Teaching Through the Tensions:

Dwelling in Multiple Accountabilities and Responsibilities as a Scholar-Activist Educator

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Abstract

This portfolio explores the experiences of a twenty-first century educator (myself) in my role as a white settler educator working in a unique high school education model, in a diverse urban context in Winnipeg, Manitoba, facing interlocking oppressive forces of capitalism, colonialism, resource extraction, neoliberalism, and social inequities that make up the global crisis of modernity. Through autoethnographic poetic inquiry, I examine how I embody my accountabilities and responsibilities to/within my school context, and dwell in tensions between conflicting accountabilities and responsibilities, as I simultaneously work within institutions that perpetuate ongoing harms and injustices, and strive for anti-oppressive, culturally sustaining, and ecologically resilient education. The chapters included in the portfolio are: (1) an introduction, (2) a description of the research paradigm (based in relationality/relational accountability) and methodology (autoethnographic poetic inquiry), (3) a literature review documenting the multiple accountabilities and responsibilities that exist for teachers concerned with activism, climate justice, and liberation in the midst of multiple global crises that threaten the well-being of people and the planet, (4) a collection of original poems that document my lived experiences of dwelling within the tensions, (5) a thematic analysis of the poems that critically reflects on commitments and next steps, and (6) a conclusion. Through the thematic analysis, I found that naming tensions such as whiteness, relationship to time and power, harm and violence can open spaces for deeper engagement, and that commitment to meaningful practices is a critical way to train intuition and instinct, allowing for an embodied praxis of connecting with the world, others, and myself as a scholar-activist educator.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Where I'm From

I am from the heart of Turtle Island, from a city of muddy waters,
The coming together of two rivers and many peoples.
I am from dusty urban streets, from the scent of the pork rendering plant drifting across the river, from layers of privilege and poverty, from the #11 bus trundling down Henderson Highway.
I am from the discomfort of living "in other words", from not-quite-belonging to la Francophonie de la prairie, Saint-Boniface et le Festival du voyageur,
From rough limestone and glass atrium and the crumpled body of Louis Riel in bronze.
I am from traveling between these spaces on two wheels, from the joy that sprang from cresting a bridge with rising sun shining down on my upturned face:
I learned strength, vulnerability, courage and hope navigating this windy city on a bicycle.

I am from the Mainstage, the Warehouse, the Gas Station,
"Who needs Broadway when you've got Dry Cold Productions?"
PTE, SIR, TPM, MTYP, WSO, TCM, acronyms of artistic aspiration,
From hard yellow seats under a dome and mosquitoes biting exposed legs in chill late-night summer air,
(Was it the chill of the air or did the chill come from the art itself, from song and dance and story told on stage, from the thrill of connection between audience and cast and light and sound and moment?)
I am from the waiting in the cramped hallway after the show, as the actors paraded past loudly, for my mother to emerge still in too-much-makeup, still half-living in the world of the play
(oh, the glamorous life)
I walk to the beat of songs by Sondheim, my blood and heart of lyrics and melodies weaving characters through their trials, my steps guided by their rhythms and lessons.
(Careful the things you say. Children will listen.)

I'm from the highway stretching into expansive sky.
I am from birchbark and sun-warmed stone, from boreal forest and boots on the trail, from loon-calls and kayaks gliding over smooth lakes.
I am from quiet gratitude and trust in intuition.

I am from cedar giants and lush rainforests. I am from springboards, axes, saws, trees falling like thunderous applause, from the tension between economics and ecosystems;
I am from clear cold lakes cradled in a bowl of mountains, from the sting of a blackberry's thorn tearing through my skin, from the sweet of a blackberry's juice, ripe, trickling over my tongue;
From stories told in black and white, friendship woven through conversations over cups of tea and steeped in poetry and thought,

From communities like mycelial networks, sustaining themselves through song and work and fresh-baked treats and the sharing of the harvest, holding individuals through fire and flood, sickness and health, suffering and celebration,
From sunlight sparkling on the surface of water like a blazing miracle,
And an arbutus tree twisting towards the sky, bark curling off in dry green strips to reveal the impossibly smooth red underneath.

I am from two places:
one bound by the promises of Treaty One, the birthplace of the Red River Métis,
the other within the unceded traditional territories of the Nuu-chah-nulth.
The lands that nourished my spirit are the home of the
Anishnaabe, Ininewak, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dené
Tse-shaht, Hupacasath, Huu-ay-aht, Uchuklesaht
And more, but not my ancestors.
I'm from clinging with shallow roots to the soil where I grew.
I'm from institutions that constructed shining edifices on top of the soil, to hide the tangled web of history beneath their floors.
I'm from the shining edifice and the tangled web:
From hymn-books and church bells and sermons on Sunday mornings,
From brick buildings and sharpened pencils, whiteboards and tile floors and 9:00-3:35,
From the call of earth and sky, the promise of hope held high, the crying out for justice,
From the belief in the power of education – to create, to destroy; to destory, to restory.

I want to bring my still-unraveling story to the meeting place,
To invite you to lay yours down beside it,
And beside all the others, stories upon stories upon stories, in every language;
I want us to fail to understand one another, but to listen, and to try,
To laugh, and cry, and shout, and rage, and reconcile
As the strands of our stories tangle together in the wind...
Might we then have something beautiful to offer the grandchildren of our grandchildren's grandchildren?
For them to hold up and say,
This is where I am from.[1]

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[1] All of my ideas, all aspects of my selfhood and expressions in my writing, come from learning with others, both human and non-human, as indeed this poem is meant to express and honour. However, I also acknowledge here a few instances where I reference other people's words more directly. The "in other words" in the first stanza is a reference to the book *In Other Words* by Jhumpa Lahiri (2015). In the second stanza, "The Glamorous Life" is a song title from the musical *A Little Night Music* (1973) by Stephen Sondheim. "Careful the things you say. Children will listen" is a lyric from the song "Children Will Listen", also by Stephen Sondheim, from the musical *Into the Woods* (1987). "Springboards, axes, saws, trees fall down like thunderous applause", referenced in the fourth stanza, is from a song that was performed as part of a sketch show at McLean Mill National Historic Site by the Tin Pants Theatre Troupe in the summer of 2009, written and directed by Kerry Robertson. "Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high", in the fifth stanza, are lyrics from the hymn *Called by Earth and Sky* by Pat Mayberry (2005). "Crying out for justice" are words used by many Christians in different contexts, but when I wrote them here I was thinking of the hymn *Bring Many Names* with text by Brian Wren (1986). In addition, the line about the belief in the

I begin with this poem to root myself and you, the reader, in my context, as this research grows out of my sense of accountability to my students, my colleagues, the Land on which we gather, and future generations. This portfolio is a reckoning with tensions between multiple accountabilities and responsibilities in my role as a white settler teacher working at a public high school which follows a unique education model. The school is located in a diverse urban neighbourhood and city that, like other urban centres across North America, is culturally dynamic (Love, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017) and situated on Indigenous Land[2] (Bang et al., 2014; Styres et al., 2013; Tuck & Habtom, 2019). All educators (indeed, all humans) are living through a global crisis of modernity, as capitalism, colonialism, resource extraction and neoliberalism work together to threaten the life of humans and the planet (de Oliveira [Andreotti], 2021). My experiences in my specific teaching context are a microcosm of these larger forces in the world, and poetry is my vehicle to express my embodied experiences of dwelling in these tensions and becoming a scholar-activist educator[3]. In this first chapter, I begin by inviting the reader into my web of relational accountabilities by expanding on the opening poem and sharing the story of

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power of education was written to faintly echo Justice Murray Sinclair's statement that "Education got us into this mess and education will get us out." (For the purposes of authenticity to my poetic voice, I have consciously used a different font and deviated from APA formatting for poetry.)

[2] Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous allies acknowledge that Land is much more than a material property. Styres and Zinga (2013) choose to capitalize Land to indicate that Land is a "spiritually infused place grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships, cultural positioning, and is highly contextualized" (p. 301). Indigenous scholars have complex and contextual relationships with Land (Simpson, 2014; Styres et al., 2013; Tuck et al., 2014) connected to their communities and ancestors. The word is sometimes capitalized *and* italicized to insist on the multi-dimensional realities of *Land* (Styres et al., 2013), and at other times written with a lowercase "l", but still infused with deep contextual relationship (for example, Tuck usually writes "land"; see Tuck et al., 2014; Tuck & Habtom, 2019). I choose to capitalize words I view as deserving of respect to emphasize their importance (e.g. Indigenous, Land, Black, etc.) and to use a lowercase letter for often-capitalized words like western and white to deemphasize their authority, except when directly citing other scholars, in which case I respect the choices they have made.

[3] This term is used in ecocritical pedagogies (Lupinacci et al., 2019; Lupinacci, 2020) to describe individuals who are challenging and rethinking education in response to global climate change, social injustice, violence, and exploitation of humans and more-than-humans felt within the dominant education system, and who are imagining schools as sites for fostering diverse, democratic, ecologically resilient communities. As detailed in my literature review, I have drawn on a number of scholars beyond ecocritical pedagogies to theorize what this term means to me.

how I came to this research. I then outline the remaining chapters through a description of the portfolio tasks.

Grounding the Portfolio: From Where and to Whom I Am Relationally Accountable

As the poem shares, I come from specific places. For most of my life, I have lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba (where I currently work as a teacher, and where my research is mostly focused) and have spent extended periods of time with family and friends in Port Alberni on Vancouver Island (where I completed a large amount of work towards this portfolio). Communities in both places, including Land and more-than-humans, have supported me through my journey of graduate studies. I have read academic articles lying in the mud by the riverbank, or cradled in the roots of a cedar tree. Sense-making occurred as non-cognitive processing while I was walking, biking, swimming, skating, kayaking, picking berries, or staring at the sky. Even when I have been lost in abstract intellectual pursuits, huddled over a computer, or enclosed within school buildings, my animal body is always on and in relationship with Land.

Place and Land are often concealed, disregarded, or unconsidered in qualitative research (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) and education research (Butler & Sinclair, 2020). Tuck and McKenzie (2015) attribute this "turning away" from the "where" of inquiry to the dominance of western epistemologies, pointing out that

> Indigenous intellectual contributions rarely fail to engage in issues of land and place – especially via conceptualizations of tribal identity, sovereignty, and treaty rights – yet when these discussions are taken up by non-Indigenous and settler scholars, the salience of land/place is frequently left out of the picture. (p. 633)

In acknowledging that I come from specific places where I have relationships with Land to which I am accountable, I attempt to counter that tendency in my research and teaching.

Accountability to place in Canada requires ongoing work of digging through the tangled web of settler-Indigenous relations throughout history to understand how colonization and oppression have played out on this Land. As Owen Toews argues in *Stolen City: Racial Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg,* "Winnipeg's urban history has always been intimately caught up in the history of Canadian colonialism" (2018, p. 61). This particular place where I am from, Winnipeg, is the centre of Turtle Island/the North American continent[4]. This place has been an Indigenous centre of meeting for many tribes and groups since before Europeans arrived, with a long history of Indigenous resilience, resistance, and organizing to oppose colonization, state violence and settler colonialism. "The life that exists in whatever we call this place – Wînipêk, Winnipeg, Treaty 1, Manitoba – is rich, dynamic, and the centre of many things" (Sinclair, 2024, p. 7). Living and working in this place, I am accountable to learning and honouring its history, and its rich, dynamic life.

Summarizing a history of mythical white benevolence in Canada, Gebhard et al. (2022) state that the very foundations of this country's social systems are rooted in assimilationist goals and notions of white superiority, designed to permit and rationalize the settler-colonial state to steal Land and resources from Indigenous peoples. As a settler Canadian, I am entwined in a complex network of relationships: with ecological systems and more-than-humans, with Indigenous peoples who have been resisting colonization for generations, and with people from

[4] A note on pan-Indigeneity in the use of the term "Turtle Island": The story of the world originating on the back of the turtle originates from *some* Indigenous cultures, including Cree and Anishinaabe peoples who are the predominant groups in my region, but far from all Indigenous cultures on this continent would use this term. There can be tremendous decolonial political power in pan-Indigenous alliance, and Winnipeg has been a continental hub for such movements, which "aspired to pan-Indigenous unity in defiance of Canadian apartheid" (Toews, 2022, p. 135); uprooting the decidedly colonial "North America" in favour of "Turtle Island" may be seen in this light. It is equally true, however, that pan-Indigenous thinking leads to non-Indigenous peoples wrongly assuming that all Indigenous/First Nations cultures are the same and thus vastly oversimplifying extremely rich and diverse histories (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018). As with all terms, it is important when using them to understand where they come from, how they are being used, and committing to changing language as a result of new learning.

various ethnic and racialized backgrounds who also call Canada home. My education has been shaped by western institutions in these places: the theatre (my mother's vocation, and, as the poem's second stanza reveals, a huge part of my own life), the church (my father's and both grandfathers' vocation, which is part of my heritage), and education, especially public and postsecondary schools, where I have spent the vast majority of my time and energy. My poem grapples with the tensions of being from both 'the shining edifice and the tangled web', benefiting from and continuing to work through these institutions while also complicit in their harms.

If the poem's content reveals some of my relational context and accountabilities, the process of how it was written offers further insight. I wrote the poem in December 2021 alongside my then-grade 12 students, who wrote their own versions as part of a multimedia autobiography project, using the "Where I'm From" poem template (I Am From Project, n.d.; Lyon, n.d.). We were nearing the end of a four-year journey together, which had begun when I was a twenty-three-year-old new teacher and they were fourteen-year-olds with vastly different identities, needs, interests, and histories, representative of the school's neighbourhood. Love's (2015) definition of urban places as "dense inner-city communities with economic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity that function as breeding grounds for hybridity of ethnic and cultural identities" (p. 115) richly describes my school's context. My students are culturally diverse, with high representation of Indigenous, Filipino/a/x, Black, South Asian (largely Punjabi), and Portuguese communities, and are also diverse in terms of gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic class, neurodiversity, body size, (dis)abilities, interests, career aspirations, academic abilities, and personalities.

Globally, education is trending towards homogenization, assimilation and erasure of local, contextual realities (Smith, 2021) while most high schools serve an increasing diversity of learners. The public high school where I teach works to challenge this institutional trend through a unique educational model that is highly responsive to our students. In our program, students achieve their core and elective credits through interdisciplinary inquiry projects driven by student interest, spend two days a week connecting with mentors and real-world learning experiences in the wider community outside school walls, and stay with the same cohort of peers (advisory) and core teacher (advisor) from grades 9-12.[5] Our school's model radically departs from typical high school structures, disrupting the status quo to imagine new possibilities of what school could be (Dintersmith, 2019). Freire (2000/1970) contrasts the banking model of education, designed to transmit knowledge and stifle critical consciousness so that the students accept the oppressive conditions of a mythical reality, to a model of problem-posing education, in which students *and* teachers are conscious beings engaging in dialogue and inquiry, challenging, demythologizing and transforming our historical reality. Education in the latter sense is a vocation of human life (Freire, 2000/1970) and a responsiveness to students that is both an ethical responsibility and a calling (Aoki, 1993). Innovative school models, including the one in which I work, are still reaching towards such hopeful and lofty intentions of progressive education.

[5] This is a broad description of the Big Picture Learning model which began in Providence, Rhode Island in 1995 and has since spread to other schools around the United States and the world (Littky & Grabelle, 2004; Washor & Mojkowski, 2013). Further research on this style of innovative schooling is warranted, but as an insider to one particular school, it is not within the scope of this project to comment on the model as a whole. Rather, in the spirit of "critical place inquiry" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014, p. 635), I name it to remember that the context that led to this research is placed, acknowledging both *where* the model originated, and *that* it is enacted in particular ways in its Winnipeg iteration. Our three Winnipeg schools are public schools; students elect to attend; they earn a regular high school diploma; and we have a very diverse student body in terms of academic background. Students who are high academic achievers, students who have struggled significantly in school, and everyone in between may and do choose to attend. The model works best for students who *want* to do school in this way, but can work for diverse types of students from any demographic.

Most people's first reaction to hearing about my school is to rhapsodize about how amazing it sounds. In reality, it *can* be amazing: exciting, joyful, meaningful, beautiful in ways that are difficult to articulate, and deeply rewarding. *And,* it can also be chaotic, challenging, stressful and messy a lot of the time, as we (educators and students) try to satisfy provincial credit requirements, live up to ideals of innovative education, defend ourselves against doubting critics even when we ourselves felt uncertain, and most importantly, try to honour everyone's personal (often conflicting) needs and hopes through the ups and downs of their lives. When we first embarked on our four-year journey together, my advisory (or core group of students) and I had no idea what we were doing. Following the students' noses, we muddled our way through just about every curriculum document in Manitoba. We learned together how to design projects and collaborate with professionals in various fields, from early childhood education to software development to lab-based scientific research (basically, anyone we could cold call and convince to collaborate with us). By the time we wrote our "Where I'm From" poems, we had weathered a global pandemic, two historic snowstorms, and countless personal life events together. We had forged each other in the fire.

In the months after we wrote our poems, while students were busy completing projects, preparing for graduation, and applying for university, I applied to the M.Ed. in Education for Change graduate studies program at Lakehead University. Having accompanied my students as they navigated school, internships, and life over four years, I knew that they had so much to offer in their ways of seeing and being in the world. I had also become aware of the complexities of the barriers they faced, including racism, colonization, capitalist and neoliberal forces, intergenerational and personal traumas, cultural expectations, discrimination based on gender and sexuality, stigma surrounding disabilities and mental illness, poverty and financial stress,

English language literacy, immigrant and refugee experiences, child welfare, and the burden of worry about climate change and global issues. These barriers were (and still are) reproducing themselves in our school and in the various institutions and sectors of society we interact with through internships, as well as in ourselves, our families, and our relationships with one another.

These problems, which we experience as intimate and concrete realities, are not unique to our school context. The dominant perspectives and epistemologies that shape Canadian education are still western and white, as recognized by a long lineage of Indigenous education and Canadian curriculum scholars (Aoki, 1993; Calderon, 2014; Chambers, 1999; Donald, 2012; Lowan-Trudeau, 2015). This pattern persists even in models that attempt to revolutionize education: many scholars have put forward incisive critiques of such progressive movements as critical pedagogies (Bowers, 2008; Ellsworth, 1989), place-based pedagogies (Bang et al., 2014; Calderon, 2014; Tuck et al., 2014), and environmental education (Maina-Okori et al., 2018; McLean, 2013; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). It is easy even in critical pedagogy to default to the lens of a "mythical norm" of humanness, one which is "young, White, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied, thin, middle-class, English-speaking, and male" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 323). Seen as abnormal in contrast, those who deviate from the mythical norm are too often blamed for their own problems.

Some scholars have flipped the script. Paris (2012), for example, deliberately refers to "cultures marginalized by systemic inequalities" rather than "marginalized students" (p. 96), intentionally placing the burden of marginalization and the onus for change on unjust and violent systems. Similarly, the term "pushout" (Tuck, 2011, p. 818) turns judgment away from Black and Indigenous students characterized as dropouts, and criticizes instead the oppressive curriculum, harsh discipline, disrespect from school staff, and overall hostile school

environments they are escaping (McLean, 2022; Nixon et al., 2022; Tuck, 2011). Too often, however, deficit-model thinking prevails. Those who deviate from the mythical norm are wrongly believed to need help to cure their Indigeneity (Newberry & Trujillo, 2019) or other cultural identity (Paris, 2012), disability (Schmidt, 2022) or any other form of difference. Students suffer when their identities are devalued in this way (Borck, 2020), particularly in schools, by educators and the curriculum.

To strive for "social justice, individual and collective well-being, and issues of peace for all of us, human and more-than-human alike" (Maina-Okori et al., 2018, p. 293), and to imagine schools as sites for fostering diverse, democratic, sustainable communities (Lupinacci et al., 2019), should not be a radical proposition, yet those who engage in activist work in education systems frequently find themselves up against the determination of dominant social institutions to maintain the neoliberal, colonial, capitalist status quo (e.g. Dunn, 2020; Dover et al., 2018; Harris, 2021; Lowan-Trudeau, 2016; Stern & Brown, 2016). These were the tensions I was encountering in my teaching. Our advisory, our school, was a microcosm of the global crisis of modernity. My students, colleagues and I could turn some of the structures of traditional schooling upside down, and yet we were still subjected to, and continued to embody, many of the dominant social systems' norms and mythologies.

In June 2022, we celebrated our graduation (my first advisory's completion of high school was a shared accomplishment, a momentous milestone for me as well as for them). After a final camping trip where we were eaten alive by mosquitoes, we went our separate ways. In September 2022, as they began their adult lives, I also began new journeys: graduate studies, and a second round with a new advisory (class) of grade 9 students. If relationships with my first

advisory were the impetus for me to pursue graduate studies, relationships with my second have been richly intertwined with my journey through this master's program.

My students are family members, care-givers, artists, musicians, writers, scientists, mathematicians, builders, coders, inventors, helpers, challengers, imaginers, teachers, learners, mentors, thinkers, questioners, activists, and entrepreneurs. They are passionate, curious, quiet, loud, creative, funny, thoughtful, joyful, concerned for the world, unsure of themselves and of the future – and so much more. Our staff team, my colleagues, are all devoted, hardworking, intelligent, and critically-minded educators. I consider it a privilege, a responsibility, and a gift to engage in democratic education with students, staff, families, and our wider community of mentors. We are humans who gather, with all our gifts and imperfections, as a learning community at the heart of Turtle Island in our city of muddy waters, in relationship with each other, our histories and futures, and the Land, which is always Indigenous Land even when we forget it beneath layers of urban infrastructure, concrete and pavement (Styres et al., 2013).

Outline of Chapters and Description of Portfolio Tasks

In Chapter 2, I describe how the research paradigm has been guided by Indigenous scholarship around relationality, justify autoethnographic poetic inquiry as an appropriate methodology for this inquiry, and briefly discuss the place of research ethics in this project.

The three subsequent chapters represent the three portfolio tasks. Chapter 3 is a thematic literature review, contextualizing the broader academic background to some of the multiple accountabilities and responsibilities I felt within my context. The chapter begins with an explanation of how the literature review was conducted, and presents relevant themes that extend from the literature. The chapter culminates in presenting two research questions which were generated from the process of engaging with these themes.

While poems are included in different places throughout the portfolio, Chapter 4 spotlights a collection of five poems with accompanying commentary. In the selection and shaping of the poetry collection, I am viscerally sharing my experiences of living in the tensions as a scholar-activist educator, in ways that can connect and resonate with others who are facing the crisis of modernity from their own teaching contexts. The poems are intentionally presented in a different font, as illustrated in the introduction, and deviate from the APA formatting conventions (double-spaced Times New Roman size 12) in order to differentiate my poetic voice from my academic voice. For each piece, I have provided additional commentary, including when and where they were written as context, and an analysis of their impact on my teaching praxis.

In Chapter 5, I offer a thematic analysis, considering how the poems in Chapter 4 respond to the research questions at the end of Chapter 3, and how I am committing to practices I intend to carry forward beyond the completion of the portfolio.

Chapter 2: Research Paradigm and Methodology

In this chapter, I begin by sharing how Indigenous scholarship has informed my understanding of relationality and relational accountability (Wilson, 2008), which have been guiding concepts of my research paradigm, and how my positionality as a white, queer, settler Canadian woman factors into my understanding of these concepts and my approach to research. I then explain the methodology of autoethnographic poetic inquiry and why it was selected for this project. And in conclusion, the chapter finishes with a brief discussion on research ethics.

Relationality as Guiding Concept (and My Relationship to It)

My impetus to pursue research grew out of my sense of accountability to the relationships I described in the introduction. My understandings of relationality and relational accountability have been informed by the work of Indigenous scholars who hold these as guiding principles of research, education, and life (e.g. Donald, 2012; Simpson, 2014; TallBear, 2019; Tuck et al., 2014; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014, 2015; Wilson, 2008). For Wilson (2008), relationality and relational accountability are the foundation of an Indigenous research paradigm: "This is our epistemology. Thinking of the world around us as a web of connections and relationships. Nothing could be without being in relationship, without its context" (p. 77). Being accountable to these relationships means being present as the researcher, based in a community context, and demonstrating the "3Rs" of Indigenous research: respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Relationships in context include other humans, but also the Land, the cosmos, and ideas. Upholding standards of relational accountability means that research must benefit the community where it is based without compromising the researcher's integrity as a person. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) use the term "relational validity", reimagining how validity has been conceptualized in research, which they term "economic validity" (p. 636), to propose that

relational validity in qualitative research be "based on paradigmatic understandings of the relationality of life" and "[prioritize] the reality that human life is connected to and dependent on other species and the land" (p. 636). Again, specificity of place and context matters. They posit that while research often defaults to anonymizing or simply disregarding place, there are "ethical imperatives of relational validity in research that is responsive to people and place" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 633), requiring specificity in the naming of communities and contexts.

I come to my understanding of these concepts as a white settler. Relationality is a culturally specific and complex concept, rooted in Indigenous intelligences and Land-based epistemologies (Donald, 2012; Simpson, 2014; Styres et al., 2013; Styres & Kempf, 2022; Wilson, 2008). Furthermore, different Indigenous scholars use terms in different and specific ways. All settler researchers need to navigate the delicate balance between respectful honouring of Indigenous thought on the one hand, and on the other, colonizing ourselves better as we remove ideas from the specificity of their context, reinterpret and share them through a settler lens, and handle them carelessly, ignorantly, and inappropriately (Haig-Brown, 2010; Kerr & Parent, 2022). Critical and liberal multicultural approaches are often guilty of including Indigenous theories without being accountable to commitments to Indigenous peoples in their communities, as their treaty partners, or towards political projects such as decolonization and Land sovereignty (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Tuck et al., 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Logics of extractivism have always underwritten Indigenous-settler relationships, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in conversation with Naomi Klein, points out that this does not stop at literal and physical extraction (e.g. of natural resources from the Land or children from families): it also includes cognitive extraction of ideas from Indigenous cultures (in Klein, 2013). I do not claim to be an authority on relationality, as to do so would constitute cognitive

extractivism; and I do not claim to have achieved deep reciprocity with Indigenous communities, as I know that I have not. These wounds cannot be written away. Rather, in briefly summarizing my understanding of key Indigenous authors who have informed my thinking, I wish to honour ideas and voices which have been valuable in my process.

While I benefit in many ways from colonial privilege, my investment in relationality is also inextricably entangled with my identity as an asexual, aromantic (aroace), queer person. In my white, western culture, the word "relationship" usually means a monogamous, romantic, sexual partnership, which is ranked in the relationship hierarchy as the ideal to aim for – the mythical norm of relationships, from which I am excluded. Indigenous understandings of relationality do not limit or hierarchize relationships in this way (TallBear, 2019). I firmly believe that queer liberation is bound up with decolonization, anti-racism, and other anti-oppressive projects (Brown, 2022). Black, Indigenous, and other non-white queer people – although their voices and influence are often forgotten and overshadowed in white queer spaces – have always been and must continue to be leaders in queer movements, as they fight to reclaim diverse cultural understandings of kinship, gender, and relationality which are much older than western binaries (Brown, 2022; TallBear, 2019; Wilson & Laing, 2018).

I have a vested personal interest in expanding relationality beyond the limits of colonial heteropatriarchal norms of compulsory (hetero)sexuality, to believe that relationships with humans, more-than-humans, the cosmos, and ideas *matter*, that we can and must strive for deep, loving, secure, joyful, passionate, respectful, reciprocal connections in all the spaces where we relate, including in workplaces, communities, schools, classrooms, friendships, families, neighbourhoods, and governments. My queerness and whiteness together inform my sense of solidarity with justice movements. To quote Birdsong (2020),

> when you benefit from the work others have done, especially when you – by nature of your identity or access to resources – hold more power and privilege than they do, you have a responsibility to show up for them. That's the rule. (p. 22)

Tuck and Yang (2012) describe "settler moves to innocence" as "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up Land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10), and may in fact offer advantages to the settler. I resonate with Asher et al. (2018) as they own the fact that their reflexive paper on settler Land acknowledgments could be interpreted as a move to innocence: "We reflect on this not as a way of getting an out or earning praise, but as a way of thinking through how we might do something different" (p. 331). I understand that my citation of these sources *will* be a move to innocence if it is not followed up with ongoing work to dismantle settler colonialism. Writing about these issues fails to achieve substantial rematriation of Land, thereby asserting my right to maintain Land, power and privilege. Furthermore, an "ethic of incommensurability" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1) requires understanding that decolonization cannot be lumped in with other social justice projects or critical theories, as it is a distinct project that is fundamentally accountable to Indigenous Land sovereignty and Indigenous futurities (Tuck & Yang, 2012). My commitment to other social justice projects and my concern for my own future are incommensurable with the real, material aims of decolonization.

Rather than turning away from this tension, I choose to dwell in it. As Donald (2012) aptly describes, colonialism is a shared condition for Indigenous peoples and settlers in Canada, bound together by "the relationality and connectivity that comes from living together in a particular place for a long time" (p. 93). Canadian education has long kept Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians on opposite sides of a mythical fort wall, denying our connectivity, and

these relationships must be reconceptualized with a philosophy of ethical relationality (based on wisdom from *Kainai* Elders), accountability for a shared future that is life-giving and life-sustaining; decolonization in Canada "can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across deeply learned divides, revisit and deconstruct their shared past, and engage carefully with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together" (Donald, 2012, p. 102). With this set of understandings informed by Indigenous scholars, I strive to respectfully honour and centralize relational accountability in this project, as well as I can with what I currently understand. I do not wish to suggest by citing these sources that I am *achieving* relational accountability, but rather that I am striving for it starting from my positionality and context, committed to continuing that striving even as I stumble and fall.

Autoethnographic Poetic Inquiry

Throughout this master's degree, I have been challenged by the dual experience of becoming acculturated to the unfamiliar landscape of academic research, while also learning what conventions to resist and bend. Often, when feeling overwhelmed by the swirling storm of professional, academic, political, practical and relational obligations that pull at my focus, I found myself able to get back in touch with myself through writing poetry, personal journey entries, and stories. I did not initially think of this writing as research, but gradually came to realize that it was generating significant insight and pulling together tangled threads.

In a methodology that may be called autoethnographic poetic inquiry, I follow in the footsteps of such scholars as Borti (2020) and Pelias (2019), by blending autoethnography and poetic inquiry. Autoethnography is both a process and a product, which "seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis et al., 2010, para. 1, emphasis in original). An "interdisciplinary,

blurred genre" (Marx et al., 2017), autoethnography frequently defies conventions of academic writing, using evocative, literary styles to be accessible to a wider audience. This can be an anti-oppressive approach:

> Analysis and theorizing on the pages of social science journals is the preserve of an elite class of professionals who wittingly or unwittingly divide the world into those who see the light and those kept in the dark. Autoethnography helps under-cut conventions of writing that foster hierarchy and division. (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 436)

Through the creation of original poetry as research, I have also drawn on poetic inquiry as a methodology (Prendergast, 2009, 2015; Prendergast et al., 2009). Poetic inquiry can potentially "do as poetry does, that is to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way" (Prendergast, 2009, p. 545). I began this proposal with a poem because it was the most effective way to invite a reader into my context. Evocative, literary writing such as poetry allows for a single poignant image or phrase to communicate immediately what pages of academic writing might struggle to.

Research Ethics

As all my data were drawn from my own experience and my writing anonymizes any information from, or references to, particular individuals, it did not require Research Ethics Board approval. In the spirit of naming tensions, I wish to acknowledge that compliance with institutional regulations around research ethics is not equivalent to honouring personal or community ethics. Namely, obscuring and anonymizing the voices of my students and colleagues does not fully honour their contributions to the development of my thinking. It was a possibility I strongly considered to name students and include their voices more directly through youth participatory action research, inspired by many examples of powerful research involving youth as co-researchers (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2020; Bautista et al., 2013; Tuck & Habtom, 2019; Walsh,

2018). This naming would have been a more involved process requiring Research Ethics Board (REB) approval, with many complicating factors; the barriers to entry on such a project are high. I do firmly believe that education, as a field, *needs* research like this to shift institutional norms around research with youth. However, given that the major drive to complete the project was *my* graduation with *my* master's degree, it seemed less than honouring to ask my students to invest their attention and energies into my portfolio when they were busy with their own valuable self-directed projects. I therefore opted to move my research in the direction of autoethnographic poetic inquiry. This approach, while institutionally less complicated, still raised questions of what is mine to ethically share, when so much of my knowledge and experiences have been forged in community and in relationship. Some pieces were excluded, even if they would have contributed powerfully to the research, because anonymizing and fictionalizing certain details felt ethically unacceptable to me despite being permissible by institutional standards.

The choice *not* to share can be empowering, but can also feel like a silencing that upholds unequal power dynamics. This dilemma is in itself a tension, one experienced not only in research, but in all kinds of situations where knowledge is shared or not shared. The following poem, which concludes this chapter, expresses my experience of sitting with this tension.

the things i can't say
here are the tensions of being a scholar-activist-educator-poet:
i am striving for truth
–but.
there are things i can't say
at the centre of my heart
how does one operate relationally in an institutional role?
i am a teacher
with systemic power over my students
and duties to perform
i am a student
with academic obligations
deadlines and tuition to pay
i am a researcher

bound by ethics
and the parameters of a graduate portfolio

the imperative
to relate
to be curious
to listen
is undercut by power dynamics

i could write to each of my students, past and present:
you are you
and no one else
you, you, have taught me and shaped me
in these specific ways
in these specific places
at these specific times
each of you is a world
we together are a world
worlds

there are stories i won't share
because they are yours
they are ours
there are some you wouldn't want me to tell, i never would
there are some you would love for me to tell, yet my institutional roles prevent candid honesty
because of this
i will never show
who i am as an educator
because who i am as an educator
is completely bound up in you
in us
in these stories
what are "my" experiences?
even those stories that are "mine" involve you
we are relational beings

sometimes i choose respectful silence
sometimes i am stifled by institutional policies
sometimes preserving trust with someone prohibits honesty with someone else
silence is power:
whose power, whose gain?
whose loss, whose pain?

Chapter 3: Multiple Accountabilities and Responsibilities: A Literature Review

The first task of my portfolio is a literature review which anchors the research questions guiding my autoethnographic poetic inquiry. If research as a whole is about relationships with ideas, a process through which "you bring the ideas into the web of relationships that is you" (Wilson, 2008, p. 134), the process of reviewing the literature, for me, was about developing my web of relationships with other scholars and their ideas. My entry points into this literature mostly came through relationship, as professors, classmates and colleagues recommended resources. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion in this literature review were often intuitive, based on the energetic connection I felt while reading, attracted by both similarity and novelty, the twin flashes of *That's just like my context!* and *I've never thought of it that way before!*, which drew certain scholars into my circle of influence.

Potts and Brown (2005) advocate for conducting a literature review critically, with awareness of power and privilege in academic research, which I have striven to do by including non-academic sources and many works from Indigenous scholars and scholars from various groups which have been historically marginalized, while holding space for questions about oppression in research throughout the process. Montuari (2005) frames the literature review as a creative inquiry process, and this was certainly the case for me; it was as much about discovering the *process* of academic research as it was about discovering the *content* related to my project. Widening circles began to coalesce organically into themes as I read, and my topic and research question then emerged as a way of defining the place of intersection between many ideas and questions. The themes that emerged are: (1) Democracy, Pluralism, Climate Justice, and Possibilities for Education, (2) Indigenous Voices and Decolonization Matter – A Lot, (3) Youth

Voice, (4) Urban Public Schools: Where it All Comes Together, and (5) Tensions: Embodied Opportunities for New Storytelling.

Democracy, Pluralism, Climate Justice, and Possibilities for Education

A multiplicity of perspectives must be mobilized in the pursuit of sustainable health and well-being for all beings (human and more-than-human) and the planet as a whole (Lupinacci et al., 2019; Maina-Okori et al., 2018). Intersectional perspectives are necessary within environmental education (Maina-Okori et al., 2018). There are many examples within environmental education of the voices of marginalized groups re-shifting narratives and adding new dimensions: Schmidt's (2022) vision for cripping environmental education through the centering of disabled bodies and minds, Russell et al. (2021) queering the field and destabilizing gender and sexuality norms, Wilson and Laing (2018) uncovering the nuances of queering Indigenous education, and Nxumalo and Cedillo (2017) applying Black feminist and Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies to allow for a re-storying of human and more-than-human relationships in early childhood environmental education.

These few examples represent only a small sample of the broad scope of possible perspectives, and their strength lies in their specificity. Freire (2000/1970) states that liberation and transformation of oppressive systems must be achieved *by* the oppressed; Ellsworth (1989) argues that Freire's highly abstracted and rationalistic theories of critical pedagogy are disconnected from specific and complex ways that identity and power relations exist in classroom contexts. The challenge, then, becomes how to truly honour multiple communities and voices, without melting everyone down into the homogenized "oppressed". Whose voices ought to be centred?

Culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) may be a useful framework here. There are three core principles of culturally sustaining pedagogies: the demand for pluralism that decentres whiteness; the need to recognize all cultures as dynamic, shifting, and unable to be oversimplified and essentialized; and the obligation to confront problematic elements of culture that exert power unfairly over other groups (Paris & Alim, 2017). In true cultural and linguistic pluralism, within-group *and* between-group dynamics exist; there is wisdom in the traditions of historically distinct cultures, but there is also vibrancy in the dynamic ways that different cultures interact and re-shape each other within particular contexts (Paris, 2019); the practice of culturally sustaining pedagogies must be highly responsive to specific contexts (Borck, 2020). Cultural and linguistic practices local and significant to the community are viewed as rich resources with powerful pedagogical potential (Paris & Alim, 2017). Smith (2021) suggests that culturally sustaining pedagogy overlaps significantly with environmental education, showing areas of intersection with critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003), eco-justice pedagogies (Bowers, 2008) and most strongly Indigenous Land education (Tuck et al., 2014). Culturally sustaining pedagogies in environmental education are a possible way to resist homogenization at local, national, and global scales (Smith, 2021).

Another relevant concept is the Mi'kmaw guiding principle of *Etuaptmumk*, or two-eyed seeing, which is about

> learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of western knowledges and ways of knowing...and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Institute for Integrative Science and Health, n.d., para. 2)

Lowan-Trudeau (2015) proposes that this framework could expand to become three-eyed or multiple-eyed seeing in environmental education, to more accurately represent the realities of Canada today by including more recent immigrants. Although the idea from this limited study has not been taken up by other scholars, there is certainly more investigation to be done into the spaces of interaction between Indigenous, western, and additional multicultural experiences.

Ecocritical pedagogies call for solidarity with "diverse approaches to healing from western industrial culture", which entails respect for non-dominant epistemologies (Lupinacci et al., 2019, p. 6). Solidarity:

> recognizes that multiple oppressions exist and builds community from the shared experiences of oppression across differences.…This does not mean that solidarity subsumes differences. Rather, solidarity requires that we learn from each other's experiences, recognize the ways that we have participated in or benefited from each other's oppression, and commit to sharing power and holding each other accountable as we work to transform institutions and systems. (Jordan, 2024, para. 6)

Decentring the dominant ontologies and epistemologies at the heart of the crisis of modernity requires diverse intersectional voices – including the more-than-human – and prioritizing pluralism, situated in particular places, communities, and contexts.

Indigenous Voices and Decolonization Matter – A Lot

In a discussion of pluralism and solidarity in education for environmental justice, Indigenous voices cannot merely be included: "Environmental justice can only take place with Indigenous peoples and epistemologies at the center" (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 17). All education that occurs in a settler-colonial state such as Canada is occurring on Indigenous Lands (Bang et al., 2014; Calderon, 2014; Styres et al., 2013). Indigenous peoples, Lands, cultures, and

relationships have been erased through settler colonial violence, while Indigenous peoples continue to resist (Bang et al., 2014; Calderon, 2014). Decolonization becomes an oppressive metaphor when it does not involve the rematriation[6] of Indigenous Land and accountability to Indigenous futurities (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and environmental, place-based and science education from western perspectives is guilty of erasing Indigenous Lands and protecting settler futures (Bang et al., 2014) – thereby likely to be guilty of metaphorizing decolonization. While place-based education is derived from western epistemologies, Land education centres Indigeneity (Calderon, 2014). Indigenous pedagogies are fundamentally about relationships with Land, relationships which are complex beyond western understanding (Simpson, 2014). For Smith (2021), the convergence point between culturally sustaining pedagogies and environmental and place-based pedagogies *is* Land education. There cannot be true community and sustainability or a full understanding of place in a settler colonial society without centring Indigenous knowledges (Calderon, 2014).

Reckoning with the histories and ongoing realities of settler colonial violence and respecting Indigenous peoples and knowledges is a responsibility of settler Canadians and settler Canadian educators (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Scully, 2012), and certainly for environmental educators, who risk double colonization by claiming to be experts on Indigenous Land (Korteweg & Russell, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that traditional Indigenous knowledges have been appropriated and romanticized by western environmentalists (Styres, 2018). This is extractivism, to which, in Simpson's words, "The alternative is deep reciprocity. It's respect, it's relationship, it's responsibility, and it's local" (in Klein, 2013, para 19).

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[6] Tuck and Yang (2012) originally use the word "repatriation" to describe the restitution of land. Asher et al. (2018) note that "subsequent work calls for rematriation, gesturing to the traditional governance systems of many Indigenous nations that center women's leadership" (p. 332).

Youth Voice

Just as it is ludicrous to discuss education for environmental justice in North America without centring Indigenous voices, it is also ludicrous to discuss K-12 education without honouring youth voice. Adultism and adult supremacy are very real forms of oppression which intersect with other forms of oppression that youth experience (bergman, 2022). A core understanding of culturally sustaining pedagogies is that youth possess expertise and knowledge (Borck, 2020). In working towards more equitable school environments that allow historically marginalized students to thrive, an ongoing commitment to make space for their identities, voices, and agency is necessary (Block, 2020; Emdin, 2016; Livingstone et al., 2014).

In the literature, these themes are embodied through youth participatory action research (YPAR), a research methodology in which youth participate as co-researchers. YPAR is driven by the core belief that the study of a particular context should be led by the youth who know it best and are most directly affected; if we do not honour their unique insights and potential as changemakers, we uphold the very power structures we seek to disrupt (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2020; Bautista et al., 2013; Tuck & Habtom, 2019; Walsh, 2018). It is also rife with challenges and tensions, revealing the palpable discomfort of adults and institutions when youth wield power (Herr, 2017; Lac & Fine, 2018). By engaging these tensions and reversing typical power structures, YPAR holds incredible potential for challenging adultism (Bettencourt, 2020).

Urban Public Schools: Where it All Comes Together

In urban public schools, all of this – oppression, pluralism, climate justice, decolonization, youth – swirls together. Urban public schools, and urban environments more broadly, are, of course, sites where oppression continues to be upheld. Emdin (2016) terms urban youth as “neoindigenous” because of their relationship to marginalization and displacement.

Tuck and Habtom (2019) similarly draw connections between settler colonialism and antiblackness as "root violences" (p. 243) that shape Indigenous and Black youth's relationship to place in Toronto. Cities are often viewed as non-ecological spaces, a violent erasure both of more-than-human presence (Jickling et al., 2018) and Indigenous presence (Bang et al., 2014; Styres et al., 2013; Tuck & Habtom, 2019). Urban places *are* Indigenous Lands (Bang et al., 2014; Styres et al., 2013; Tuck & Habtom, 2019). Styres et al. (2013) describe Land as holding layers of "placed stories", even when covered with urban infrastructure, even when Indigenous voices are silenced or ignored, and even when people forget to listen. Given this, and that a majority of Indigenous peoples in Canada now live in urban centres, Land education must take place in urban educational environments (Styres et al., 2013). Urban schools are also sites of cultural pluralism where complex and dynamic interactions between diverse cultural groups take place (Paris & Alim, 2017; Russ & Krasny, 2017). Urban spaces, as built environments, are also inherently more accessible to disabled bodies (Schmidt, 2022) and often more welcoming of queer identities (CBC, 2021), which creates further opportunities for diverse perspectives to interact. Given this multitude of factors, urban environments are rich in challenges and opportunities for environmental education (Russ & Krasny, 2017).

Tensions: Embodied Opportunities for New Storytelling

Tensions are inherent to justice work. While different movements share common experiences of oppression, they may also have fundamentally different goals, as Tuck and Yang (2012) articulate when speaking of incommensurability between decolonization, reconciliation, and other social justice movements. Movements preoccupied with sustainable ecological futures may alienate racialized people (Gilliam, 2021; Heglar, 2020; Ray, 2021) and people from other marginalized groups (e.g. Russell et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2022). Researchers engaging in YPAR

projects find themselves navigating blurred boundaries between conflicting roles, as allowing genuine student agency comes into tension with their institutional power as both teachers and researchers (Herr, 2017; Lac & Fine, 2018). Teachers' "critical caring", authentic care for environmental work and human connection with students, plays an essential role for student engagement (Schindel & Tolbert, 2017), but in education, authentic caring can also cause discordancy for teachers, as their values as activists and humans contradict their roles working within and upholding oppressive education systems (Dover et al., 2018; Dunn, 2020; Gorski & Chen, 2015). These tensions will be particularly felt by teachers who have lived experiences of marginalization (Grooms et al., 2021; Russell & Semenko, 2016; Tompkins et al., 2019).

Aoki (1993) muses that teachers are *always* dwelling in "tensionality" (p. 257) between two curricula: the *curriculum-as-plan*, that which is written and prepared by curriculum developers for a nameless, faceless, student, and the *lived curriculum*, that which exists in the real lives and stories of the individuals in the classroom, of which there are "as many as there are self and students, and possibly more" (p. 258). Aoki muses that tension and turbulence is a good and fruitful place to be, where the curriculum-as-story is able to grow between the master story of the curriculum-as-plan and the daily stories of the lived curriculum. There is a distinction to be made between the kind of fruitful tensionality described in detail by Aoki (1993), and tensions that cause harm, but in many studies, including those in the preceding paragraph, tensions as dwelling in between distinct and contradictory realities may also be generative and beneficial.

Emerging in the Tensions: Research Questions and Purpose

I turned to academic research as a response to embodied tensions felt in my role as a teacher and found many of these tensions reflected and refracted in the literature. My multiple accountabilities and responsibilities continue to come into tension with one another and with

institutional impositions and constraints. By taking on the role of graduate student-researcher, stepping into the triangulated identity of scholar-activist educator, I discovered, and continue to discover, additional tensions, questions, and power dynamics borne out of participating in the institutions of graduate education and academic research. While morphing through different iterations and articulations, my inquiry has been swirling closer to my core questions. Working in a project-based learning model, I spend a fair bit of time talking with students about research questions, essential questions, or driving questions. They are those ever-elusive concisely worded articulations of the purpose of our inquiry, like rogue mythical creatures which we circle around but so often fail to capture, and which morph and change over time.

My research questions are the following: (1) How do I, as a scholar-activist educator working within institutions, embody my responsibilities and accountabilities to/within my school context – this place, this Land, this moment, these people, these relationships, these communities? (2) What does it look like to dwell in tensions between multiple accountabilities and responsibilities, as I confront the very real oppressive forces in my world, my community, and myself, while simultaneously imagining and striving for collective well-being in relationally connected, culturally sustaining and ecologically resilient education?

What pulls these questions and resources together in the research is me, my embodied self, in this context, in this moment, on this Land, in these tensions, shaped by everything I have encountered through my lived experiences in my professional role, my personal relationships, and my academic wanderings. The purpose of this research is to chronicle and share my journey of grappling with these tensions. The grappling of many others who I have cited above in my literature review (e.g. Aoki, 1993; Herr, 2017; Lac & Fine, 2018; Russell & Semenko, 2016; Schmidt, 2022; Simpson, 2014; Tilley & Taylor, 2013; Wilson & Laing, 2018) has provided me

with new insights and perspectives, and each local, contextualized and specific lens adds dimension to understanding the role of education, and of scholar-activist educators. Vulnerable sharing is essential for building relationships (Schindel & Tolbert, 2017; Wilson, 2008) and solidarity requires learning from others' experiences (Jordan, 2024; Lupinacci et al., 2019). Holding pluralism as a value (Paris & Alim, 2017), there is a need for the offering of multiple perspectives. My own grappling, from a unique context which has not yet been represented in the literature, is what I offer to this conversation, through an autoethnographic collection of poetry and creative non-fiction.

Chapter 4: Dwelling in Tensionality: Collected Poems and Commentary

Five poems are presented in this chapter. The poems, which were written at different points throughout the past three years, demonstrate my embodied, poetic answers to the research questions articulated at the end of the previous chapter: they show how I responded in moments of dwelling in tensions. Each poem is accompanied by a brief commentary, including when and where they were written as context, and any relevant thoughts on their meaning or relationship to my developing scholarly-activist teaching praxis.

Self-in-Relation

1. I'm from…

…(was born/currently live and work in)
Treaty 1
lands of the Anishinaabe, Ininewak, Anishininewak, Dakota, Dene
homeland of the Métis Nation
presently known as
Winnipeg.

…(way-back-when)
England/Ireland/Germany,
but have no connection to those lands.

…(love/feel at home in)
Port Alberni, B.C.
unceded territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth
where my mother grew up
where dear friends and family live
where I, too, have lived and worked,
where
swimming in the cold, clear water of Cameron Lake
breathing in the cedar-scented air of lush West Coast rainforest
cresting a hill on a bicycle, dazzled by late-afternoon sun sparkling on the Alberni Inlet
I feel at home.

2. I know…

…about this place
from a western perspective

from working at the Alberni Valley Museum
like my mother before me.

…Scottish settlers arrived in 1860
built a paper mill on the banks of the Somass River
but left a few years later
(trees too big for their European millstones).
More settlers came in the 1880s
stayed this time
for agriculture, fishing, sawmilling, paper milling, the railroad
the waters of the Alberni Inlet seen as a deep sea port,
an economic opportunity
for ships exporting lumber
I grew up on "heritage" songs and stories
(forest industry propaganda/romanticization of the MacBloe era)
"Springboards, axes, saws,
trees fall down like thunderous applause,
we chip, chop the trees real good,
in this forest neighbourhood!"[7]
they arrogantly, ignorantly, believed the forest was infinite
turns out–
in only a few decades,
most of the old growth was gone
government-subsidized companies filling ships with spindly second- or third-growth logs
ignoring Nuu-chah-nulth knowledges
while clear-cut mountainsides mess with the watershed's drought and flood cycles
long, hot, dry summers
air smoky from forest fires
hordes of tourists driving through to Tofino.

…the narratives of my people
white, politically progressive, socially/environmentally conscious
(NDP/United Church)
community activists
organizers of an official Apology, in 1997,
for the Alberni Residential School–
But Willie Ermine is right:
we have lost our memories
our connection with land.[8]

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[7] From one of the Tin Pants Theatre Troupe shows put on at McLean Mill National Historic Site (as preserved by my memory). This one was from 2009, I think.

[8] Referencing a video that I had watched for class featuring Willie Ermine's thoughts on the meaning of reconciliation (National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education, 2019). Ermine is Cree/Neyhiyaw from Sturgeon Lake First Nation and Professor Emeritus at the First Nations University of Canada.

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3. My history of self-in-relation-to-place

Challenged by reading Cyndy Baskin,
I interviewed my three living grandparents
about their relationships with land
wanting to better understand
my own roots and place-based identities.

I listed
every place where my parents and grandparents had lived, felt connected to
as far back as they remembered.
Almost forty different North American cities:
this land has nurtured and sustained us
as we roamed unrooted, occupying
territories of dozens of Nations.
I wrote down their names:
A dizzying list...
How little I know of their stories.

Dad's parents, from the American Midwest: unsure of their grandparents' birthplaces,
their grandmothers' maiden names
never wondered, never asked:
"All German, as far as we know"[9],
but how did they come to be in the U.S. prairies?
Grampa laughs.
Ridiculous question.
Gramma reflects: perhaps the stigma of being German after two world wars
kept her parents silent about their history.

Nana: born in Ontario,
daughter of immigrants from England,
lived in many different places
before and after marriage.
What she recounts of Grandpop's family:
his mother's family, Irish, obsessed with status and genealogy,
his father's, *"prairie people"* who *"came to Canada who knows when"*[10]
Nana impatient with my questions about land she felt connected to:

[9] K. Gehrs, personal communication, July 2022
[10] S. Whyte, personal communication, July 2022

"I was someone who looked forward to the next place rather than being sad about leaving the last place."[11]

Funny
I've always felt closer to Mum's family
Yearned after the West Coast
Resisted my Manitoba side
But of everyone in the family
Grampa has the deepest connection to land:
This who-knows-how-many-generations German Lutheran settler loves the prairies
a prairie boy through and through
My dad and I
both born in Winnipeg
Grandpop's dad's family, too, from Manitoba/Saskatchewan–
My Port Alberni connection just 50 years old
while my prairie story stretches back at least five generations
I am more of a prairie girl than I thought.

–

4. I hold close to my heart…

…the taste of summer, a juicy blackberry
ripened by August heat
not the native trailing blackberry–
the invasive Himalayan ones that choke every ditch
line every railroad track.

…sailing on skates
on the frozen Red River
beneath the surface
the abandoned bodies of missing and murdered Indigenous women
muddy waters, indeed.

…a necklace I bought from a Hupacasath artisan:
a seashell encased in rough cedar bark weaving,
cradling a small charm,
a bison.
I am from
two places
and a complicated colonial history.

[11] S. Whyte, personal communication, July 2022

In July 2022, shortly before beginning the M.Ed. program, I was inspired by Baskin (2016) to interview my grandparents about their relationship to Land. I had never been very interested in my family's history. Reading Baskin (2016) was neither the first nor the last time that I heard an Indigenous person say that white people need to understand where they come from, but it was the one that pushed me to do something about it. In the spring of 2023, while taking a course in Place and Land in Teacher Education with Lex Scully, I finally returned to my notes from those conversations with my grandparents, and this poem was born.

This was an important piece for me to write, and in many ways, the most personal one I have chosen to share. I also shared this poem during the 2023-24 school year with my then-Grade 10 students, and they wrote their own versions. Some students engaged in the task in a heartfelt way. Others didn't. There are times I want to communicate with my students, and I have, "I'm not asking you to do this because I'm your teacher and you are students and you have to do what I say so I give you your grades and your credits." I don't wish for my relationship with my students to be defined by power, a transactional relationship. And yet, it also is, and I cannot deny that very real dynamic as we play our (institutional) roles. Institutional structures are not useless; teachers and students do need some kind of structure to work within. But this poem exposes my inherent vulnerability, my implicit ignorance, the gaps in my understanding of Canadian history, and my acknowledgement that whiteness is not neutral. It is an unraveling of biases that are products of my very successful Canadian education. It is a way of saying to my students: "It matters, that you do this (un)learning; and I will show you that it matters because it is a risk I am willing to take myself. Let me show you how much I do not know. Let me show you how I am part of this history, and maybe you will see that you are, too. Let's learn together about the things I don't know how to teach you."

period/full moon #1: september

there are two sides to this week
there's the side that's about logistics, about action:
hold the banks to account
get the camping gear ready for the school trip
pack the food
gather the permission forms
print the bus permit
send all the e-mails
attend the protests bookending the week:
protect trans kids
every child matters
talk back to the vitriolic hatred of the past week
talk back to the history of colonization
not with words but with
presence
mobilize voters for october 3
keep moving
don't stop
keep solving problems
don't give up
keep going
keep going
keep going

then there's the part
about the moon
and water.

there's the part where after all the gear has been gathered
and the bus has bounced down the uneven road
in between preparing meals and touring the chemistry lab
we connect
with the lakes
with the boreal forest
with each other
there's the part
where i gaze at the moon
where i gaze at the water
and feel
and wonder
moving at a slower pace
there's the reality of my body

menstruating
my connection to the moon right there in the word
in the monthly rhythm
my body's ritual
slowing me down with aches and pains
the cleansing blood
thicker than water, it is water
i am
a body of water

in the moments when the pace slows
i catch my breath:
“education is no guarantee of decency or wisdom” (Orr, 1991)
neither is action
yield to the wisdom
of the moon
of the water
of my body
let that wisdom
guide my steps
as step by step
we climb this unscalable mountain (Pinson, 2022)

i breathe
i bleed
i feel
i flow
i connect
i keep moving

I initially wrote this poem for the discussion boards while taking a course in Wild Pedagogies with Paul Berger in the fall of 2023. In this course, we were assigned experiential tasks around various themes for each week as well as more conventional academic tasks. During this very busy semester, I was taking two master’s classes while teaching full-time. The week that the Wild Pedagogies’ class theme was the moon and water, when we were supposed to draw the moon for at least four nights and spend an hour with water, it happened to be the same week when I was taking 30 students on a somewhat remote camping trip. The end of the week was September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, when being present for the events

in Winnipeg was a high priority for me. Manitobans were also in the midst of an inflammatory provincial election during which the governing Progressive Conservative party had made a political wedge issue out of refusing to search the landfill for remains of murdered Indigenous women, and were also campaigning on a wave of transphobic rhetoric, fanning the flames for protestors to organize anti-trans marches. So at the last minute, in the midst of preparing for the camping trip and attempting to keep up with my university coursework, I dragged myself to the Manitoba Legislature to demonstrate support for trans youth. The counter-protest was much, much bigger than the anti-trans march. Wab Kinew's NDP won the election and he became Manitoba's (indeed, Canada's) first First Nations premier, and the proposed legislation targeting the rights and safety of trans youth was not passed. As of March 2025, two sets of remains were found at the Prairie Green landfill, and the Progressive Conservatives apologized to the families for refusing to search the landfill and for their behaviour during the election (Shebahkeget, 2025). But at the time I wrote this poem, in the fall of 2023, none of these outcomes was a foregone conclusion. Oh, and I was on my period.

How can a body be present to all of this, when it has more than enough reason to be exhausted: the need to complete more work than it feels humanly possible to achieve in the hours available, poignant awareness of cruelty and suffering, the shedding of the uterine wall? I felt the tension of the need to rest, and the impetus to contribute collectivist labour to these larger efforts. Actions that I believed were important, that needed to happen: to make sure the students were safe and fed on what was for many their first ever experience camping (or existing for multiple days without cell service!), *and* to show up in solidarity at what felt like a critical political moment in our city, province and country.

I ended up expanding this poem into a series of pieces I dubbed "menstrual poetry" (written during my periods in September, October, and November) which I submitted as one of my assignments for the Wild Pedagogies course. Although I had been dabbling in creative writing before this point, it was through this that I began to lean into it as a practice, one that integrated my embodied experience with the rather disembodied impulse towards intellectual critical analysis. The themes covered in this poem fit into a larger desire to demonstrate my pedagogy through my actions. I do not want to be a different person inside the classroom than I am outside of it. It is an affirmation of the physical, animal limitations which are part of being human, and must be tended to along with other accountabilities and responsibilities. Pedagogically, again, this is something I hope to model for my students.

message in a bottle

i wrote a poem in may 2023

i won't share it
it was for you
you are dead

i'm taking "a stance of refusal" (Wark, 2021)
there's a truth that's mine, but it was woven in relationship
i can't share mine without sharing yours

to anonymize you
is to dishonour you

i wish i could ask your permission
but you are not here

how do i honour you?

This poem was a follow-up, written to a much longer poem I wrote in May 2023 following the death of an eighteen-year-old former student from my first advisory. I could not

include the original. With or without edits to anonymize personal details, I had no desire to claim her story. Yet, I felt I needed to include *something* so as not to silence it. The week the student died, as I sobbed in a friend's arms at the divisional graduation pow wow, she said to me, "This sucks and it's not fair, but you will make meaning out of this." The meaning I have made lives in embodied ways in my relationships and teaching practice. Most of it belongs to me and to her family and friends, but some of it also deserves to be shared here.

While grief comes with all loss, this was a loss that forced many systemic injustices into sharp relief for me. In my privileged life in Winnipeg, I had been able to hold systemic issues for Indigenous peoples in Canada at arm's length even as they surrounded me on all sides. The death of this young woman, who had spent four years in my advisory and did not survive a year past the high school graduation that she worked so hard to achieve, brought the bald-faced truths of anti-Indigenous racism painfully close. That her death was so statistically likely, that I pass by people as vulnerable or more than her every day, that there is a seeming willingness to tolerate the death and suffering of Indigenous peoples in Canadian society, that some lives are valued more than others, that I am complicit in all of this: these are all tensions I do not know how to move through in a good way. I name them. It is not all I can do, but it is better than leaving them alone in their silence.

two poems about power

violence: talking to freire

"To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce"

"our converts…truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of transformation"

a scene of
violence:
heat, although not too hot,

made pleasant by a breeze
rustling amongst the branches of the trees providing their cool shade
sounding the soothing music of the wind-chimes
caressing her hair, her skin
she sits
in a solid wooden chair at a square wooden table, made by the hands of friends
next to a house with a heat-pump, a cool space she can retreat to if the sun beats down too much
she reads Freire (2000/1970) on a Kobo Elipsa 2E using the Kobo Stylus 2 to annotate, highlight, make notes
taking gulps of clean water from a purple 24 oz bottle (contigo brand, purchased at Wal-Mart only recently, after she lost track of her old one in the sleepy confusion of airplanes and airports)
the grass is neatly mown, the hedges trimmed
the tomatoes and zinnias in their heavy pots and wire cages
protected from the hungry mouths of deer
birds chirp and flit about
she uses the Merlin app on her two-year-old Google Pixel 6a to identify the calls of the dark-eyed junco, the chipping sparrow, the pine siskin, satisfying her idle curiosity
ants hurry everywhere, on missions that take them over the table and chairs and keyboard
when they get too close and tickle her skin she blows them to the ground
they scurry on
she is comfortable
well-fed with a meal from a local cafe
(bacon, eggs, potatoes)
having awoken from a brief nap right here in this chair
changed into clean clothes after the sweaty excursion to the hardware store this morning
riding a bicycle through the forest to buy wasp traps
because Nana found a wasp in the kitchen yesterday
two hours ago, she filled the traps with water to activate the toxic chemicals
and hung them in two places on the patio
already, she has caught one wasp
it is a summer day: separated from the bustle of the school year
today she has only minor, achievable responsibilities
materially speaking, she has everything she needs, and more
later she will make taco salad
which she will eat with her grandmother
who is right now sitting inside watching the television
and then clean the kitchen
watch Jeopardy!
and then drive 12 minutes to the home of friends who live on the lake
immerse her body in cold water
so she can sleep peacefully through the heat

she wrestles with ideas
reading
writing
thinking
wondering
discussing with the members of the writing group on Zoom
what will she write about for her portfolio
for her master's degree in education for change
social justice, environment and sustainability
Freire speaks to her through time and space and a translator:
oppressors don't want liberation, he says,
they perceive any loss of their dominance as a threat
they feel oppressed when systems are overturned
indeed, violence is necessary for her to sit in this peaceful scene
so much invisible suffering
(excepting the wasps, of course, the one very visible in its fruitless efforts to find its way out of the trap, for which she feels, if truth be told, no real remorse, more so an academic curiosity about her lack of remorse, in fact her mother has just texted her "may the wasp bodies pile up :)", although she does not imagine either her mother or herself as violent people, they are content to accept the violence for their own comfort)
she can't liberate the oppressed with her words
it requires reflection and action
they must liberate themselves, and she must work for solidarity
but will she?

she's not rushing to free the wasp, after all

harm
what does it mean to be
a researcher
what does it mean to be
an educator
what does it mean to be
a human
what does it mean to be
an activist
what does it mean to operate
ethically
relationally
professionally
with integrity
what does it mean to be
well
and is that even fair

perhaps fair is the wrong word
is anything fair
what does it look like to challenge
the systems
what does it look like to hold multiple values in contradiction
and balance them against each other
who gets to be safe
who gets to be well

the doctors say first, do no harm
what is the teacher's directive?
what if you're harming people anyway
because there are too many in the waiting room
harmed by not being cared for
there's only so much you can do
what does it mean to
do no harm?
if there is harm already,
how do we heal it?

The first of these poems was written in the summer of 2024. During this time, I was staying with my grandmother in Port Alberni, on Vancouver Island, spending many hours each day engaging in reading and writing, and had just finished reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2000/1970). I was very aware, uncomfortably so, of the indulgence of thinking and writing about social and environmental justice in a situation where I had all my material needs and wants provided for, thanks to generational wealth that my family has built on the lands of dispossessed Indigenous peoples, and the historical and ongoing theft of lands and labour. It is a poem both about and of privilege: it is *about* the cruelty of being complicit in the suffering of others, and it also cruelly, vainly, dwells in the decadence of that complicity.

The second poem was written during the 2024-2025 school year. It is one of many pieces that I wrote in direct response to being in the middle of the tensions, and the only one I felt was general enough to share. I no longer remember what specific incident preceded the writing of this poem, but I do know that it was written at the end of an internship day. On internship days,

Tuesdays and Thursdays, our school population is spread out throughout the City of Winnipeg. Students attend internships, while advisors dart around: visiting students at their placements and meeting with their mentors (professionals who have agreed to supervise the internship), taking others to one-off experiences or to interviews to set up new placements, supervising group internships or excursions, and supervising still others back at school who are, for whatever reason, not at internship that day (either those who are temporarily at school due to factors like a sick or traveling mentor, or those who more permanently exist in the purgatory of not successfully securing an internship). These days, being looser and more flexible, are also prime times to schedule meetings and events related to student projects that do not fit within the constraints of the Monday/Wednesday/Friday school day. In other words, anything and everything could – and does – happen on an internship day. Because they are less structured, they are often when the best and worst of this program occur. This is not an indictment of the model. It is a privilege to have this deep engagement with community, to observe how the program creates conditions for extraordinary learning that could never occur inside of a classroom. I and my teacher colleagues bear witness to what teenagers can accomplish when entrusted with responsibilities and immersed within real-world communities, and we support them through the very real ways they can screw up in those very same circumstances, and all of this is powerful learning. Nevertheless, as an advisor, you can never, ever, meet everyone's needs and be everywhere you need to be; inevitably, someone, somewhere, is being neglected and forgotten. As you rush from one thing to the next, you misstep. To engage with the world is also to confront the injustices baked into our social systems. You feel powerless against systemic violence, and yet, you *do* hold power, and with that power, you participate in and uphold oppressive systems. The question at the conclusion of the final poem and this chapter is a cry that

echoes from the discomfort of contradiction: how do we, in schools, heal from harms when the harms are still ongoing?

The poems I have shared in this chapter viscerally share my experience of living in the tensions as a scholar-activist educator, in ways that can connect and resonate with others who are facing the crisis of modernity from their own teaching contexts. In the next chapter, I will consider how they also reveal answers to my research questions.

Chapter 5: Naming Tensions, Practice as Praxis: Thematic Analysis and Commitments

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the lessons learned from my autoethnographic poetic inquiry by proposing themes that emerged through the poems and in answer to the research questions shared at the end of Chapter 3: (1) How do I, as a scholar-activist educator working within institutions, embody my responsibilities and accountabilities to/within my school context – this place, this Land, this moment, these people, these relationships, these communities? (2) What does it look like to dwell in tensions between multiple accountabilities and responsibilities, as I confront the very real oppressive forces in my world, my community, and myself, while simultaneously imagining and striving for collective well-being in relationally connected, culturally sustaining and ecologically resilient education?[12]

My response to the research questions can be encapsulated in two key themes I have identified in the poems. The first is **Naming the Tensions: Embracing Discomfort, Releasing Shame.** Within this section, I explore three key areas of tension I have learned to sit with: whiteness, my animal body, and power, harm, and violence. The second theme is **Practice as Praxis: Training Intuition and Instinct.** Inspired by Simpson (2014), I ruminate on the *importance* of practice; and drawing on Justice (2018), I conceptualize three *areas* of practice: connecting with the world, connecting with self, and connecting with others. Through this analysis, I share the commitments I hope to carry forward beyond this project.

[12] While the contents of Chapters 3 and 4 came together slowly over the past three years, Chapter 5 was written almost entirely in March and early April 2025. It is tempting to expound upon the daily news cycle as evidence that this moment is a particularly compelling time to sit with these research questions. On the contrary, I would argue that these questions are no more salient now than they were a few months or years ago. We have needed to address the crisis of modernity for a long time now, and while the current political instabilities in North America are symptoms of this crisis and must be attended to, we cannot let them distract from the deeper issues at play.

Naming the Tensions: Embracing Discomfort, Releasing Shame

At different points throughout this project, I have conflated the tensions I feel in my work with the problems that created them. Viewing the tensions *as* problems, I felt an impatient yearning within myself to resolve them. Of course, large, complex, systemic problems are not quickly resolvable. Holding awareness of these issues and my complicity with them can create discomfort and shame, provoking paralysis or the instinct to ignore and turn away. The tensions can then sit as the proverbial elephant in the room, and the discomfort and shame builds. However, over the course of this project, I have become more comfortable with greeting the elephants in the room. Writing poetry was an access point for this naming. Initially, I reached for creative writing in the moments when I felt the most tension, as a way of articulating and working through my discomfort. As writing poetry became an intentional exercise rather than a responsive release, I gained skills of turning towards the discomfort and shame and exploring them with curiosity for generative probing.

As Aoki (1993) refers to tensionality and tensioned spaces as fruitful places, I found that choosing to name and investigate the tensions led to an *embracing* of discomfort and a *releasing* of shame. Even outside of the poems, in conversations with colleagues, students, friends, and family, I was able to take more risks I found uncomfortable, and recognize the discomfort as a fruitful place of learning and growth. Naming the tensions is vulnerable, risky, and opens up possibilities for transformation that would otherwise not exist.

To illustrate this transformational vulnerability in de/colonizing research, I ruminate on three areas of tension that I learned to engage with: whiteness, how to relate to time, and the interlocking structures of power, harm and violence.

Claiming Whiteness

The teaching profession has long been dominated by white educators, often women, who continue to "[enact] racism and white supremacy while simultaneously performing innocence and race evasiveness" (McLean, 2022, p. 38), a pattern which is paralleled in other helping professions such as social work (St. Denis, 2022). As a white woman teacher, I am part of this legacy of settler-colonialism. Before, during, and after any interaction I have with a student on an individual interpersonal level, my whiteness is present as a historical-social-material reality that shapes how both I and the student engage with each other, whether either of us is consciously aware of this or not. Contextually, I represent a set of dominant ideas, unjust systems and oppressive structures much larger than myself.

My school, like many others, features mostly white teachers teaching mostly non-white students in a mostly non-white community. In exploring the themes of "democracy, pluralism, and climate justice" in the literature, it was abundantly clear that there is a need for the centering of voices that counter dominant, hegemonic paradigms in education – for example through intersectionality (e.g. Maina-Okori et al., 2018), culturally sustaining pedagogies (e.g. Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017), or Indigenous/Land education (e.g. Tuck et al., 2014). The voices – in fact, the mere presence – of non-white teachers are invaluable and powerful. White voices cannot speak on their behalf. At the same time, systemic injustices, discrimination, and expectations to take on additional work weigh heavily on my non-white friends and colleagues. For all the allyship, friendship, listening and anti-oppressive learning and action that I engage in, there have been, are, and will be, griefs I cannot understand, burdens I do not bear, subtleties I do not grasp, experiences I do not share. My whiteness protects and shelters me from them at every turn.

The *only* way to undercut these tensions is to claim and name my whiteness. As DiAngelo (2018) argues, white people have been socialized *not* to do this and feel a discomfort around it that they term "white fragility" (p. 2). I exhibit white fragility in the "Where I'm From" poem in the introduction, written shortly before I began the master's degree. In this poem, I avoid mentioning my whiteness, only vaguely alluding to the fact that the First Nations are "not my ancestors". Everything I claim to be "from" is of recent history (within living memory) and in Canada. In contrast, the Self-in-Relation poem in Chapter 4 faces race and history with more candor. I claim "my people" as white, acknowledge the lost memories and disconnection to ancestral lands that the *Where I'm From* poem fails to confront, and trace my family's history back to England, Ireland, and Germany. The poem concludes with the affirmation that "I am from/two places/and a complicated colonial history".

There can be a discomfort and shame to claiming whiteness, as it requires coming to grips with the harms that white supremacy has caused and is still causing. By failing to claim my whiteness, I maintain the illusion that my identity as a white teacher is "constituted as caring, neutral and objective" (McLean, 2022, p. 40), and fail to challenge white supremacy. Being comfortable calling myself white is not radically transformative, but it is a crucial step to disrupting the violence of silence, which all white teachers need to take.

How to Relate to Time

The second poem in Chapter 4, "period/full moon #1: september", names the tension of my own self as a physical, animal being, with my other selves as social, economic, political beings. My accountabilities and responsibilities to my profession and to my community, to contributing to the world I wish to dream into being, demand *more* and *more* and *more.* Action is

demanded in response to each catastrophic facet of the crisis of modernity (capitalism, colonialism, racism, climate crisis, etc.). Justice work is sorely needed, and never finished.

As a lifelong overachiever, it became a half-joke, half-truth amongst my friends and family that my current teaching job has cured me of perfectionism because it was so overwhelmingly apparent that I (indeed, any teacher), can never accomplish everything well. I know that I serve everyone better, in the long run, by setting boundaries that protect against burnout. Yet, to students, boundaries can feel callous in the moment when *their* particular needs are not being met by *anyone*.

Our tiny school suffers from do-everything syndrome. Students and staff (as well as mentors and family/community members) are busy, and we make a lot happen. On the one hand, this frenetic energy feels exciting, and leads to many incredible partnerships, achievements, and projects. On the other hand, it is not realistic for the energy of either the staff *or* the students, and we may then miss out on deeper, longer-lasting learning as a result. Hersey (2022) argues that the impetus to be infinitely efficient and productive is a result of capitalism, and that rest – for its own sake, not merely to recharge for further productivity – is an important act of resistance and survival in late neoliberal capitalism. Any shame, in this impossible situation, comes from internalized notions of self-blame, the niggling inner voice that nags *I have not done enough.*

Teachers, in my collegial circles, love to talk about time (and how we don't have enough). We talk about "spending time" as though it is a resource. When students miss a few weeks of school to travel to India or the Philippines or go hunting with their dad or participate in a unique educational opportunity, or are incapable of attending consistently due to a mental or physical disability or caregiving responsibilities for a younger or older family member, there are usually academic consequences, as the train of our schedule has kept racing along without them.

Making Land education, or anti-racism, or decolonization a priority in high school is constantly pulled at and apart by time pressures around provincial exams and students' or parents' concerns about preparation for university. How educators relate to time shows a lot about our curricular priorities.

I attempt to imagine what it would look like to relate to time differently in schools. Could structures change to view the humans in this system as animals moving through ecosystems, responsive to seasonal changes, our energy, and the food we have available? Is it even possible for educators to imagine other ways of being when we are so governed by a school schedule with four periods that start and end at particular times, and have internalized these logics of economic, precisely measured colonial time such that our choices become dictated by them? Our school does more than most (especially with the flexible Tuesday/Thursday schedule) to challenge these structures, and yet they still hold us within their grip.

Time pressure is something I find I must actively resist, reminding myself to slow down and respond to my own energy and the energies of the people and ecosystems around me as I frequently slip into hyper-productive, neoliberal modes of work. Naming the flaws in educators' relationship to time and productivity calls our attention to how we might reimagine and shift it.

Power, Harm, and Violence

In Chapter 3, I enumerated the multiple crises and tensions arising in urban public schools. In many ways, the most difficult tension to hold as an educator is knowing that I cause harm. Not to give myself (or any individual teacher) too much credit: a great deal of the harms that *appear* to be caused by me (to students, or their parents, or my own sense of teacher guilt) are really caused by larger systemic problems which I alone cannot address or solve.

While those who are experiencing the harms *must* confront them head-on, I have the choice to ignore them. Privileges allow me to go around what others must go through, and those privileges exist in direct relationship to the suffering of others. The poems "message in a bottle", "violence: talking to freire", and "harm" all grapple with this tension. Stating that I cause harm feels cruel, particularly as a teacher, and yet, if I know that I am causing harm, why am I not equipped to do something about it? There is no reconciliation without truth. There is no accountability without being honest about how my actions contribute to reproducing oppressive structures. Responsibility cannot coexist with denial. This is a tension I *must* face, allowing it to propel me to further action.

As I have become more capable of verbalizing my accountability to harms (as well as other tensions such as whiteness and time), I notice that it provokes reaction from others. To state in conversation that I am white, that I benefit from intergenerational wealth, that I hold institutional power over my students, or that my lifestyle relies on the exploitation and marginalization of others, transgresses social norms to keep silent about such matters. Sometimes, it makes people uncomfortable. People may seek to reassure me that I am being too hard on myself, dismiss or ignore the issue by changing the subject, or argue that it is right and inevitable for these harms to exist. In situations where I am in the position of being an ally, it *can* open up space for safety, solidarity, and trust, but can also feel insufficient and insincere. Words are only so effective. To embody my commitment to multiple accountabilities and responsibilities, and dwell in the tensions between them, also requires action.

Practice as Praxis: Training Intuition and Instinct

since i first read
land as pedagogy (Simpson, 2014)
a call to action
has drummed in my consciousness:

"if you want to learn something, you need to take your body out onto the land and do it
get a practice"[13]

How do I embody my multiple accountabilities and responsibilities? How do I dwell in the tensions between them? Teachers make thousands of decisions every day. We are busy people, with many demands on our time. This means that our decisions are often made intuitively, in fractions of seconds, as we do not have time to consciously consider them or deliberate our next steps. In physical pursuits such as athletics or music, practice forms muscle memory, so it is important to consider *what* teachers practice, because that is what will stick. The daily decisions that I make and actions that I take as a teacher live in my body, too. Practice as praxis, for me, is a way of making mindful, intentional commitments to what I value, and training my intuition and instincts through habit formation.

As indicated in the poem above, Simpson (2014) underscores the importance of life practice and embodied practice in Indigenous Land education. What we practice reveals far more about what we are committed to than what we promise. What have I been practicing by writing these poems, and in the spaces between writing them? What do I wish to either continue to practice, or change about my current practices, as I conclude this project?

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter,* Daniel Heath Justice asks: "How do we find the strength and the trust to tell different kinds of stories? Stories that are truthful about who we are, stories that connect us to the world, one another, and even ourselves" (2018, p. 4)? While Justice is talking about literature here, I posit that educators are telling stories through our actions constantly – about what and who matters, about what truths we acknowledge and believe. If being "truthful about who we are" is what I am attempting by naming the tensions, as described

[13] Simpson (2014, pp. 17-18). Grammar and capitalization have been edited to match the style of the poem.

in the previous section, my practices broadly fall into these three categories of connecting with the world, one another, and ourselves. I will use this as a framing to look at my current practices and what I view as my current next steps.

Connecting with the World

I generally conceptualize connecting with the world as opening oneself up to, and learning from, many different perspectives and ways of being. There are two practices I have begun in the last two years which I intend to keep up. The first is reading academic literature, or engaging with content that challenges me with new knowledge and perspectives. I began my master's degree without much experience with academic literature, as my first degree was in literature, philosophy and mathematics. I was a voracious reader, but I read mostly fiction and creative non-fiction. My master's classes' bibliographies, this portfolio's literature review, and having access to the university library, all opened up the world of academic research and non-fiction reading, which I had previously found extremely intimidating. I have also appreciated joining book clubs and discussing these issues in community. Reading, as a practice, shapes the way I engage with the world. I intend to maintain university library memberships and commit to reading texts that challenge me when I am no longer a graduate student.

I invited my students along with me on this journey, sharing articles with them, and showing them how to read and use the university library. I have appreciated the dynamic of learning alongside them, working on my own projects as they work on theirs, and modeling continuous learning. Many of them have integrated the reading of research into their learning process, and are now completely unfazed by highly technical papers on, for example, the latest developments in medical research. (In this, they surpass my own skill.) My students' hunger and capacity for reading research articles demonstrates to me that we need to lower the barriers to

academic spaces and/or create more spaces for sharing peer-reviewed resources outside of the university (e.g. through public libraries). I also commit to showing my students, by teaching them to read academic literature, sharing my own reading journeys with them, and exposing them to university libraries in our city, that this is a space where they can belong.

A second way of engaging with the world through practice was made necessary by choosing to live without a personal car or personal computer. Without my own car or computer, I am far more involved in the public life of the city, spending vast amounts of time on transit, walking or biking through city streets, and in public libraries. As a practice, this makes me far more aware in an embodied way of the issues of poverty, homelessness, and crime in Winnipeg, as well as the vibrant peoples who inhabit it, having many daily interactions with people from all walks of life and parts of the world. I value tremendously the practice of existing in public, and commit to remaining open to the opportunities for connecting it offers, as well as advocating locally for the necessity of accessible public services, resources, and spaces in our community.

In terms of practices to adjust, I have found that burying myself in academic work also distanced me somewhat from local community organizations and activism (in both Winnipeg and Port Alberni). Academic reading is only one way to learn about the world. There is much to learn from local grassroots movements that are mobilizing knowledge, perspectives and relationships in the margins of dominant Canadian society. Recommitting to dedicating my time and energy to getting involved with these communities is a high priority for me.

Connecting with Others

Direct, interpersonal relationships were the primary motivator for me to engage in this research. As de Leeuw et al. (2012) demonstrate, friendship opens up a space for critical engagement. I am fortunate to have friends (some of whom are also colleagues) who are just as

deeply invested in these questions as I am. In the case of de Leeuw and her co-authors, friendship became an informal methodology in the space of formal research; in my case, critical friendship provides the methodological framework to approach life as informal research. My friendships push me to listen, empathize, seek out new resources, read, experiment, question, and reflect. My most important commitment is to show up for people in my real life – students, colleagues, friends, family, community members with whom I collaborate on projects – in intimate ways that involve deep listening and sharing in our learning journeys as we move through this crisis of modernity together.

There are two areas where I have begun to practice challenging myself more, but I realize that I can go further. The first is to build my relationships with Indigenous partners. I know that this relationality matters:

> The process of decolonizing in Canada, on a broad scale and especially in educational contexts, can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across deeply learned divides, revisit and deconstruct their shared past, and engage carefully with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together. (Donald, 2012, p. 102)

To reiterate Simpson's words, cited earlier in Chapter 3: "The alternative [to extractivism] is deep reciprocity. It's respect, it's relationship, it's responsibility, and it's local" (in Klein, 2013, para 19). Building such deep reciprocity requires showing up consistently in my local community. I have started the journey, but I have a long way to go. I commit to continue facing those "deeply learned divides" and seeking opportunities to connect across them.

I feel there are also similar, perhaps even greater, "deeply learned divides" between myself and more-than-humans. The belief that human lives matter more than other lives has been

hardwired into me through my culture and I struggle to challenge it. My attention is far more oriented towards other humans than it is towards other non-human beings. Calling back to Simpson's (2014) imperative to "get your body out onto the land and do it" (pp. 17-18), I consider my practice of relating to the urban space of Winnipeg *as* Land. My body is always on the Land; it is only through practiced forgetting, trained into white people for generations, that I ignore this fact. Reorienting my attention towards the Land all around me, especially while I am walking or biking, is a daily practice. More significantly, seeking out and engaging in opportunities to connect with Land-based learning goes hand-in-hand with building relationships with Indigenous mentors.

My other challenge to myself is to engage with conflicting views. In this time of extreme polarization in media and politics, it can be interpersonally challenging to find common ground with those on the "other side". It is easy to be scared away by far-right ideologies that I find extreme, but given how much these views are permeating the media diet of many people (particularly young cisgender men) (Botto & Gottzen, 2022), finding effective ways of bridging those gaps in real, in-person relationships is of utmost importance. The practice, in this case, is about engaging with openness, listening, and curiosity when such interactions occur. As Botto and Gottzen (2022) argue, vulnerability and the longing for identity and community may be a factor in young men's radicalization; it is my hope for my young male students that they find alternative pathways to identity, community, and healthy masculinity that do not rely upon misogyny and conspiracy theories. Listening and building relationships with them, and gently offering critical thinking, may not save them from far-right radicalization, but it is at least more effective than writing them off as lost causes, pushing them further into their online worlds.

Connecting with Self

I came to the master's degree expecting to connect with "the world" (different knowledge and perspectives), out of the sense of accountability I felt to the "others" in my direct sphere. I was somewhat intimidated by the prospect of working full-time while in a graduate program, but I was surprised to find that doing a master's, in many ways, felt like a *lightening* of my workload. Partly, this was due to the fact that what I was learning was directly relevant to my teaching context and felt generative for my planning; planning felt less like a chore as I was excited to share resources with my students, particularly when they were in Grade 10 and we were focusing on the theme of Land for the entire year. Meanwhile, I never lacked inspiration for research projects or assignments, as my teaching practice provided a constant flow of questions and issues to investigate. The key ingredient in my newfound energy flow, though, was simply the practice of writing. I had not realized how much I had missed the discipline of writing (and creative writing in particular) as a way of connecting with myself. Since graduating from my undergraduate degree, I had worked on small writing projects here and there, but integrating writing into my daily routine renewed my energy in completely unexpected ways. Rather than viewing writing as something extra to do, an additional burden on my list of tasks, I now view it as an energizing practice that allows me to connect to myself and process the many experiences I have in my busy days. As with reading, I also found I was able to share some of my writing with my students, forming a writer's circle with some students that kept us all motivated. Carrying forward the practice of working on creative writing projects will be a lasting legacy of this portfolio.

Similarly, the choice to give up my car and computer (unrelated to this project, but coinciding with it), which is apparently inconceivable to many in the twenty-first century, was

extraordinarily liberating. Moving through the city on foot or on a bicycle was far more creatively generative than driving. Choosing alternative transportation became a form of practicing "slow pedagogy" (Breunig, 2016), "which challenges the dominant narratives of institutional norms. Slow is therefore a counter-hegemonic concept" (p. 2). Contrary to prevailing implicit understandings that vehicle transportation is efficient, I have found that as I travel slowly, time expands, and I become a more effective, energetic, hopeful, creative teacher.

Perhaps these findings seem like personal choices that have nothing to do with either my research, or my teaching praxis; but through a lens of understanding curriculum as *lived* (Aoki, 1993; Tilley & Taylor, 2013), these personal practices decidedly impact how I show up in the world, including as a researcher and as a teacher. To fully embody my responsibilities and accountabilities, to truly sit with and dwell in the tensions, my whole body and whole self needs to be present; it cannot be only a professional or academic exercise.

In this chapter, I have explored how naming tensions such as whiteness, relationship to time, and power, harm and violence can open spaces for deeper engagement, and the importance of practice for connecting with the world, others, and myself. This analysis is a response to my research questions, but not a conclusive declaration. I live and breathe with these questions every day, and doubt I will have ever answered them. Part of my commitment is to continue to live with these questions and shift how I respond to them as I continue to learn and teach with my students and in my community.

Chapter 5: Conclusion (I Have Gone Wandering)

i have gone wandering
still wandering wondering winding wounding wending my way
art work, heart work, hard work, heard work, herd work, word work
blurred lines between my roles as
scholaractivisteducatorpoetteacheradvisorstudentresearcherreaderwriter
daughtergranddaughterniecesisterfriendcolleagueneighbour
bodycyclistanimalobserverthinkerlearneretc
dwelling in the tensions
i am all of this
harming healing
human

The completion of the portfolio is not the completion of the project of learning to live in the tensions, but one step in a lifelong process. The institutions I work and exist within are, of course, still bound up in systemic injustices. And the crisis of modernity, along with the multiple intersecting crises that it entails – racism, settler colonialism, social inequities of all kinds, and climate change – are still ongoing. When I began my master's degree, I felt a great deal of despair about these crises. Now, when things are arguably less stable, I find many moments of empowerment, hope, groundedness, and joy. As educators, even as we (I) perpetuate ongoing harms, we are (I am) also engaging in healing work.

Healing takes time. As Dr. Pamela Palmater said at one of our school division's professional development days: "This work is urgent, but it cannot be rushed" (P. Palmater, personal communication, October 8, 2021). And as Justice Murray Sinclair wisely counseled us at another PD day, it will take eight generations – two hundred years – to heal from the trauma caused by Residential Schools, and the healing has only just begun (M. Sinclair, personal communication, March 13, 2020). How we engage matters. Based on my current understanding of what it means to dwell in the tensions, I aim to cultivate deep, respectful relationships;

continuous, curious learning; and embodied presence and practice, as I honour my multiple accountabilities and responsibilities as a future ancestor.

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