traditions here and at nearby spots on the river. We gathered blueberries, tumbled and fumbled around islands, splashed in the cool water and warmed up in the sun. My mom would send me on treasure hunts and I would scour the nearby beach for snail shells and clamshells and zillions of rocks. At night we shared food and laughter around the campfire and I loved the tradition of marvelling at the night sky while wrapped inside my dad's big wool sweater. At least once a summer we would make the twenty-minute trek along the winding path to the top of the cliff where we took time to soak in the view of the sweeping valley, and swim in the spring-fed lake that was set back from the edge of the cliff.

Even as a young child, I had a sense that there was a long history of people being at this special place. While I do not know what fostered my awareness of the stories of this place, I can clearly remember walking the trail to the top of the cliff and wondering who had walked the same trail hundreds and thousands of years before me and who might have gazed out over the rolling hills in the distance. I recall hearing about Chief Tessouat, a powerful Algonquin Chief who, hundreds of years earlier, had controlled trade at a location downriver. At some point I became aware, possibly from a family friend, that Oiseau Rock was an important site of the Algonquin people. There is to this day a gigantic naturally occurring statue of rocks at the base of the cliff that resembles a bird, perhaps an eagle, raven or vulture. I recall learning that there is an Aboriginal story about this place that involves a young girl, her baby and a bird, although I hesitate to describe it here as I have no idea about its details, origins, authenticity or purpose. Despite this vague sense of Oiseau Rock and the Ottawa Valley as being connected to the history of Algonquin people, I had almost no interaction (that I was aware of) with local Algonquin people or contemporary Algonquin culture while I was growing up, aside from a one-time visit to the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation community, which I knew of at the time, Eurocentrically, as “the reserve at Golden Lake.”

Later, during university, while writing about my experiences on the Ottawa River, I became aware of the existence of pictographs at Oiseau Rock and subsequently found 5 or 6 at the base of the cliff, now increasingly and devastatingly being covered in spray-painted graffiti. Finally, as a teacher, I twice took students to Oiseau Rock by canoe during a re-created voyageur-style expedition, the purpose of which was to learn about the history of the fur-trade. While sitting on the beach we read from historic journals by

European “explorers” MacKenzie, Harmon, and others, who had written from the exact same location. While this exercise was in no way comprehensively decolonizing, it did give us the opportunity as a class to begin to discuss the Eurocentrism of these written records and to begin to ask questions about what really might have taken place on this land and what other perspectives are missing.

Throughout my experience as a graduate student learning to decolonize more deeply, I have reflected often on this special place, the role it has played in my life, and the dynamic meaning it has held for me. Now, when I think of Oiseau Rock, it really helps me to reflect on my own decolonizing journey, the nature of my relationship to my home-place and how my understanding of what has happened in that place has gradually shifted. While I have a deep relationship to the land at Oiseau Rock, and some sense of the social and political history of that land, the piece that is evidently missing for me is a relationship with Algonquin people in the local community. Overall, my decolonizing journey has indeed involved learning from and building relationships with Aboriginal people in a variety of settings, yet for the most part this has occurred in places other than the Ottawa Valley. During the past two years while I have been living in Anishnaabe territory in Thunder Bay and building relationships with Anishnaabe friends, colleagues and professors, I have been acutely aware of my lack of relationship with the Aboriginal people of the place where I grew up and I have felt overwhelmed at the prospect of establishing those relationships on my own, in a new context.

Recently, I was fortunate to experience what could be a pivotal moment on my own journey. As co-presenter of the keynote address with my supervisor, Dr Lisa Korteweg, I attended a professional development day for (mainly non-Aboriginal)

elementary school teachers from school boards across Eastern Ontario about implementing the *Ontario Aboriginal Policy Framework (2007)* in their schools and developing culturally responsive approaches to teaching. The event was co-sponsored by both the public and Catholic school boards of Renfrew County and the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. During one presentation by a female Algonquin teacher (who was approximately my own age and therefore would likely have grown up at the same time as me, close to my community), I was struck with the realization that this was the first time in my life that I was listening to the traditional people of my home place speak about what it means to live and teach respectfully on that particular land. I am grateful to have had this brief opportunity, close to home, and know that it will compel me in the future to continue my decolonizing journey ... I have much more listening and learning to...

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APPENDIX A: Telephone Script Used During the Recruitment of Participants

Hello _____ (name of potential participant)

This is Emily Root. Given our prior work experience together in the field of outdoor environmental education I thought that you would be interested to hear about the study I am about to undertake and I have identified you as someone who might like to consider joining the study as a participant. Please allow me to explain:

The purpose of this study is to examine the life histories of White outdoor, environmental educators who are engaged in the process of disrupting Eurocentrism in their own practices and worldviews. The study would explore the nature of “decolonizing moments” that may have occurred throughout your life. In addition to gaining insight into the decolonizing journey, the research process itself is intended to serve as an experience that will further disrupt our (researcher and participants) Western worldview. You have been selected as a potential participant because of your demonstrated, ongoing attempt to disrupt Eurocentrism, engage with Indigenous perspectives and because of your experience working in the field of outdoor and environmental education.

As a participant you would be involved in a 1-2 hour artistic endeavor and two, 1-3 hour interviews (one on one with the researcher). The research would take place sometime between September 2008 and March 2009.

If you have any further questions now I would be happy to answer them. If you are interested in reading a more detailed outline of the study and what exactly is required of participants I would be more than happy to send you an information letter and consent form for you to read and consider.

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX B: Information Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a qualitative study entitled, “*This Land is Our Land? This Land is Your Land? Exploring the Decolonizing Journeys of White Outdoor Environmental Educators*”. The purpose of this study is to examine the life histories of White outdoor, environmental educators who are engaged in the process of disrupting Eurocentrism in their own practices and worldviews. The study would identify and inquire into the nature of “decolonizing moments” that occurred throughout the lives of the participants and the researcher. In addition to gaining insight into the decolonizing journey, the research process itself is intended to serve as an experience that will further disrupt our (researcher and participants) Western worldview. You have been selected as a potential participant because of your demonstrated, ongoing attempt to disrupt Eurocentrism, engage with Indigenous perspectives and because of your experience working in the field of outdoor and environmental education.

The study will be conducted by me, Emily Root. I am a Master of Education student at Lakehead University. The project will be supervised by Dr. Lisa Korteweg, professor at the Faculty of Education, at Lakehead University. Should you choose to participate in the study, your participation would be entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any part of the study and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

During the study you will be asked to:

- create a visual representation of your life history using a variety of art materials. In this exercise you would attempt to identify moments or influences in your life that may have contributed to your current engagement with Indigenous peoples, lands and perspectives and your commitment to disrupting Eurocentrism. (This task will require approximately 1 hour of your time.)
- assemble relevant “artifacts” of these decolonizing life events: photos, maps, letters, emails, journals, a paddle, etc., any object that will help to elicit memories and enrich the narrative. (This will require a minimum of approximately 1 hour of your time.)
- participate in the first interview, during which you will be asked to explain life history events as they relate to your current involvement in disrupting Eurocentrism and engaging with Indigenous peoples and perspectives. (This interview will last approximately 1-3 hours and will take place by phone, video-conference, or in person at a convenient location of your choice.)
- participate in the second interview, during which you will be asked to review the data collected during the first interview and to clarify, reflect or elaborate on this data. During this meeting you will also be asked to reflect on your experience of the research process itself. (This interview will last approximately 1-3 hours and will take place by phone, video-conference, or in person at a location of your choice.)

- participate in informal correspondence by phone, email or in person throughout the research period. (The frequency and length of such correspondence depends on your availability and interest in participating beyond the two initial interviews.)

All data for the study will be collected between September 2008 and March 2009. If you consent, data for all formal and informal interviews may be recorded by video, audio, still photographs or written notes by the researcher. Photographs and video or audio recording will occur only if you have given your explicit consent. Other data for the study may include email correspondence and photographs of your life history artwork and artifacts.

There is no foreseeable risk or harm associated with participation in this study. You will not be identified in any recorded data or publicly disseminated information. You will be referred to using a pseudonym of your choice. Should you wish to be named and waive your right to privacy and confidentiality, you will be required to provide written evidence, witnessed by a third party, to this effect. Should you consent to being recorded by video or audio for the purpose of data collection, or should you provide self-identifying artifacts such as still photographs, etc., you will be given the choice whether or not you consent to the sharing of these images, artifacts and visual/audio recordings in representations of the research such as presentations and publications. Consent for this sort of sharing will not be assumed and will be obtained on an individual basis prior to such use of the images, artifacts or voice recordings.

All electronic or multimedia data collected during this study will be downloaded and stored on a secured hard-drive (not connected to the Internet). All information and text that you provide will remain confidential and securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. During this time the researcher and her supervisor, Lisa Korteweg, would be the only individuals with access to the raw data. After the 7-year period, all multimedia data (electronic, notes, or tape) will be destroyed. The findings and analysis of this project will be made available to you at your request upon the completion of the study.

I sincerely look forward to your participation in this exciting and critically important research endeavour. If you have any questions concerning this study, I can be reached through email: eroot@lakeheadu.ca. My supervisor, Dr. Lisa Korteweg can be reached at her office by email: lkortewe@lakeheadu.ca or by phone: (807) 343-8174.

Thank you sincerely for considering participation in this study.

Emily Root

Contact Information:

Researcher: Board Emily Root Master of Education student Faculty of Education eroot@lakeheadu.ca	Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Lisa Korteweg Faculty of Education (807) 343-8174 lkortewe@lakeheadu.ca	Research Ethics Lakehead University (807) 343-8283
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APPENDIX C: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

I, _____ have read and understood the covering letter of the study entitled, *This Land is Our Land? This Land is Your Land? Exploring the Decolonizing Journeys of White Outdoor Environmental Educators*, by **Emily Root**. I do agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I will be involved in the following phases and procedures:

- create a visual representation of your life history using a variety of art materials. In this exercise you would attempt to identify moments or influences in your life that may have contributed to your current engagement with Indigenous peoples, lands and perspectives and your commitment to disrupting Eurocentrism. (This task will require approximately 1 hour of your time.)
- assemble relevant “artifacts” of these decolonizing life events: photos, maps, letters, emails, journals, a paddle, etc., any object that will help to elicit memories and enrich the narrative. (This will require a minimum of approximately 1 hour of your time.)
- participate in the first interview, during which you will be asked to explain life history events as they relate to your current involvement in disrupting Eurocentrism and engaging with Indigenous peoples and perspectives. (This interview will last approximately 1-3 hours and will take place by phone, video-conference, or in person at a convenient location of your choice.)
- participate in the second interview, during which you will be asked to review the data collected during the first interview and to clarify, reflect or elaborate on this data. During this meeting you will also be asked to reflect on your experience of the research process itself. (This interview will last approximately 1-3 hours and will take place by phone, video-conference, or in person at a convenient location of your choice.)
- participate in informal correspondence by phone, email or in person throughout the research period. (The frequency and length of such correspondence depends on your availability and interest in participating beyond the two initial interviews.)
- I agree that the interviews may be recorded by audio, video or still photography. I understand that these recordings and photographs will not be shared publicly unless the researcher obtains my written consent. Should I (the participant) so desire, these audio and video recordings and/or photographs may be shared in representations of the completed research at presentations and in publications ONLY IF I have given my written consent to the researcher prior to their use.

I understand that all raw data will be destroyed after a 7-year period. I am aware that I may withdraw at any time from participating in this research project, even after signing this form, and that I may

choose not to answer any question. Any information that is collected about me during this study will be kept confidential, and if the results are published, I will not be identified in any way unless I write to the researcher to request my identification. I am aware that the research findings will be made available to me in writing upon request once the study is complete. I have discussed these details and issues with the researcher of the study, Emily Root.

Signature of Participant

Date

I have explained the nature and parameters of this study to the participant and believe they have understood.

Signature of Researcher

Date