

Pedagogy of the Land: Tensions, Challenges, and Contradictions

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In this article, the authors share autobiographical reflections from their journey to the Northern Nishnawbe Aski Territory in Ontario, Canada where they taught several courses in an Aboriginal focused Bachelor of Education program. Sessions were held at a remote fishing lodge that opened up opportunities for the authors to explore their understanding of Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy while integrating Indigenous and Western knowledges. They refer to these insights in relation to the tensions, challenges, and contradictions they faced while embedding Land in pedagogy and classroom practices, engaging in relationship-based teaching, resisting relations of power and privilege, and re-conceptualizing authorship. Calling on us to expand understandings of pedagogy within Aboriginal education and resist tendencies to look for universal and prescriptive ways to *do* Aboriginal Education, the authors present individualized, contextualized, intimate, and iterative pedagogy and classroom practices.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This article is grounded in our autobiographical reflections, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, of our journeys to the Northern Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Territory. NAN is a land-mass covering two-thirds of Ontario, Canada and hosted the satellite education site where we taught at a fishing lodge as part of the Aboriginal¹ focused Bachelor of Education Primary/Junior program. This program is designed for students of Aboriginal ancestry who are working in educational contexts in communities located within the NAN territory. The Aboriginal students enrolled in the program came from various NAN communities whose home languages are traditionally Cree in the east, OjiCree in the west, and Ojibway in central south. This program, offered by Brock University and the Northern Nishnawbe Educa-

tion Council, has two primary purposes; first, to increase the number of certified Aboriginal teachers in First Nations community schools; and second, to model ways of infusing Aboriginal knowledge with mainstream course content. In addition to the core language course that addresses aspects of the three Nishnawbek languages (taught by a community Elder), traditional languages are infused throughout various courses and students are encouraged to speak in the language in the classroom. We are among many of the program instructors who do not speak Cree. We worked together to ensure the courses we taught integrated Indigenous and mainstream knowledges as well as encouraged the use of language by the students in openings, assignments, presentations, and working sessions. The vision for the course development was grounded in the ways Land² informed curriculum and instruction focusing on how we drew upon Land as first teacher within the classroom. This location opened up opportunities to explore Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy.

In this article we explore the circular and iterative process of reflecting on pedagogy, using those reflections to inform our classroom practice, reflecting on those experiences and connecting them back to pedagogy in order to further our understanding of Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy. We focus on our own experiences and reflections and therefore course content and students' experiences are only included in a general way for clarity. A full examination of course content and students' experiences is beyond the scope of this article and will be forthcoming in a separate publication. Understanding the complexities and diversities inherent in Indigenous epistemologies, we recognize the challenges of attempting to come to any final declaration or definitive statement about Indigenous epistemology. This article draws upon our understanding of Indigenous epistemology grounded in Land through dynamic interconnected and interdependent relationships, circularity, and iterativity (see Black Elk & Brown, 1953; Buck, 2009; Graveline, 1998; Hodson, 2009; Kawagley, Norris-Tull & Norris-Tull, 1998; Morrisseau, 1998; Nabigon & Mawhiney, 1996; Niehardt, 1979; Tsuji, 1996; Wilson, 2008). We understand these relationships as being grounded in the land in the form of stories that "cannot be separated from geographical locations, from actual physical places within the land...you cannot live in that land without asking or looking at or noticing a boulder or rock...there's always a story" (Silko, 1981, p. 69). We also draw upon Tafoya (1995) who further articulates the circularity and iterative qualities of traditional stories:

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen. (p. 12)

Similarly, just as stories cannot be separated from the land that holds those stories or the interconnected relationships that formed them, our journey was informed by our conceptualization of the courses and drew upon a growing body of scholarship that influenced our developing understanding of Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy. For us, a dynamic part of the process was primarily about allowing ourselves to become lost before we could open up and listen to how Land was teaching and guiding us along this journey.

A key element of our story and journey with Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy was exploring ways these two concepts related to one another; however, we also make clear distinctions. Land as first teacher considers the multifarious ways land communicates and recognizes the interconnected relationship between educator/learner and Land. Connected but distinct, Land as pedagogy focuses on the ways land informs practice and is embodied and enacted through content and instruction. Feld and Basso (1996) assert that "place [which takes into account our concept of Land both geographically and abstractly] is the most powerful fundamental form of embodied experience – the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time" (p. 9).

Although a large body of literature explores the ontologies of space and place, that literature is only tangentially related to our exploration of land and education. Our conceptualization of Land draws on the work of Dr. Celia Haig-Brown and colleagues around Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002; Haig-Brown, 2005; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2008; Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009). Like the current article, their work is grounded in land and focuses on land in the context of formal and informal education. Haig-Brown and Dannenmann (2008) discuss the relationship of Land as pedagogy to a land-based program speaking not only to the importance of land but also its primacy:

With its central focus on a pedagogy of the land, the program takes seriously a grounded context and an understanding that land and situatedness refer to much more than a material place as defined by

legal documents, geological surveys, or points on a map. Ultimately, the innovation of this course of study draws on very old pedagogies by never losing sight of the land as first teacher. As these old pedagogies are recreated in contemporary contexts, they lose nothing of their salience and promise new ways to think of participatory community-based education. (p. 248)

It is important to appreciate the fundamental being of Land and its role in the conceptualization of identity for Indigenous peoples. For us, this refers to land as a living entity providing the central underpinnings for all life, the understanding of interconnected relationships, and is underscored by her capitalization as a proper name. Generally, and in the context of this article, Indigenous concepts of "land and earth are seen as a female entity as in Mother Earth³, having the ability to birth, nurture and sustain life" (Styres, 2010, p. 21- see also Buck, 2009; Hampton, 1995; Mitchell, 1984; Ross, 1996; Tsuji, 1996). Wilson (2008) states that, "we as Indigenous people have a literally *grounded* sense of identity" (p. 88) and goes on to discuss the primacy of land:

So our continuing connection to the land, and fulfilling our role within that ongoing relationship, is centred on our specific environment and the relationship that it holds, rather than on events that may be seen as historically important to others but hold only tenuous connection to our land. Maintaining traditional obligations to the land is seen as more important than deeds or dates of transference of ownership. (Wilson, 2008, p. 88)

Hampton (1995) speaks of land as the primary caregiver and Ross (1996) describes land as having a heartbeat and further, states the sounding of the drum represents her heartbeat. In this way, Land is at the core of Indigenous being and learning across diverse urban and rural landscapes and learning environments. This has implications for infusing Indigenous ways of knowing into courses with mainstream content where that content may represent views that are oppositional to or do not easily integrate Indigenous thought and include aspects of modern life that appear disconnected from land and do not conceptualize Land as first teacher or choose to acknowledge Land as the primary caregiver.

In acknowledging the primacy and fundamental being of Land, "land becomes the first teacher, the primary relationship" (Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009, p. 168) and "first gestures to the primacy and groundedness in all our

learning relations" (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2008, p. 248). According to Styres and Haig-Brown (2010), first "is not intended to reflect a western linear or hierarchical categorization or to negate the integration of Western knowledge but rather to situate, legitimize, and ground learning and learning processes within land as first teacher" (p. 7). Learning relations reflect ancestral, historical, and present knowledge as well as knowledge yet to be "(re)cognized" (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2008, p. 248). Land, in this context is not a geographically fixed space; rather, she is a spiritually infused place that is grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships, and cultural positioning. Land is "meaningfully organized and on the very point of speech, a kind of articulated thinking that fails to reach the ultimate translation in proposition or concepts, in messages" (Kulchyski, 2005, p. 189). Land as pedagogy moves beyond the boundaries of "mainstream conceptualizations of pedagogy...and opens up possibilities to critically consider how the learner is grounded, shaped, and informed by pedagogies that reflect land as first teacher" (Styres, 2010, p. 11).

As previously mentioned the structure of this article reflects an Indigenous epistemology whereby "the circle represents wholeness and connectedness that brings all of creation together in a circle of interdependent relationships grounded in land and under the Great Mystery" (Styres, 2010, p. 3). As such, this article is a directional⁴ articulation of the four elements: vision, relationships, knowledge, and action. Further, according to Styres (2008) and Wilson (2008), it is important that the circle not be represented as static, fixed, or closed but rather reflects interconnected relationships and organic movement within the circle. Entering the circle by the eastern door of *illumination*, our vision for this article was pedagogy that privileged and centralized Land as first teacher. The southern door of *trust* is the place where "relationships are established and maintained" through "connections, associations and conditions of being related" (Styres, 2008, p. 57). It is also grounded in our individual and collective relationship and commitment to the vision. Knowledge in the western door of *looking within* "is the place from which we develop our collective and personal knowledge. It implies an acquaintance with facts, truths or principles...about the creation, use or dissemination of special knowledge" (Styres, 2008, p. 57). This leads us to the northern door of *wisdom* "where vision is actualized...Action in this process is constant, consistent, dynamic, and sustainable" (Styres, 2008, p. 58). This iterative process leads to a re-visioning that continues to develop "relationships, creating

and building new [and very old] knowledges, and thereby establishing additional courses of action that can be measured in order to reassess the initial visioning" (Styres, 2008, p. 58). We invite you to journey with us along the path of Land as pedagogy.

VISION

According to Styres (2008), we enter the circle directionally through the eastern door of vision. The Ojibwa teachings concerning the four directions tell us that the east is where we begin our journey from the spirit world to the physical world. It is also the place of new beginnings, illumination, and rebirth. As such, this is where we begin our journey into Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy. Styres asserts that:

Visioning can be seen to be the act of anticipating something that will or may come to be. It can also be used in the sense of envisioning, which is to imagine or conceive the possible, or to be able to picture mentally some future event(s). (p. 55)

Our vision for the courses was grounded in Land from the beginning and with a commitment to emphasize Aboriginal ways of knowing. Despite early preparations in the first year most of the work was done in situ. The three-week session was an immersive and intensive experience for us and for the students. We spent our days teaching and our evenings reworking our material and preparing for class. In the late afternoons after class we often walked the forest paths seeking inspiration from Land. It was during this first year that we were able to actualize Land as first teacher but it was upon reflection that we realized we were also enacting Land as pedagogy. Throughout that first session we maintained our commitment to grounding everything in Land and continually sent the students out onto the land as well as bringing Land into the classroom. Our classroom had several large windows providing beautiful views of the land as a constant reminder to remain true to our vision. This was a necessary reminder as we faced many challenges that could have shifted us away from our grounding in Land.

The initial planning of the courses posed the first challenge, as we had agreed the courses would privilege Aboriginal ways of knowing and be grounded in Land but were uncertain of how to actualize that vision. We were teaching a full introductory Child and Youth Studies credit as well as a quarter Classroom Dynamics credit that drew heavily upon Eurocentric knowl-

edge. Thus, in order to realize our vision we privileged Aboriginal ways of knowing by ensuring the course design and assignments were grounded in Land – it was a departure from the way that both courses were taught on the main campus and led to more tensions, challenges, and contradictions. Given that the courses were broad and covered a lot of mainstream material, we balanced the mainstream content with shared Indigenous cultural understandings drawn from various Indigenous scholars. We also drew upon one author's (Haudenosaunee from southern Ontario) own Aboriginal understanding and experiences and as this was our first experience teaching in Nishnawbe-Aski territory, we designed the course assignments and interactions in a way that encouraged students to bring experiences and understandings specific to their own communities and the territory into class.

The integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledges into the courses was fraught with tensions. Many scholars, most notably Foucault (1995), discussed some of the underpinnings, systems of relations and hidden agendas that structure Western education and identified the hierarchical nature of Western education. The Eurocentric approach to education is premised upon privileging Western knowledge while devaluing other ways of knowing. This is evidenced by reliance on scientific methodology and on knowledge proven through experimentation or mathematical proofs (Kawagley, Norris-Tull & Norris-Tull, 1998; Kuhn, 1996). While there are some mainstream academic disciplines that question this approach, it remains the dominant influence on university education. Our approach was in direct opposition to privileging Western knowledge, which led us to confronting issues around power and privilege.

We had to come to an understanding of how power and privilege were situated in our interactions, decisions, and systemic structures. In terms of our own interactions, we occupied different roles within the university structure: one of us being a graduate student and the other a tenured associate professor. In addition, one of us was of Aboriginal heritage and the other was not. Thus, we had to negotiate the tensions around our identity and positionality. This was not an explicit negotiation but a very implicit process, much like a dance, with each of us taking risks, anticipating and responding. We never had a student-professor interaction pattern but had not yet established a colleague-to-colleague relationship. Establishing our vision meant we had to engage power and privilege directly and often acted in opposition to university structures.

Through negotiating our emerging relationship as colleagues, we often resisted the power of the university structures and interaction patterns that would have defined our relationship on different and unequal terms. Our understanding of how to negotiate issues of power and privilege was influenced by Foucault's (1977) articulation that power operates through a network or system of relations. Specifically, his conceptualization of individuals "simultaneously undergoing and exercising power" (p. 98) and in this way being both a consenting target of power and a vehicle of power. Learning from Foucault's conceptualization of power we were able to conceptualize ourselves as resisting relations of power and of being able to make conscious decisions to resist becoming or being vehicles of power. It also enabled us to confront those times when we did, consciously or unconsciously, act as consenting targets and vehicles of power.

In addition to our relationship with each other, power and privilege was at play in our relationship with the students. Interactions between instructor and student contain an inherent power imbalance within the university structure with the instructor purveying knowledge that is received by the student. The systemic power of the instructor includes evaluating how each student demonstrates an understanding of that knowledge and ultimately grading that effort. While we recognized that there would be some hierarchical structures that could not be avoided, such as the power imbalances associated with our being hired to design, deliver and grade the courses, whereas students are able to provide feedback through a teaching evaluation and do not have the same influence and power on an individual basis as instructors do. However, with that acknowledged, we set up our interactions to be more egalitarian in terms of sharing knowledge and learning together. While our students were all Aboriginal and culturally would have different approaches to teaching and ways of knowing some of which may have been associated with hierarchical teacher-student models, all had been indoctrinated into the Western system of education through various means. Thus, while there was some level of resistance to certain customs of Western education such as automatic respect for the instructor, the students also activated issues around power and privilege by placing us in hierarchical positions as "university instructors". It was clear from the students' behaviours and attitudes towards each of us that despite our having struggled with and established an egalitarian collegial relationship – the students continuously pushed to place us in a hierarchical relationship to one another and to themselves. We were

constantly struggling against that hierarchical positioning and implicitly stressed that the students see us as interchangeable. We had limited success with this approach in the first year and found in the second year that the students persisted in positioning us hierarchically, which caused us to rethink our planned approach to the second year.

We had thought that the hierarchical structuring was largely caused by the students' confusion over our blended approach to teaching the previous two courses, so in the second year we each took responsibility for instructing one of the two courses to more clearly delineate instructional responsibilities to the students. It became apparent that the hierarchical structuring would not be completely addressed by this delineated approach and, upon reflection we opted to add a more explicit component. We noticed that the students continued to draw upon the pattern they had established in the first year of often looking to the instructor who they perceived to be senior. Based on an agreement between us, the 'senior' instructor would draw upon the power and position that the students were pushing her to enact in order to explicitly reinforce the other instructor's primacy when a student would pose questions about that instructor's course. This redirection of power was effective in explicitly reinforcing each instructor as 'senior' for her specific course. This also had the effect of reinforcing the egalitarian collegial relationship that we had established as by mid-way through the courses the students' behaviour shifted. However, we found it strangely contradictory to have to use the power and privilege that they were pushing on us in order to accomplish our goal.

Our engagement with issues of power and privilege was central to the success of our visioning. Its importance was in addressing those issues in our relationships with one another and the students as well as challenging our own beliefs and educational indoctrination. Without questioning and resistance, our vision for the courses would look good on the surface but lack depth and would have reinforced Western approaches. In questioning those Western approaches that were part of our educational indoctrination, we opened ourselves to fully engage in exploring what it meant to have Land as pedagogy and be open to Land as first teacher. While we did experience questioning from colleagues about the possibility that our approach would "water down the curriculum," it was our own struggles against internalized ideas of acceptable teaching practices that were critical. Welcoming Land into the classroom resisted the educational practices we had and continue to

be immersed in while on the main campus. We experienced difficulties that first year getting in touch with Land as pedagogy and Land as first teacher conceptually and practically. The key was engaging in questioning and being willing to examine what we meant during each step of our journey, even if that meant getting lost along the way. It was during that first year we learned both Land as pedagogy and Land as first teacher are enactments. Each has an undeniable embodied physicality that is complemented by a reflective aspect. During that first year we learned from Land during our many walks and embodied that learning in classroom practices thus enacting Land as pedagogy.

We discovered that both Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy require an openness on the part of the individual to reflect on what learning can be drawn from the messages Land communicates. Land as first teacher is highly individualized, contextualized, and centred on what Land is teaching you, whether or not you choose to listen, through its varied modes of communication. For instance, individuals may draw upon and experience understandings of Land as first teacher in a way that is unique to their own learning journeys. A specific example of this occurred when we sent students out on the land with instructions to connect with Land and bring something to the sharing circle that symbolized children's growth and development. Two students chose water as their symbol but the lessons they drew from it were very different. Similarly, we both experienced the same environment and often went on walks together but drew very different lessons that we brought into the classroom. Land as Pedagogy is how you enact that learning in classroom practices and how you set the stage to assist learners in being open to and connecting with Land as first teacher. In our first year we struggled to be open to learning from Land and incorporating that learning into our classroom practices. We often walked through the various trails and felt Land speaking to us and would spend evenings reflecting on our interpretations and bringing them into the classroom the following day. Land is an immersive, intense, and very explicit experience and as such our primary focus became making Land welcome in the classroom, thereby remaining true to our vision.

Upon reflection during our second year we noted that our experiences differed in important and critical ways. Our first experience had been very immersive, intense and, explicit while our second year was more implicit, quieter, and immersive on a different level. We had gone through some of

the hardest struggles during the first year in challenging ourselves to be truly open to a different approach and way of knowing. In our second year, we were more centred and also had the reassurance that our approach had been successful in the previous year. Initially, we felt as if in our second year we had lost some of our vision but what we were recognizing was the move from explicit to implicit. Our vision for the courses became implicit in the second year; it was embedded in everything we did. We also benefited from having worked so hard in the first year to ensure that Land was welcome in the classroom. In the second year, the students and ourselves brought Land into the classroom with us every day. We also took the classroom out onto Land more often.

In striving to realize our vision, we had to conceptualize what Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy were in practical terms and in relation to our role as teachers. Maintaining our commitment to our vision also meant that we had to question those practices that our formal education had indoctrinated in us. We also had to question how power and privilege were articulated and enacted within academia and then, based on that understanding, choose how to resist those structures that threatened to undermine our vision. In doing so we came to a deeper understanding of Land and the centrality of relationships as discussed by many Indigenous scholars (Alfred, 1999; Archibald, 2008; Kawagley, Norris-Tull & Norris-Tull, 1998; Smith, 1999; Tafoya, 1995; Wilson, 2007). We also came to appreciate the words of Tafoya when he stated, “part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.” In our first year, we often got lost but in doing so we found the way to realize our vision.

RELATIONSHIP

According to Styres (2008), vision represented in the eastern door leads us through to the southern door of relationships. This is the place from which relationships, associated with the vision, are established and maintained: “relationships can be evidenced either by the connections, associations, and conditions of being related, kinship ties, or particular kinds of connections that exist between unrelated people who have dealings with each other” (p. 57). It has been said that Aboriginal education engages the complex relationship between place and the people who have existed on the land “since time immemorial” (Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009, p. 168). As stated earlier,

this journey began from the vision of how Land would inform and engage with the design and delivery of several courses and how we could adopt this principle as pedagogy and classroom practice. In reflecting on how we worked together to design and deliver the courses, we found our combined interaction (Aboriginal and Western) reflected in the Coyote's Eyes story as told by Terry Tafoya (1982) who is of Taos Pueblo and Warm Springs Indian heritage. According to Styres (2008), Coyote is one of the trickster characters in First Nations storytelling, and as such, "carries the good lessons that teach us about life and how to be in relation with one another, creation, and the land" (p. 5). As with many Indigenous stories that reflect moral or life lessons, interpretation is open to the experience and readiness of the listener. What we, as educators, took from the story is ultimately how our mismatched, diverse, and at times conflicting perspectives were reflected in the lessons of the story and the dynamic and complex relationship between us as individuals and collectively with Land as first teacher. It is important to note that trust evolved between us as educators, colleagues, and ultimately as friends throughout this process. It is that foundational relationship that we have developed and nurtured through our interaction with Land as first teacher that enables us to engage with the work in the way that we have. Joint oral journaling created the space where we could share our experiences and the ways Land was speaking to us through simultaneously recording on our individual laptops. Our experiences built upon and reflected not only our own but each other's story. In this way we became an interconnected part of each other's story. Cole & Knowles (2000) states that reflexive inquiry uses an individual's own experiences as both learner and educator to reflect on teaching experiences. In the context of this article we refer to this form of reflexive inquiry as *storying*.

As stated earlier, Land as pedagogy is distinct but interconnected with Land as first teacher. Land as pedagogy focuses on the ways land informs practice and is embodied and enacted through content and instruction. The pedagogy was literally developed on the ground, at times day-by-day in response to the learning needs of the students and their engagement with land-centred activities. The existing tensions revolved around how to deliver what were mainstream courses in relation to Land as first teacher as well as appropriately integrating Indigenous and Western knowledges. An organic circular framework was adopted organizing course content into units of in-

struction integrating the two courses. Assessment and evaluation strategies were also reflected in the circular framework.

By way of enacting Land as pedagogy within formal and informal learning environments, relationships were brought into course content and instruction drawing each of the learners into an organic and interconnected relationship with Land as first teacher. In the first year we spent a great deal of time building and establishing relationships both with Land and the students. We were perplexed that the second year felt so different but initially were unable to articulate the way it was different. It was not until we returned to the south and after much reflection we realized that while in year one we spent a great deal of time establishing relationships, the second year was more relationship-based. It was more about nurturing and maintaining those relationships. This sense of nurturing was also reflected in our own relationship with Land as first teacher and how it was enacted in our pedagogy and classroom practice.

KNOWLEDGE

Styres (2008) indicates that relationships in the southern door lead to the western door of knowledge and is “the place from which we develop our collective and personal knowledge. It implies an acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles arising from study or investigation” (p. 57). In this context, knowledge refers to the creation, use, and/or dissemination of Indigenous knowledges. Further, Styres asserts that this kind of knowledge arises out of an understanding gained through lived experiences and education formally and informally. Haig-Brown and Dannemann (2002) noted that “an indigenous pedagogy of the land” (p. 452) is (re)membered⁵ experientially and is grounded in the interrelationships of self, community, Land, and cosmology. Essentially, these (re)membered experiences are embedded in a worldview that continues to reflect knowledges that are relevant, dynamic, and fluid.

Kawagley, Norris-Tull and Norris-Tull (1998) in creating a dialogue about the relevance of Indigenous worldviews within contemporary science education, in particular the Yupiaq culture of southwestern Alaska, define worldview “as a means of conceptualizing the principles and beliefs-including the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of those beliefs-which people have acquired to make sense of the world around them” (p. 134). Further,

that this worldview is distinct from Eurocentric thought in that it is not compartmentalized and/or segregated from lived realities, but rather, is holistic, relational, and ecological in nature. Kawagley, Norris-Tull and Norris-Tull further assert that the integration of Indigenous and Western knowledges in curriculum development and pedagogy is not only desired, but also critical. Our own reflections and journaling processes assisted in the integration of Indigenous and Western knowledges. Through our daily oral and written joint journals we were able to connect the land-based activities and student responses to the activities and course content in order to relevantly and appropriately integrate both knowledges. An example of how this was integrated was the introduction of storying, in particular, Coyote's Two Eyes story into a discussion of the ways sociocultural perspectives connect to what the students already know. Various Indigenous theorists and their perspectives were introduced together with mainstream theoretical perspectives culminating in a discussion of storywork (Archibald, 2008) highlighting the role of ongoing inquiry into self and contexts in relation to Land, both as teacher and pedagogy. Further, we engaged a dialogue around the ways stories can be used as a framework for examining and developing storywork methods and theories across other nations and communities.

In the previous section we discussed how Coyote and the story of his two mismatched eyes provides an example of storywork blending two different perspectives. When applied to concepts of knowledge it is important to conceptualize that Coyote, as a trickster character in many Aboriginal stories, is a metamorph⁶. Coyote as a metamorph exemplifies how knowledge shifts, changes, and transforms us as educators/learners. That is to say Coyote is constantly journeying, struggling, transforming, and journeying again all the while teaching us lessons about how to be in relation both interpersonally and ecologically. The notion of cyclical metamorphosis and transformation, as well as journeying and struggling connects Coyote as Trickster with traditional Aboriginal teachings, which assert that we cannot fully predict or control the natural world because of the complexities of inter-relationships and inter-actions. One of the tasks of Trickster is to challenge listeners' taken for granted assumptions about interacting in relation to the natural world and subsequently turn those assumptions upside down in order to teach us humility and to remind us that we cannot control or predict the natural world. Another related task of Trickster is to demonstrate the consequences when we are not mindful of ourselves in relation to Land as first teacher. Coyote's

Two Eyes story demonstrates the struggles, tensions, gaps, contradictions, and constructions of difference, as well as the inherent contrasting and competing visions that exist within the concept of attempting to integrate Indigenous and Western knowledges.

Through the joint journaling and ongoing reflection mentioned previously we engaged in a circular and iterative process of reflecting on our pedagogy and classroom practices. However, our discussions about blending Indigenous and Western knowledges began long before we entered the classroom. The knowledge that we built through those discussions became informed by our daily reflections of classroom experiences and was shaped by our interaction with Land as first teacher. The inclusion of Coyote's Two Eyes was first triggered by our sighting of an actual coyote as we entered the small town near the lodge. The sighting of the coyote was, in fact, Land introducing herself to us and welcoming us – we wondered aloud what lessons would be waiting for us. The significance of the sighting in turn led to a conversation about Coyote and in particular the Two Eyes story. However, the notion of bringing the story into the classroom did not occur until approximately one week into the course and after a series of discussions around the tensions and challenges in blending Indigenous and Western perspectives. At that time we realized the students were experiencing difficulties connecting with the concepts of sociocultural theory. Based on our own experiences with the Coyote's Two Eyes story, we decided that sharing the story and the learning we drew from it might facilitate the students' engagement with the concepts in a way that helped them connect and apply theory and diverse worldviews within the context of their lived experiences. This is one example of how, through our circular and iterative reflections, we were able to bring our emerging understanding of Land as first teacher into the classroom by providing the students with an example of ways to think about diverse worldviews. In this way, Land as pedagogy became informed by our experiences with Land as first teacher.

ACTION

Styres (2008) articulates that, "the western door of knowledge leads us to the northern door of Wisdom where vision is actualized"(p. 58). We have discussed our visioning for the courses, the role of relationships, and the integration of Indigenous and Western knowledges, bringing us full circle

into Action where we now focus on enacting our vision of Land as pedagogy. As previously mentioned in the Vision section, it was during our first year teaching that we explicitly grounded our vision of Land as first teacher. It was not until we reflected back on our experiences that we understood that we were also actualizing Land as pedagogy. It was during our second year that we came to a greater conceptual understanding of Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy and solidified our understanding of their connections and distinctions. This growing conceptualization was reflected in the essential components of our course design and associated activities, and served to actualize our vision of Land as pedagogy.

Central to our course design was the way we brought Indigenous and Western knowledges together so as not to continue perpetuating hierarchical knowledge representation. In the Vision and Knowledge sections we discussed the importance of visioning and conceptualizing the blending of the two knowledges, but for the classroom, our challenge was to enact the physical manifestation of grounding the two knowledges together in Land as first teacher thereby enacting Land as pedagogy.

The work we had done in the visioning and conceptualizing of how to integrate the knowledges in the courses provided the foundation from which we could draw on the growing body of literature exploring connections between Land and Indigenous ways of knowing. According to many Indigenous scholars, one of the fundamental differences between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing is the understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of self in relation to the natural world that grounds Indigenous ways of knowing to Land (see Alfred, 1999; Archibald, 2008; Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009; Kawagley, 2006; Kawagley, Norris-Tull & Norris-Tull, 1998). One of the ways that we chose to actualize the integration of the knowledges was to blend the two courses together during delivery in order to provide an explicit example of the interconnectedness of knowledges and relations. Each of the courses was designed to privilege Indigenous knowledge by having the students take turns doing an opening to start the day (students' choice of ceremony, prayer, or other forms of opening the day) and closing each day in the sharing lodge or on the land by having students reflect on and share their lessons from Land. We also emphasized throughout the course the need to deconstruct and examine Western knowledge in relation to the students' sense of their own community knowledge and lived realities. We designed class activities and assignments that required reflection

on concepts from class and on Land as first teacher. Each class began with an opening by one of the students and we usually ended classes outside on the land with a discussion in the sharing lodge followed by time for journaling. As noted in the Vision section we made a significant alteration to our method of course delivery for the second year. We discovered that the way we brought blended instruction into the classroom worked very well for us, but was confusing for the students. Agreeing we had taken the blended approach too far, we changed course delivery in the second year. Each of us took primary responsibility for one of the courses and clearly delineated when each course was being taught. For example, we spent the morning on one course and afternoon on the other. We also opted to retain the best of the blended approach by keeping the complementary assignments in each course and consistently pointing out the interconnections between the courses as well as how each course might consider the same material differently. This approach was effective and well received by the students.

A more complex issue in the first year was what we perceived to be the students' reluctance to engage with Land as first teacher. The students' reluctance may have been related to their educational experiences in and outside of their communities, which may have decentred and devalued Indigenous ways of knowing and being. As a result some communities had moved away from actively engaging with many of the traditional knowledges and/or faced challenges accessing such knowledges. As Taiaiake Alfred (1999) has said, "Not only has the indigenous voice been excluded from the larger social and political discourse, but even within our own communities it has been supplanted by other voices" (p. xviii). Having said that, there were several students from communities where, in spite of these experiences, traditional ways of knowing and being remained central to community knowledge and practices where the use, protection, and maintenance of the community's languages were of primary importance. Other students came from communities that were making inroads in regenerating some of their traditional knowledge and practices.

This resistance was mirrored in our experiences with the students when we engaged with Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy in the classroom. In the first year we spent considerable time grounding classroom experiences in Land by incorporating vision quests and other land-centred activities. We saw a noticeable shift in the second year when the students independently brought Land into the classroom with them. In addition, the

students were more open to exploring and privileging Indigenous theorists, a primary focus in the second year. Further, the students took up the work of Indigenous theoretical knowledge in a manner we had not expected. We introduced Indigenous theorists in a limited way in the first year and spent a lot of time integrating theoretical concepts from Indigenous and Western perspectives; however, the assignments reflected the ways the students privileged Western theorists. In the second year, the students astounded us with how they incorporated Indigenous theories into their assignments and the depth, breadth, and richness of that integration. The students' work demonstrated very interesting insights into the ways they were thinking about and drawing upon Indigenous theoretical concepts in relation to their communities, work, and families. It also revealed the students' storied journeys with Land as their assignments provided examples of how they either had or planned to bring Land as first teacher into their classrooms and other experiences. Land as first teacher provided the space from where they could comfortably engage with Indigenous theoretical concepts, as well as drawing on their previous year's experience. We would not have been able to engage Indigenous theorists as profoundly with the students without first having grounded their perceptions of Indigenous knowledge in Land.

In the first year we had to be very explicit in making Land welcome in the classroom and our active privileging of Indigenous ways of knowing. In the second year, it became more implicit and embedded in everything the students and us as instructors did in the classroom. While we had fewer explicit Land-centred activities such as vision quests in the second year, we implicitly brought Land into the classroom as well as taking the classroom out onto the land. In the first year the large classroom windows were enough to center and ground Land in the classroom. The windows provided a way for us to connect with Land and served as a constant reminder of Land as first teacher. However, in the second year both the students and we as instructors continuously resisted being confined to experiencing land through windows and were drawn to be out on the land and more intimately informed by Land as first teacher. The formal boundaries of the physical classroom were removed and we engaged with Land by centering it as the primary learning environment.

Another way we removed formal boundaries was to adopt what we refer to as relationship-based teaching. As previously discussed, relationships are central and primary elements of Aboriginal education. Generally, in aca-

demia the teacher-student relationship is very defined and based on concepts of teacher as conveyer of knowledge and student as passive receiver of knowledge. This academic model is described by Freire (2003) as the banking concept whereby "banking education begins with a false understanding of men and women as objects" (p. 79) and passive recipients rather than active engagers in the learning process. While there have been shifts to a more interactive teaching model that describes teacher and student as co-creators of knowledge, vestiges of this approach remain and exert influence. Traditionally and in many Indigenous contexts, teaching and learning occur in the natural environment. Students are exposed to knowledge without a predetermined outcome in terms of what the student is expected to learn from being exposed to knowledge. The student learns at his/her own pace and takes away from the experience what s/he was meant to learn. Wilson (2008) alludes to this philosophy around teaching and learning when he describes the responsibilities of storyteller and listener.

As the speaker, I share information that I am allowed to share. My main obligation is to make as many connections or relationships available as possible and to respect the reader's ability to take in what they are ready to receive or what their current relationships allow. ... Carrying this one step further, it become unethical to reiterate or restate previous messages. To do so would judge certain ideas as more important than others. Different listeners will get different lessons out of what I have to say, depending on their own level of readiness and their current relationships. I cannot judge them on their level of readiness any more than I can on their relationships; to restate previous messages is to tell them what lessons they were supposed to pick up and this would be inappropriate. (p. 133)

In our relationship-based teaching practice, we focus on building relationships with students as a culturally appropriate and relevant way of teaching. In so doing, we engage with students in a way that is different from what would be expected on the University campus. For example, there is joking and teasing in the classroom from both sides as well as more engagement with co-constructing knowledge. Drawing upon Wilson (2008), we respect and value student contributions and learning arising out of knowledge co-construction without prejudging or predetermining what that learning or contribution should be in terms of content, expression, or any other evaluating modality. Another aspect of relationship-based teaching was how

closely we worked with students both in constructing knowledge and on their assignments. At times this was intensive and other times it was a matter of being available to answer questions and act as a sounding board. On one notable occasion, it involved an after class session that started around 7:00pm and did not end until well after midnight. The session involved all of the students at various points throughout the evening. Our ability to engage with students in this way is based on mutual respect, which is the foundation of this approach. The establishment of this mutual respect was a gradual process whereby we, as instructors, earned the students' respect, which was illustrated by interaction patterns and classroom behaviours. For example, in our first year, we experienced difficulty keeping students off the Internet (Facebook, chats, e-mail) during class time. While we had made several unsuccessful attempts to address the issue indirectly, it was not until part way through the session that we had built enough mutual respect to address this issue directly and agree as a class how it would be managed. In our second year, it rarely needed to be addressed as the students automatically maintained our agreement and reminded others who slipped occasionally.

In actualizing our vision for these courses we faced many tensions, challenges, and contradictions. In many ways, the successes we did experience were rooted in our determination not to turn away from those tensions, challenges, and contradictions but to navigate through them in order to come to a deeper understanding of Land as pedagogy and Land as first teacher both theoretically and practically. It was a continuous storied journey through the four directions as we engaged the iterative process of re-visioning and actualizing Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this storied journey and iterative process, including the writing of this article, we shared many tensions, challenges, and contradictions, which take you, as readers, and us beyond the borders of our comfort zones on multiple levels. One of the challenges in sharing our journey is that we cannot tell you how to journey yourself or what lessons you should draw from the process. For us, our journey was shaped by how we chose to engage those tensions, challenges, and contradictions. We cannot tell you how to navigate the journey or to predetermine the outcomes for you; you must chose how you will engage with what emerges.

There are those who might like this article to be an articulation of how to *do* Aboriginal education and provide a toolbox for the classroom. In the history of Aboriginal education there has been a decided push to create universalized tools for use across diverse Aboriginal educational contexts, which has shifted to include a focus on best practices. While our approach could be seen to fall within best practices, Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy is a highly individualized, contextualized, intimate, and iterative experience. Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy is not an experience that can translate into a toolbox for duplication. It is important to heed Freire's warning that "experiments cannot be transplanted; they must be reinvented" (Mayo, 1990, p. 74).

Like an experiment, our journey cannot be transplanted into another context or duplicated, as it was a profoundly intimate, embodied, and transformative experience. Even the students who shared the experience with us took up Land as first teacher in the context of their own lived experiences. Each of us has our own journey in life. While the students and us experienced the same learning environment, at times our journeys converged, and at other times they diverged but always remained connected to Land as first teacher. It was not that we actively taught Land as pedagogy but rather it emerged from an embodiment of Land as first teacher. The students had to choose to take up Land as first teacher and make it an essential part of their journey along the path to embodying Land in their classrooms as pedagogy. In revisiting Coyote and the Two Eyes story we relate Coyote's mismatched eyes to the integration of Indigenous and Western perspectives and the tensions between linear and circular thought. While we engaged these tensions throughout this article authorship remains one of the final places where we must actively engage these tensions. Standard Western authorship practices reflect hierarchical and linear structures organizing multiple authors according to a perceived division of seniority and/or labor that ultimately undermines true collaboration and activates and reinforces relations of power. To accept those authorship practices imposes foreign concepts into what has been constructed as an egalitarian, dynamic, fluid, and circular process. Writing this article has become another embodiment of Land as first teacher as our voices are intimately interconnected. The process of writing mirrored the iterative circularity we engaged in while enacting Land as pedagogy. In the same way we challenged other taken-for-granted assumptions, we now challenge these artificial and foreign constructs. To do otherwise would be

equivalent to imposing Western concepts of land ownership and ecological exploitation. Western concepts of authorship are equivalent to ownership, which is highly hierarchical and linear. Traditionally, "in Indigenous epistemologies, knowledge is derived mainly from, and is rooted in, individual and collective experience" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. xvii). Knowledge is held collectively and not subject to the ownership of one individual. Our collaborative writing of this article does not lend itself to a clear title of ownership as it is collectively and not individually held, and offered up to others. We actively resist and reject the imposition of Western concepts and instead consider our authorship to be equal with the order of authors as interchangeable⁷. To do otherwise would undermine the premise of this article.

We leave you with the task of choosing how to take up the tensions, challenges, and contradictions around Land as first teacher and Land as pedagogy together with the relations of power that undermine our understanding of and interactions with Land as "land urges us to come around to an understanding of ourselves" (Kawagley, 2006, p. 7).

NOTES

1. The term Aboriginal refers to the original or first people of a country and is used interchangeably with Indigenous. Usage is also dependant on authors' choice of wording and context within the use of quotations.
2. In this article we have chosen to capitalize Land when we are referring to it as a proper name that indicates a primary relationship rather than when used in a general sense.
3. While we recognize that there may be diverse understandings with regard to Earth being referred to as a female entity, we draw our understandings from our own reflections and conceptualizations. We also draw from shared Indigenous understandings, which are acknowledged by several Indigenous scholars and Elders, including Cree scholars (Wilfred Buck and Leonard Tsuji) and Cree Elders (Cecilia Martell and Harry Blackbird)
4. See Serim, F. (1998). Four directions for life long learning. Retrieved March 21, 2006, from http://oii.org/html/the_four_directions_explained.html

5. According to Haig-Brown (2005) the term (re)member “is an effort to capture the idea that such knowledge[s] must be put back together out of fragments held by individuals and communities who have had their traditional ways attacked as wrong for generations” (p. 90).
6. “Metamorph is comprised of two terms: meta and morph. According to the Oxford English Dictionary meta is a prefix that demotes change of state, place, or condition of being; the term morph is a verb reflecting a smooth change, transformation, or transition from one form or image to another. Both terms originate with metamorphosis is of Greek origin meaning to transform or change shape.” (Styres, 2011)
7. In reference lists readers must reference the article twice noting each author as first author. In-text citations must be done as follows: (Styres & Zinga, 2011; Zinga & Styres, 2011) for single citations; multiple citations must consecutively alternate authors throughout.

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