OF LAND & LIVING SKIES: A Community Journal on Place, Land, and Learning is a partnership between the Saskatchewan Outdoor and Environmental Education Association (SOEEA), the Sustainability Education Research Institute (SERI) with the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Education, and the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Of Land & Living Skies is a community journal where theory and practice merge, creating a space for dialogue within the fields of environmental and sustainability education, and focusing on research, policy, and community practices, as well as inspiring action.

Thank you to this issue’s funders:

Cover Photography: Don Jedlic

COVER IMAGE ARTIST:
MIKE WYSMINITY AND DANICA THOMPSON

The front cover artwork was a creation by Mike Wysminity and Danica Thompson, two born and bred Saskatchewan residents who currently call Regina home. The artwork itself is as Saskatchewan as they are, if not more, for everything presented (excluding the glue holding the fairy houses together and the paint on the polypasses) came from different regions of the province. This may not be the case for all of Mike’s other work but it can be justly said that the greatest inspiration for all his pieces come from the beauty of nature itself.

“Can the arts really change the world?” one of my students asked recently. I am a firm believer that they can, as evidenced by the creative contributions that artists, musicians, playwrights, dancers, and others have made to the environmental movement in general, and the field of environmental education more specifically, over the last few decades. While environmental activists have often come from backgrounds in biology, ecology and other scientific disciplines in the past, this is rapidly changing, with those in the arts embracing the roles they can and should play in social and environmental change.

Certainly in the field of the visual arts, the environmental art movement has been growing rapidly over the past twenty five years (Graham, 2007; Collins, 2007; Inwood, 2013). While many Indigenous peoples around the world have been making art for centuries that responds to the environments in which they have lived, the contemporary environmental art movement has drawn inspiration from these precursors and taken art-making in new directions that raise awareness of our dependence on natural and built places, document the impacts of human life, and provide innovative solutions to environmental challenges.

Looking to the work of artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Mel Chin, Peter Menzel, and in Canada, Edward Burtynsky, Brian Jungen, and Noel Harding, provides evidence of a rich and diverse set of arts practices that contribute to the conversation around environmental activism, place-based education, and eco-justice education.

As a university-based art and environmental educator inspired by the efforts of these and other eco-artists, I have been working to share their work with a broader audience in school and community settings. This aligns me with the environmental art movement, often referred to as eco-art education. By engaging with concepts such as interdependence, biodiversity, conservation, restoration, and sustainability, the environmental art movement and eco-art education bring creativity, imagination, and a fresh perspective to environmental and sustainability education. The more creative, affective, and sensory approaches of the arts are being welcomed as a counter-balance to the cognitive, positivist approaches of science education which has more often formed the basis of environmental education in the past. By bringing a more diverse knowledge base to environmental education, the arts help a greater range of learners open their minds, change their attitudes, and shift their behaviours when it comes to environmental change, becoming a powerful ally in developing environmental literacy.

Drawing on exemplars from the environmental art movement is a great starting point for those who might like to include it in their environmental education programs (refer to the Green Museum website for an excellent introduction to this field). For some, sharing the works of artists who work with and in the natural world is an easy way into study in this area. Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy, for example, has inspired thousands around the world with his handmade, nature-based artworks that capture and respond to the physical, cultural, and spiritual qualities of the places in which he works. The works of Niki Udo, Patrick Dougherty, Baia Island, and hermann de vries share his love of working with natural materials and as well as his heightened awareness of the cycles of nature.

Other artists take more of a documentary approach, often using photography to share the realities of environmental degradation around the world. Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky is known internationally for his complex images of human impact in the form of quarries, mines, oil fields, and dams; American Peter Menzel focuses instead on the inequalities of food production, distribution, and sustainability in communities around the world. Another group of artists aims to offer innovative solutions to these challenges through re-purposing, recycling or re-thinking materials or processes. For example, Chris Jordan incorporates found materials as a way of giving environmental statistics physical and aesthetic form; First Nations artist Brian Jungen uses re-purposed objects like basketball sneakers, golf bags and green composting bins to comment on the impact of consumer culture on Indigenous ways of life. Others have combined aesthetic practice with scientific knowledge to offer innovative solutions to the remediation of environmentally-damaged sites; American Mel Chin has done this in relation to toxic landfill sites, and Canadian Noel Harding has demonstrated how to filter polluted water in the Don River in Toronto.

The works of these artists offer inspiring examples of how art can change the world for the better for students of all ages in schools, outdoor education centres, or community programs. Part of this is getting students outside to learn from their natural and built environments: drawing, painting, and photography are easy ways to have learners focus on the details of the places in which they live. Another component is using the arts as ways to investigate local and global environmental issues; research is a necessary component of many artists’ practice. And sharing learners’ artworks in digital form or in exhibits can be considered...
a form of environmental activism, helping raise awareness or encourage viewers to take action on an issue. Examples of the latter abound: Dominique Mazaaud’s performance in the 1990s engaged others in a long-term garbage clean-up along the banks of the Rio Grande; Joseph Beuys spearheaded the planting of 7000 oak trees in Germany; Merle Laderman Ukeles raised awareness of the amount of garbage going into landfill in New York City - all in the name of art.

There are models for teachers to follow as starting points. The River of Words project invites school children from around the world to write poetry and make art celebrating what they have learned about watersheds in the places they live. The Stream of Dreams project has helped schools across North America learn about the health of fish in lakes and oceans. As part of my research work, I have been working with children at a local Toronto school to transform their schoolyard using eco-art installations as a way into environmental learning (Inwood, 2013b), and at our Lab School to help deepen primary children’s understanding of place while improving sustainability practices at the university (details are found on OISE’s Environmental and Sustainability Education website).

As a quickly expanding field, eco-art education offers educators and their learners a plethora of opportunities to help bring about positive social and environmental change. Anyone can experiment and contribute to this field; any background and expertise can be brought into play. Just bring some creativity and imagination, and follow your heart – who knows what you might create along the way?

REFERENCES


River of Words (n.d.). Located at www.riveroffwords.org/admincontent.html

HILLARY AITKEN is a farmer’s daughter, hailing from the Eyebrow, Saskatchewan area, who is still learning to appreciate the prairie more as time passes. When she’s not working at Victoria Faulkner Women’s Centre, she spends her time reading, listening to as much CBC as possible, and wandering the outdoors. She now lives in Whitestone, Yukon with her husband Shawn, her dog Zeky, and her new baby.

REBECCA CAINES, Franz Seibel, and Cal Krenny worked together on the Community Sound Scapes [e] Scapes: Northern Ontario, a place based sound and video project. Rebecca Caines is an assistant professor at the University of Regina and an award-winning interdisciplinary artist. Her artistic practice, teaching, and research crosses between creative technologies, contemporary performance and improvisation, site-specific art practices, and community-engaged art. Franz Seibel is the Director of Research with Keewaytinok Okimakanak and spends his time in First Nations throughout Northern Ontario to support local research initiatives focused on the land, the youth, and Elder teachings. Cal Krenny is K-Net’s Multimedia Coordinator. His artistic odyssey began when he was introduced to painting at the age of 17, and his art currently includes painting with acrylic and watercolours as well as photography.

JEH CUSTERRA is a justice activist and performance artist based out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He is pursuing a Masters in Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan where he manages the Digital Media Project out of the Sustainability Education Research Institute. His ideas are featured in the books “Evolving: Working Together For a Sustainable World” and “Journey To The Tar Sands”, the documentary films “To The Tar Sands” and “Under One Sky: Voices of Youth”, as well as a TEDxUofS talk “Playing With Our Lives” (available at: http://bit.ly/QHjsjs).

MARIA ENNS A graduate of the University of Regina’s Arts Education program, Maria taught art to middle school students for two years before becoming a stay-at-home mother of two. She currently lives on a farm near Herbert, SK. Maria fills her days making handmade notebooks from reclaimed paper, nurturing her children’s natural love of art, and exploring the secret places in the pastures surrounding her prairie home.

HILARY INWOOD is a lecturer teaching art education and environmental education at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She holds degrees in education (MEd, University of Toronto), art history (MA, York University) and art education (PhD), Concordia University. Her research focuses on integrating art education with environmental education to develop learners’ environmental literacy in school and community settings. Her work extends beyond the classroom to include school gardens, outdoor education centres, parks and galleries.

JOHANE JANELLE worked in different fields, from the Calgary Zoo flying birds of prey and visitor interpretation, to National Parks where she worked on everything from bison handlings to radio telemetry tracking of trumpeter swans, media design and park interpretation. She worked as well with children at-risk, using outdoor recreation as a way to improve their health and well-being. Recently her focus has been more on conservation photography. Living on the doorstep of Grasslands National Park, in the heart of Canada’s last remaining native prairie, with a newly established herd of plains bison, provides unlimited inspiration for a nature photographer.

LEANNE KADYSCHUK AND JOHN MURRAY both work as educators and coordinators with the Saskatchewan Boreal Forest Learning Centre. Leanne is a teacher with the Saskatoon Public School Division and is passionate about inclusive education. She believes an important goal for the world is to build empowering community for the young people she works with, including her four-year-old daughter Olive Daisy. John works for conservation organizations such as Nature Saskatchewan and the Nius Creek Cultural and Recreational Society. He educates youth about the boreal forest. Currently he is working on creating an extensive network of all season walking, biking, and skiing trails around the Ness Creek festival site near Big River.

SYLVIA SMITH is a high school teacher in Ottawa, Ontario. Since 2007 she has been teaching her history students about the difficult topic of Indian Residential Schools. In December, 2011 Sylvia won the Governor General’s History Award for Teaching Excellence for her Project of Heart learning module she created to teach about the Residential School era; over 140 schools across Canada have now participated in the project. By 2013, 70,000 tiles commemorating students who attended Indian Residential Schools will have been created by project participants.

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PROGRAM: The Saskatchewan Boreal Forest Learning Centre

LOCATION: Ness Creek Site, near Big River

TARGET AUDIENCE: elementary and high school students, groups, artists

SUBJECTS: ecology, biology, history, forestry, phys-ed, art, English language arts

TEACHING METHODS: experiential and arts-based approaches

WEBSITE: www.borealforest.net

BY LEANNE KADYSCHUK AND JOHN MURRAY

The Saskatchewan Boreal Forest Learning Centre is a not-for-profit organization that provides forest-based programming for high school students, both in the classroom and outdoors. Our goal is to provide students with learning opportunities that encourage a deeper understanding and awareness of the boreal forest, leading to an increased sense of respect, responsibility, and connection with the natural world. We often work in partnership with Nature Saskatchewan’s program, Nature Quest.

We do programming both in the schools and in the forest. We give youth an opportunity to connect with Treaty 6 territory at our shared 320 acre site located 20km northeast of Big River, Saskatchewan, and on the west side of Prince Albert National Park. Workshops are led by a diverse array of individuals, each with his or her own area of forest-related expertise. Program leaders include traditional land users, natural resource managers, silviculture contractors, commercial fishers, poets, First Nations elders, and educators. These varied perspectives give students a sense of the many different connections between humans and nature in the Boreal Forest ecoregion.

Youth come to the Boreal Forest Learning Centre and slow down, listen to their surroundings, and reflect on their identities by embracing the arts (making music, crafting, journaling, storytelling), moving their bodies (canoeing, tree planting, hiking, skiing, yoga), and engaging with all of their senses.

Many of the youth participants have wrote about feeling like they are ‘coming home’ when they come back to the Boreal Forest Learning Centre site a second or third time.

In the fall of 2011 we hosted a conference called ‘Teaching the Treaties: Discovering our Connections’ for teachers, educators, and those involved with treaty education in Saskatchewan. Our dynamic presenters helped inspire educators by connecting them with others and the land.

The arts, specifically music, weave their way into all of our programming.

Our current programs include:

• Workshops on forest stewardship and management;
• Interpretive tours in the forest at and around our Big River area site, including the west side of Prince Albert National Park, the Northern Provincial Forest, and private land;
• Exploring the forest through music, art, and movement;
• Horseback riding;
• Bison education;
• Gardens in the school yard;
• Nature Photography in the school yard and surrounding community;
• Traditional Cree Sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies;
• Traditional Elder Teachings;
• Storytelling and Nature;
• Canoeing, hiking, snowshoeing, skiing, hiking, and Nature interpretation on our 20 km’s of trails on our forest site; and,
• Winter and summer camping.
“The reason I come to Ness Creek is because, let’s face it, growing up is flippen hard. My life is crazy in the city, I have three full time jobs. Ness is a place where I get to relive my childhood in a lot of ways. I get away from all of my regular days worries and relax. I learn so much about the forest, but also about myself. I am so absolutely thankful to have had the opportunity to come on four Ness Creek trips. And I want everyone to be able to do the same. I honestly do not think I’d be in the same place I am in today, or even the person I am today had I not had this change. The Boreal Forest Learning Centre and Ness Creek is shaping young minds and young lives and that in itself should be worth everything.”

— Selina

“I come up here for time to be away from the “civilized” world. Up here there is no stress, no worries, just time to be peaceful. The peacefulness of this place is amazing. Up here you can be able to think clearly. It’s almost impossible to put into words. This place is deserving of the money needed to preserve and keep running.”

— Darren

“As an educator from Swift Current, the experience the Boreal Forest provides for these students is extremely valuable. Most notable is the sense of environmental stewardship they acquire. During their photography and solo time they exhibit a keen sense of pride and accomplishment. They are so proud of their actions in the forest their awareness and appreciation for nature which they share and promote to others in their life. Also quite remarkable are the students reports of decreased anxiety, and feeling of calm and relaxation. The forest brings them safety, security, and the feeling of letting their guards down. When this happens self growth flourishes. The discussions that are generated are reflective, of how they can better themselves and how they can better the world. It is truly remarkable to witness. Otherwise unmotivated students with low self esteem become transformed into individuals who have energy in their hearts to do well for themselves, the world, and the world. They gain a sense of purpose and self worth. The idea is to capture this feeling and bring it with you where ever you may go.”

— Eliza

PLACE PRACTICE

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CURRICULUM BROUGHT TO LIFE

ECO-ART PROJECTS

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Below are some ways that you can bring the arts into environmental, land, and sustainability education:

IDEAS:

Taken From: www.hilaryinwood.ca

- Write/perform songs or dance routines at an assembly or community event about a local environmental issue.
- Do a litter pickup in the school, and use the (non-toxic) litter as the basis for collages or anti-littering posters.
- Create a giant map of the school yard on craft paper, highlighting its treasure and trouble spots. Design a guided walk of it in brochure form; share with other classes and parents.
- Create artworks using only natural materials, like leaves, sticks, stones, snow or feathers.
- Go on a walking tour to collect materials; set up the artworks outside for others to view.
- Research an environmental issue facing the local community. Create a class video full of skits, songs or interviews to share what was found, and encourage others to help solve it.
- Plant a tree together in the school garden or local park. Track its growth from year to year; create drawings, poems, plays, journals or short videos about its development. Share these works in an assembly or exhibit.
- Design a knit-bombing project to draw attention to a special part of your schoolyard. Have students create squares or rectangles of knitting; attach together to make a covering for a favourite bench, tree, sign or fence.
- NATURE INSTALLATIONS: Create large-scale sculptures in nature using only materials found on the site. Leave the sculptures in place to slowly decompose. Preserve them only in photographs.
- RAIN PAINTINGS: On a rainy day, take painting paper and powdered paints outside. Use spoons or brushes to arrange the paints in desired shapes on the paper and let the rain mix the colours. Bring the rain paintings inside to dry.
- ICE SCULPTURES: Create nature-friendly sculptures out of ice. Fill old margarine tubs, buckets and other containers with water that is coloured with food dye. Leave the containers outside overnight in the winter. Pop the ice blocks out of the containers and place to slowly decompose. Preserve them only in photographs.
- STONE PAINTINGS: Use a small smooth stone as a surface for a painting or drawing. Paint a picture of a special natural place or turn the stone into a small animal by adding fabric ears and tail. Inscribe a memorable word on the stone and return it to its original site for others to find.
- BUBBLE PAINTINGS: In a small container, mix tempera paint with dish soap. Use a straw to blow air into the mixture. Press paper onto the bubbles to capture their image.
- ICE SCULPTURES: Create nature-friendly sculptures out of ice, fill old margarine tubs, buckets and other containers with water that is coloured with food dye. Leave the containers outside overnight in the winter. Pop the ice blocks out of the containers and place them as building blocks.
- WILDFLOWER CARDS: Fold a sheet of paper in half. On the front, lightly glue wildflower seeds in a pattern or shape. Add a drawing around the seeds. Provide instructions for planting the card in the garden. (This can also be done with grass seed; water the card daily for grass to sprout.)
This article is inspired by the work of the Digital Media Project (DMP), an action research project focused on youth orientations to place and sustainability. The project is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant held by Dr. Marcia McKenzie and is coordinated through the Sustainability Education Research Institute (SERI) at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S). In 2011, I worked as a co-facilitator of the first DMP camp, and then project managed the three camps in 2012. In 2013, I began my master’s in the School of Environment and Society. For the pilot study, we ran weekly 3-hour sessions for 12 weeks, from January until March at CNYC in Saskatoon. To provide a history of the project, in 2011 and 2012, 60 youth participants were engaged in 4 multi-week workshops developing narratives in relation to identity, place, and sustainability. A research team of independent filmmakers and photographers taught the youth participants about digital photography, photovoice, and video production to empower youth narratives of sustainability in each modality. The research team also collected participant narratives through storyboard, and making digital videos. These materials were also included as data in the study with participant consent.

In early 2012, a meeting was organized for community partners and participants of the Pilot Study to discuss the development of two more workshop camps in Saskatoon. At the meeting, the community partners agreed to support the development of the DMP workshops camps, and the support base broadened to include additional Saskatchewan community organizations. In the spring of 2012, through discussions with members of the English River First Nation (ERFN) and the Committee for Future Generations from Beauval we also discovered their interest in developing a photovoice project. We started to explore the possibility for a camp in Northern Saskatchewan and were officially invited in June. A filmmaking mentor, Georgie Trifa of Soul Datta Productions, and myself headed up to Beauval where we conducted a 4 day DMP camp with the students of the ERFN run Homefront School.

We were aware that ERFN was one of the communities being targeted by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) as the potential site for Canada’s first nuclear waste dump. However, when we arrived we discovered that NWMO was conducting an “Open House” during our workshop time at Homefront School. To help engage the students in the sustainability issues faced by their community, we went on a field trip to the NWMO Open House. The students took photos and recorded interviews with the NWMO representatives about the impact of a nuclear waste disposal site on their land and communities in Saskatchewan.

We were still absorbing the powerful experiences of the Homefront School students and the nuclear waste proposal upon returning to Saskatoon to get ready for the Saskatoon DMP workshops camps out of Earthkeepers Classroom in August, 2012. To accomplish what ended up being a busy month, we organized a larger team of mentor filmmakers and photographers including: Marcel Petit and Clark Ferguson from the Pilot Study, as well as Georgie Trifa, Alyyna May Morin, Jeff Elliott, and Scott Mickelson. In September 2012, once the youth participants finished creating their videos with the filmmaking mentors, the second Digital Media Project Photo and Film Fest was organized with the participants from Beauval, Earthkeepers, and CNYC at PAVED Arts in downtown Saskatoon.

Teaching digital media skills presents a great opportunity to engage young people on sustainability issues important to them while further empowering their ability to have their voices heard on the issues facing the coming generations. After four DMP workshop camps, thousands of photos, over 50 photovoice pieces, and over 20 films have been produced dealing with sustainability issues ranging from climate change to homelessness, Treaty Rights to fair trade, racism and apathy to overconsumption and nuclear waste. Given the state of the planet, research examining youth narratives of sustainability, as well as limitations to sustainability education in Canada is timely. In particular the research is interested in how youth identity, and youth orientations and connections to place (locally and globally), affect the types of sustainability issues that must concern youth. Early analysis of the youth produced data suggests implications for educational policy and social movements at regional, national, and global scales. Teaching digital media skills presents a great opportunity to engage young people on sustainability issues that are important to them while further empowering their ability to have their voices heard on the issues facing the coming generations.
The wind is the most constant presence in the prairie. For those who don’t hail from the flat lands, perhaps it seems counter-intuitive; the most intangible, ever-changing, ethereal of all the elements concurrently acts as dependable as the proverbial rock in stormy waters.

Do not be led astray; the wind herself is not constant, merely her presence. From the warm, dusty, sage-filled August wind to the sharp, ferocious, cut of the January wind, this beast reinvigorates herself by the day, sometimes by the hour.

But when I wander, every few months when I return from the Canadian north, to visit the piece of prairie closest to my heart, I know the one presence I can depend on meeting me there: the majestic prairie wind.

For, you see, the wind is not omnipresent in the North. The landscape here is interrupted by a carpet of trees – spruce, pine, aspen – that gently resist the wind, yielding to her strength and protecting those of us closer to the earth from the force of a cold gale in the face.

In southern Saskatchewan, however, the wind can wander freely, uninterrupted, unheeded by those pesky obstacles. She can drift between grasses, float over hills, and descend into coulees. She can bask in the beauty of the Saskatchewan prairie – an experience I yearn for as I sit in my cabin near Whitehorse, Yukon, thick in the heart of the boreal forest.

She has the luxury of gliding daily over the flat, unbroken prairie found at one of my favourite places: 18-20-2-W3, as our colonizer predecessors have so callously labeled it. To the Assiniboine or Cree inhabitants, it may have been a stop on the journey, a place to follow prey, or a gathering place. The south pasture is how my family refers to it, or more simply ‘down south’. For our four-legged or winged friends, perhaps it is known simply as home.

The wind can watch each day as this piece of prairie evolves and changes. She can see how the prairie can be dotted with the tiny flecks of soft yellow flowers, then how fall can transform it into rusty hues of orange, crimson, and brown. She can watch a wet year change the soil into mud and the vegetation into a lush carpet. She presses her gentle hand into the stray grains of dirt, rubbing them against the rocks and imperceptibly weathering the landscape over eons. She guides the varying plants as they bloom and grow throughout the season.

She swirled around our families as we pledged our hearts, our minds, and our commitment to each other and the relationship we were building. She promised to be there with us along the way, too.

She can watch the wanderings of our herd of cattle, and occasionally sheep, over the lumpy, rock-strewn surface, extracting and depositing nutrients as they amble in the symbiotic grazing relationship we now know is best for native prairie management. She can listen to the call of the meadowlark, watch the kill of the loggerhead shrike, guide the flight of the Sprague’s pipit.

She can watch the sharp-tailed grouse arrive at mating season to prepare one of their few remaining leks before beginning their intricate and mysterious dance.

Unfortunately, she must also bear witness as places like this become more rare, as songbirds are silenced, burrowing owls disappear, and native grasses are ploughed under. She watches as the land changes and humans leave our irreversible impact. But sometimes, despite our ill behaviour, when we are most fortunate, we are able to share a piece of the magic and beauty of the wind and the prairie.

The wind was there to watch nearly two years ago as I wed the man I love on this particular piece of prairie. She swirled around our families as we pledged our hearts, our minds, and our commitment to each other and the relationship we were building. She promised to be there with us along the way, too.

Now, as we await the arrival of our firstborn child, the wind is swirling outside still. She will be there as we bring this new human into the world. She will be there as we introduce our child to the prairie. She will be there for the first visit down south, bringing with her the warm dusty smells of sage and the calming knowledge of a more peaceful existence. I hope she is there to teach our child about environmental stewardship, the importance of solitude, and an understanding of home.

And as our child grows, I hope the wind will preside over the protection – and restoration – of our precious native prairie, so that the next generation (and the seven generations after that) will have the honour of learning from the prairie, just as I have. I hope she brings a warning call for our destructive behaviour, but that a softer tail wind follows her; optimism for a future where places like the south pasture are protected, honoured, and treasured.
“GOING FRAGILE”: EXPLORING PLACE THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED ART PRACTICES

DR. REBECCA CAINES, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA
FRANZ SEIBEL, KEWEYATINOOK OKIMAKANAK RESEARCH INSTITUTE (KORI)
CAL KENNY, KEWEYATINOOK OKIMAKANAK K-NET SERVICES (K-O-KNET)

ABSTRACT
This article documents the Community Sound Scapes [e] Scapes: Northern Ontario, a place based sound and video project that worked with Lands and Resource workers, teenagers, Elders and other community members in Keewaytinook Okimakanak communities in remote Northern Ontario in 2010-2012. It also discusses the vital land work being done by the project partners K-NET, a community-led ICT organization, and KORI, the Keewaytinook Okimakanak Research Institute. The paper draws on literature from community-based art, from communications studies, and from critical studies in improvisation in order to outline an approach to “going fragile” and making ethical art that is based on what could be considered improvisatory qualities of active listening, collaborative real-time decision making, and a reconfiguration of mistake. We acknowledge and thank the Community Leaders, Elders and community who hosted the project in North Spirit Lake and Dryden, and K-NET who consulted on the preparation of this paper. This article is written from the perspective of Rebecca Caines, with consultation with KORI and with additional material by co-researchers Franz Seibel and Cal Kenny.

Keywords: Community-based art; improvisation; “Going Fragile”; sound art; space

“GOING FRAGILE”: EXPLORING PLACE THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED ART PRACTICES

In March this year, I flew in a tiny charter plane towards North Spirit Lake with a team of artists for a community-based audio and video project. North Spirit Lake is one of six First Nations communities linked by the Keewaytinook Okimakanak chief’s council. From the window of the plane, just for a moment, I thought I saw a cloud shadow shaped like a giant bird, stretched out across the landscape of lakes, marsh, trees and ice below me. I thought from my research and conversations with new colleagues in the communities below that the bird was probably an important symbol in a culture, where nature, land, human and animal were understood as deeply connected. Then the shadow was gone as the clouds and the plane moved, and I laughed out loud at myself. I am so absurdly white and alien to this place in so many ways, seeking for moments of connection through creative expression, trying to make patterns in this landscape that is shaped by so many living practices, spiritualities, ice-roads, traditional trap-lines and walking routes, family and national blood lines and territories, mining and construction plans, charter plane flight paths, absences, and returns. It is a landscape that is also scarred by histories of colonization, denial, exploitation, and abuse. This transient moment of uncertainty, of reaching out for meaning, of complete difference, of being both alien and connected stayed with me, and disturbed me in productive ways. This paper is about the art project Community Sound Scapes Northern Ontario which included the North Spirit Lake visit I just described. It is about the acknowledging the important ongoing land-based work done by my partner on this project, Keewaytinook Okimakanak, their communications wing K-NET Services, and their research network KORI (the Keewaytinook Okimakanak Research Institute). It is also about the importance of profound uncertainty and what I call “fragility” as a working strategy for learning in site-based art with communities.1 This article is written from my perspective (Rebecca Caines), with additional material from KORI, and with consultation with my co-researchers Franz Seibel and Cal Kenny.

COMMUNITY-BASED ART AND PLACE

21st century community art is a field made up of a diversity of practices and described using a number of different terms. For example, in Australia where I did my training, this kind of work is described as “community cultural development” (“Mills & Brown, 2004), whilst in the USA and Canada the same kinds of projects are thought of as a “new genre public art” (Lacy, 1995), or “community-based” practice (Cohen-Cruz, 2000; Haedicke & Nellhaus, 2001). When these works are explicitly issue-based they can be described as “activist” or “applied” arts (Feldhini, 1995; Primenti & Preston, 2000). This kind of art practice is also often discussed in terms of its inherently “dialogical,” “socially-engaged,” and “relational” nature (Kester, 2004; Robertson, 2007). Contemporary community-based art might emerge from within a community, from the intervention of outside visitors, or from collaborations between different partners. It is made by ensembles of professional artists, non-artists, and those whose artistic skills lie outside professional art contexts. Often the content and form of the work is directly responding to community interests and needs, and mentorship and pedagogy play a central role. I have over fifteen years of experience in community-based art facilitating community projects, visual art, and interdisciplinary art with communities that I was part of, and those who invited me to partner with them. These projects have taken place in Australia, Canada, and Northern Ireland. Informed by the work of leading practitioners in the field, such as the late Dwight Conquergood (1985), I aim to create work that is born out of dialogue, positive for all partners, and which produces social outcomes through artistic innovation.

The word “community” is itself such an overloaded concept, used in a bewildering number of different ways, that some search for better words to describe the social networks that sustain us. However, if as I do, one instead gains strength from the fact that the term “community” inherently holds so many contradictory notions in play at once, then perhaps it becomes interesting again. “Community”, for example, can refer to the affective contact in small, shared networks of human social interrelation, and the use of the term can highlight a (sometimes troubling) human longing for commonality, liminality, and sharing (Turner, 1990). It marks the borders of both our geographical areas and our online locations (Baym, 2010; Rheingold, 2000). It may describe political coalitions (Haber, 1994), shared arenas of daily practice (Wenger, 1998), or even sketch out communal conditions of deprivation (Secomb, 2000). It can act both as a tool for identity formation and representation (Kuppers, 2009), but also for repression (hooks, 1999). It somehow marks both official and unofficial territories “the community,” and “my community”. For post-structural thinkers, however, the idea of community is primary one of potential, relation to difference and responsibility, (Agamben, 1993; Lingis, 1994; Nancy, 1998). “Community” is thus what Marvin Carlson (1993) would call a “post-structured” cultural idea, a vital but “essentially contested” activity (p.1). I argue that communities are always “essentially contested”, as they place these different notions in tension, and as they expose both our need for networks and our failure at sustain them. As community-based artist Petra Kuppers suggests, community is “a tactical lever, utopian hope and oppressive regime [...] both given and longed for, exclusionary and inclusive, tradition and innovation, located in stories, spaces and habits.” (Kuppers, 2006). Art grounded in ideas of community thus has the potential to build, celebrate and develop community, but also to expose where community fails.

Increasingly the types of community-based art projects I find myself drawn to making are explicitly tied to ideas of learning in site and location. I am interested in how learning and being creative outside can allow people to reclaim their influence on the construction of contemporary spaces, both material and conceptual, what Henri Lefebvre (1991) called the “production of space” and give new ways for their own unique lived, embodied sense of place to be experienced. Through observing, playing with, and making art based on the specific places they play, dream about, fight for, live and work in, I believe participants in community-based art projects can create new understandings of themselves, and build new relationships to the world.

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1The art project this paper focuses on was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts under the Artist and Community Collaboration Program in Media Arts. It is the result of a partnership between artists working with Ed Media, an Ontario based artist run centre, and Keewaytinook Okimakanak (Northern Chiefs Council). The research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded research initiative, Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation: a partnered research institution) and by the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Regina, Saskatoon.
GOING FRAGILE: IMPROVISATION AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

It is not difficult to identify ethical problems inherent in learning in community art projects. When it is all right to represent elements of a community, who gets to do this representation, and who benefits? Who is being paid and who is not? How are plans communicated across communities? What focus should be placed on innovation inside the world of art, and when should aesthetics, quality, and adequate training and experience matter? When can, or should, artists blur their roles to take part in pedagogy, community development, and social change? Under what conditions can “outsiders” make informed choices compared to “insiders” and how are these categories established? Given the range of different goals and agendas that different partners may bring to a project, how do priorities even get established to start with, and what risks are faced? This questioning only seems more important when working with learning in space and place where we have to always ask: whose spatial realities are dominating, and whose places remain hidden? No one framework can suit all projects; I argue these kinds of questions have to be considered anew every time. In my previous projects I worked directly with my own community(s), or I directly responded to an invitation to participate. In Community Sound [e]Scapes Northern Ontario, a tangential link brought together a team of people who did not know each other at all. For the first time, I felt like an outsider. I had to struggle to understand what we were all doing together, in this new, temporary coalition. This project has made me consider very carefully how I build relationships with communities and places. I draw on the metaphor of improvisation to help articulate the way the project formed and its outcomes.

Basque born improvising audio artist Martín (2009) suggests that when we improvise, we “go fragile.” He suggests it is in these moments of fragility that innovation and connection occurs. “Improvised music forces situations into play where musicians push each other into bringing different perspectives to their playing. When players feel too secure about their approach the experimentation risks turning into Mannerism. What I would like to explore are the moments in which players leave behind a safe zone and expose themselves. These I would call fragile moments” (p. 20). He goes on to ask how these approaches might play out:

How could you anticipate what you might achieve if you do not know what you will find on the way? To be open, receptive and exposed to the dangers of making improvised music, means exposing yourself to unwanted situations that could break the foundations of your own security.

Keep going forward toward what you do not know, to what is questioning your knowledge and your use of it. Keep pushing yourself, knowing that the other players will be pushing you, replacing traces of comfort. This is an unreliable moment, to which no stable definition can be applied. (p. 20)

In Martín’s vivid description of improvising, one can see the beginnings of an ethics of uncertainty in working with others based on creating structures for change, where planning and control are shared and ethical frameworks mutually confirmed. Yet it is a challenge for community artists just as it is for musicians. How can we bring ourselves to this state of fragility? More importantly, how can we make this productive uncertainty an active strategy that continues throughout the process of making? Rather than “just making stuff up on the spot,” the improvisation Martin describes is one of exposing experience, training, innovation to deliberately changeable conditions; and of holding ourselves open to vulnerable interaction with difference (Heble, 2005). I think of this as an ethics of fragility. I argue that when my partners and I made Community Sound [e]Scapes: Northern Ontario, we all “went fragile,” and utilised the qualities of the improviser. I will articulate the process and outcome of this community-based art project using just such three qualities: active listening, collaborative and real-time decision-making, and a reconfiguration of mistake

ACTIVE LISTENING IN THE COMMUNITY SOUND [e]SCAPES NORTHERN ONTARIO PROJECT

Improvisation plays a crucial role in creating the facility for an augmented sense of listening because at its core, improvisation is an art that opens doors. It creates new understandings of connectedness and futility in order to explore hidden possibilities. It privileges temporary and ephemeral resolutions over permanent and set in stone closures, recognizing that yesterday’s solutions always require renegotiation and adaptation tomorrow as situations and conditions change. (Lipsitz, 2014)

In 2010 I was living in Guelph, Ontario and I became aware of an organization called KO-kNet working in Northern Ontario that seemed to be doing interesting community work using online and audio-visual media for locally specific projects (Beaton, 2004; Carpenter et. al, 2010; Carpenter et. al., 2013, “Kweywaytnook Okimakanak.” 2014). I made contact through Professor Helen Hamby at the Don Snowden Program at the University of Guelph and later that year was successful in a funding proposal to the Canada Council of the Arts. The grant was to bring artists connected to the Ed Video artist collective in Guelph (“Ed Videos,” 2014), together with the KO-kNet team and researchers from KO communities to deliver an artist and community collaboration in media arts. Preparing this grant was just the beginning of a period of improvisatory active listening that continues to this day. From this initial contact, KO-kNet and kORI and my team of artists shaped the project through our attempts to really listen to who each other were, and hear what was needed and offered on both sides. kORI, through Research Director Franz Seibel helped to find locally appropriate solutions to all ideas, and KO-kNet provided a wealth of knowledge based on practical experience in each of the communities. Such listening requires noticing silences, gaps, discontinuities, even as it requires locating the connections between seemingly disparate ideas, in this case between sound and new media art, and community-led communications and infrastructure projects.

“I aim to create work that is born out of dialogue, positive for all partners, and which produces social outcomes through artistic innovation.”

What I heard at this early stage was that Kweywaytnook Okimakanak (KO), is a First Nations tribal council established by the leaderships of remote Northern Ontario communities of Deer Lake, Fort Severn, Kweywayin, McDowell Lake, KO Spirit Lake, and Poplar Hill bands to provide a variety of second level support services for their communities The KO-Kuhkenah Network (KO-KNet) provides information and communication technologies (ICTs), telecommunication infrastructure and application support in First Nation communities across a vast, remote region of north-western Ontario as well as in other remote regions in Canada (McMahon et al., 2011). Kuhkenah is an Ojib-Cree term for everyone, everywhere (“Kweywaytnook Okimakanak.” 2014). The research network kORI was started by KO Chiefs to build research capacity at the community level and to seek out academics who are willing to put First Nations research priorities over those of the institutions (Walmark, 2005). As I listened, I also heard, and eventually saw, that many of the KO communities were facing significant structural inequality (Ferreira, 2006). In 2009 the community of North Spirit Lake, for example, identified the following pressing needs: housing shortage – overcrowded homes, drug and substance abuse and resulting crime issues that need to be addressed, safety for vulnerable members, lack of employment, high cost of living and social issues leading to hunger, the need for parenting workshops, suicide prevention, language/communication issues between youth and Elders and a lack of consistent, well trained teachers. Social and cultural isolation and alienation remained central problems, especially for teenagers (Manaw Shawawiggyakwin, 2009). KO (and KO- kNet and kORI) is involved in a number of initiatives aimed at finding locally appropriate, specific, community-led responses to these kinds of ongoing social issues (Beaton, 2004). These include the development of internet high schools (Walmark, 2005), successful video-conferenced medical clinics (“KO Telemedicine Website,” 2014; Gibson, 2011), critical infrastructure training in areas such as water treatment (Gurstein, 2009), youth employment training and
economic development, land projects, and media training; as well as innovative uses of social media and personal websites (Budka, Bell, & Fiser, 2009). KO researchers, with the support of KORI, have been building an impressive body of research on the innovations taking place (“First Nations Innovations”), including nearly seventy publications showing the impact of this work. What I kept listening for, and saw my partners including nearly seventy publications showing the impact of KORI, have been building an impressive body of research on the innovations taking place (“First Nations Innovations”), including nearly seventy publications showing the impact of this work. What I kept listening for, and saw my partners listening back equally carefully, was for a way for creative works with sound to connect with the important work already taking priority, in this place, at this time.

REAL-TIME CREATIVE DECISION MAKING AND COLLABORATION

All of the stakeholders in this project were committed to keeping the project open to let the right strategies emerge collaboratively. To the Canada Council we had promised audio art, but perhaps this would not be what KO communities wanted or needed in the end? For our managers at Ed Video, real-time decision making meant trusting KO-KNet/KORI and my team to make and remake the project many times, for KO-KNet/KORI it meant trying out different ways the project might support their work, and for me and my fellow artistic team it meant moving the project goalsposts and changing its nature continually based on what we saw and heard. I would normally take on the majority of administrative burdens in partnerships. The reality of the land such as the instability of ice roads leading to the communities in winter (and the lack of any roads in summer), the extreme distances involved to travel to each location, and my own ignorance on how to get around between communities instead made me need to rely heavily on my partners. I also moved away from Ontario to Saskatchewan between communities instead made me need to rely heavily on my partners. I also moved away from Ontario to Saskatchewan as they map and record the land (“Community Sound [e]Scapes: Northern Ontario,” 2013). During these sessions, KO decided that audio might provide a new tool for the workers that provide more flexibility and a smaller reliance on complex video editing processes. I learned a lot from KO-KNet and KORI staff and the Lands and Resource workers about adaptability with technology, and how to continually seek for connections to important, ongoing processes for community development.

I then worked with KO Lands and Resources to source and fund appropriate equipment for the team (water resistant, hardy, compact and able to withstand cold temperatures and not reliant on disposable batteries alone). One of the positive outcomes of this project is that each KO community will now have a professional grade portable audio recorder and headphones in the kit for future audio work. For me, the best outcome of the Dryden workshops is seeing that the types of ideas and resources I offered as an audio artist could be utilized and adapted to produce new opportunities for engaging with the land. This adaptability with technology is a specialty of KO-KNet and KORI, and was particularly evident in the work of KO-KNet staff member Cal Kenny, who constantly learns, to Dryden to join with Lands and Resource workers from all six KO communities. For this project, all of the communities have established Lands and Resources Offices and are facilitating lands and resources training. Planners and technicians coordinate community events and conduct strategic planning to provide their leadership with the information they need to make decisions. During the Lands and Resource project, each planner and technician receives ongoing training, peer support, and access to equipment including kits of audio-visual and GPS equipment. The current Lands and Resource project website states:

KO seeks partnerships in order to provide the Lands Offices with additional resources and training to coordinate community events to reunite youth with the land and strengthen the language, culture and heritage of future generations. Community events and cultural activities are enabling communities to gather stories, maps, history, heritage, wildlife habitat, and other topics of interest. Youth are being involved through school outings, art contests, and cultural teachings with Elders. Video cameras and recorders will be used to preserve Elder stories for future generations. (“KO Lands and Resources,” 2014)

During the Dryden trip in October 2012, I was involved in teaching and learning through collaborative video and audio workshops, supporting the ongoing work of Lands and Resource workers as they map and record the land (“Community Sound [e]Scapes: Northern Ontario,” 2013). During these sessions, KO decided that audio might provide a new tool for the workers that provide more flexibility and a smaller reliance on complex video editing processes. I learned a lot from KO-KNet and KORI staff and the Lands and Resource workers about adaptability with technology, and how to continually seek for connections to important, ongoing processes for community development.

...we have to always ask: whose spatial realities are dominating, and whose places remain hidden?

“Fragile”, “real-time” decision-making, and collaborative planning shaped this project at every step. One telephone conversation with community leaders connected my nascent idea for audio art projects to an existing Lands and Resource project. Just over two weeks after this idea was floated, I flew to Dryden to join with Lands and Resource workers from all six KO communities. For this project, all of the communities have established Lands and Resources Offices and are facilitating lands and resources training. Planners and technicians coordinate community events and conduct strategic planning to provide their leadership with the information they need to make decisions. During the Lands and Resource project, each planner and technician receives ongoing training, peer support, and access to equipment including kits of audio-visual and GPS equipment. The current Lands and Resource project website states:

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and then teaches new technologies to his community, and who since the project has gone on to use his new audio equipment and skills to negotiate situations where filming is not allowed or appropriate, to capture stories in transport situations where film would not work, and to supplement other audio visual methods of data gathering. The audio recorders continue to be utilized since these workshops, and new audio works are appearing regularly on the Media server for K0-KNet as part of the Lands and Resources project (K0 Media, 2014).

“seeing that the types of ideas and resources I offered as an audio artist could be utilized and adapted to produce new opportunities for engaging with the land.”

In March 2013 our team of artists visited North Spirit Lake First Nations to continue this collaborative lands and resources focused sound work with high school students. Again, we went informed by our experiences of facilitating community sound work before, but the project was adapted at each step of the way as K0-KNet, KORI and the artistic team learnt more about each other, and about local conditions. The visiting team was made up of myself, video artist Nicholas Loeser, sound artist Rosa Loeser, and new media technical consultant John Campbell. We were supported at a distance by the mentorship of renowned Canadian sound artist Michael Waterman who is living in St Johns, Newfoundland, and by our management team at Ed Video back in Guelph, Ontario. During the visit the team held workshops at the North Spirit Lake camp of the Keewaytinook Online High School (KOHS) focusing on recording, editing, and mixing audio to create audio art; and on working with audio in video and mixed media projects. We also facilitated the young people recording stories from Elders about sound in the community, and hosted a number of community events at the elementary school and the community centre; as well as participating in a video conferenced school assembly with the other thirteen K0-KNet as part of the Lands and Resources project (K0 Media, 2014).

“How has the sound changed in the community?” “What are the beautiful sounds you remember?” “How long is it since you heard a drum in the community?” The stories, answers, and knowledge shared by the Elders included everything from memories of the sounds of animals, wood chopping, and singing, to stories about how drums were made, to memories of family and children, to concerns for the future of the young people in a changing community.

Powerful connections occurred when young people asked the Elders about drums, and other sounds that have not been heard in the community for over sixty years. Moving scenes during the interview included witnessing instructions for drum making shared for the first time between an Elder in her eighties and a sixteen year old who wanted to learn about his cultural heritage. Permission was granted for the first time for the young people to hold a pow-wow again in the community. As Eva suggests, “Long time ago there was no drinking, no nothing, we did the pow-wow and everybody was happy doing it, and we would really like to have that coming back because the kids would have something to do instead of doing what they are doing, and we would love to participate” (“Elder Stories– Eva interviewed by Phillip,” 2013). The lessons I learned from these Elder interviews included recognition of the important memories and knowledge held by the Elders of the changing community around cultural practices, the contributions these young people can offer to their community, and detail on the rich soundscapes that exist as part of the cultures in K0 communities in the past, present, and future.

RECONFIGURATION OF MISTAKE

Many uneven partnerships have been made with the K0 communities in the past, particularly in terms of research projects that took information, but gave nothing back in return. For this reason, K0, through their research wing KORI has developed clear protocols for working with communities. Their “Community Consultation Standards” for researchers suggests: “The leadership may express some frustration from being overly researched. The position of the researcher should be that they are there to listen to the community and do their best to record suggestions and comments in order to improve local programs and services and ultimately the quality of life

“Hunters say we are thankful to the animals, plants, and fish that give up their lives so that we humans can survive.”
“Powerful connections occurred when young people asked the Elders about drums, and other sounds that have not been heard in the community for over sixty years.”

My goal throughout this project was to ensure we together took measures to ensure these mistakes were not made again. I can’t help but wonder, however, if my eagerness to apply

work with the resources and ideas we shared to make audio and videos speaks to and for their sense of community and the land that sustains us all. As Mattin concludes, when aiming for profound uncertainty, when going fragile “You are breaking away from previous restrictions that you have become attached to, creating a unique social space, a space that cannot be transported elsewhere. Now you are building that infrastructure of collaboration, scraping previous modes of generating relations” (p. 21). I see the process we took to build this project as one of adaptability and flexibility. These are qualities that KO-KNet and KORI were obviously already adept at; but together we created a vulnerable, collaborative, creative process. Perhaps that shadow of the bird I thought I saw from the plane that day transient, momentary, fictional, but connected to site and culture actually foreshadowed the fragile uncertainty and optimism of this project, a project that explored community and land through imagination, education, and creative practice. As I continue to work here in Saskatchewan, on Treaty 4 Land, I hope that the lessons I have learned from my partners and participants will continue to guide the work I do. How might we “go fragile” in this place, right now? What “previous modes of generating relations” need to be left behind, how might we improve a distinctive future with this land and its peoples?

REFERENCES


B Bird

ALONGSIDE HIGHWAY #54

It’s the usual aluminum and beer cans, plastic bottles, water bottles, plastic bags and Tim Hortons cups and dead animals. Two porcupines, quills brown-yellow and curved so gently, one at each end of the highway this week. Also this week, the deer near the Buena Vista turnoff, its two-pronged antlers velvet-coated as it layed on its tan-brown side. Was it the same one she’d seen prancing along in the ditch a week ago or munching at berries the week before?

There’s the usual, too, discarded by accident or deliberately. A large, black flip-flop, only one. A green sweater that’s not Rider green or it’d be long gone. A white comforter. Did someone have a sleeper in the ditch at the Lumsden Beach corner? A coiled blue rope. Or is it a cable? She thinks she will stop and check it out if it’s still there next time she passes by the llama farm. Three weeks have since passed and it’s still there. She saw it this afternoon, her way to the cottage.

If she’d collected these items, posted images to Facebook or Twitter, Kijiji or UsedRegina would anyone care enough to respond?

BERNADETTE WAGNER

currently serves as the inaugural writer in Residence at the Last Mountain Lake Cultural in Regina Beach. She is author of “This Hot Place” (Thistledown Press, 2010). She grew up near to the Qu’Appelle Valley.
As a child of newcomers whose ancestors had come ashore on Turtle Island sometime in the 1700s, my family’s ownership of the tracts of land my father had inherited from his father was a story that I would have never thought to challenge. Farming the land and setting up a salvaging business in agricultural equipment were endeavours that I never questioned. Working hard, making money, saving most of it, and being a good Christian -- these were the great values in life and as a family were proud to embrace them all.

My education was there was simple. I was a child in the 1950’s. As a child I was to fear God. I was to work hard in school. Obey God, your father and mother, the teacher, and your older brothers and sisters. And remember you’re a girl. Don’t show up boys. Look good but don’t look “too good”. That might lead you down the road to sin. Don’t drink, don’t smoke, and don’t swear or be saucy.

Don’t question the meaning of hard work. Don’t question gender roles within the family. There was work to be done. Get an education. The boys will inherit the farm and you will either be a farmer’s wife or you’ll go to university and be a teacher or a nurse. Always think of others before you think of yourself -- but don’t think too much of yourself.

Being the fifth child of seven, I was the “oldest of the little ones”. I had responsibilities, but not too many. I was a nervous child, always wanting to please and do the right thing so that my mom and dad would be proud of me and God would also be pleased. Excelling was important. Bragging rights were important for my father. Competing against others, whether in sports or in business, raised one’s status. Being noticed and respected for being a winner had no corollary. I accomplished that. I excelled in sports and in academics. In my reality, the only thing that appeared to matter was “getting ahead” and making a name for myself in whatever community I found myself. Your family is your whole world at a young age, and in my world, a person’s worth was evaluated by material wealth or whatever skills/talents one possessed.

As a child growing into a young adult, I didn’t challenge my family’s value system. I judged what I saw through the lens of privilege, wealth (learned with hard work of course), and entitlement to private property that was mine because I deserved it (if I didn’t work for it, my dad or mom did!).

Questioning my privilege never happened until I was an adult. And even then, it wasn’t until I found myself treated unfairly (my perception anyway) at my workplace, that I began to critique power relations. It was a personal experience with discrimination that stoked the fire of my quest for new knowledge and got me back to university and studying again. I needed to find out how power worked, and I soon saw that all roads led to “Canadian History”.

What WERE my roots? Why was I MADE so unaware of the history of the land on which my family made its living? Could it be that nothing that had happened here before my grandfather set up his homestead was important enough to know about?

The questions were disturbing; the historical facts they could lead to were often horrific. But they also led to the kind of answers I found exhilarating -- exhilarating because they ushered in a new of kind life…a life that could be lived much more authentically now that I was learning what I should have learned a long time ago, and unlearning what should never have been learned in the first place -- racism, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism.

Sometimes I think that it’s as if colonialism just eats up history. It constantly gnaws away at our understanding of who we are until there is just a husk left, and after that none of our stories make sense. With so much meaning
...go missing, we grow from children into adults, all the time unaware of our dependence on the “unseen other”. My grandfather’s fences kept the original caretakers/owners of “our” land from being able to continue their way of life. My father and mother’s certainty that God bestows good fortune on those who work hard kept me from considering the truth that was in front of me the whole time: that land theft and forced dependence on colonial administration were the cause of poverty, hopelessness, and despair. The story was right in front of me every time I drove down 20th Street in Saskatoon, but I had never been allowed to read the first part of that history book before—only the last chapter.

So, what does a privileged prairie girl who finally realizes her received family history made no sense? I got busy. Teaching became a kind of emergency. I had been in classrooms for almost 30 years, teaching all over the world. I knew I had agency with my students, but now I had something more. From my own experience I knew that if the students could be taught to believe in themselves, we could, together, begin to change the way history was taught. So together we developed “Project of Heart”, a learning module that sets out to teach the truth of the Residential School era.

The Grandfather and Grandmother teachings of Anishinaabe peoples were our model. They teach us that we must live our lives with love, honesty, courage, respect, wisdom and humility before we can reach our true potential.

With those attributes set as the primary “outcome”, Project of Heart brings to the foreground the lived experiences of those who have been left out and made invisible. Students learn how they themselves can take a principled stance to right historical wrongs; they learn to lead through a values-infused pedagogy. Project of Heart allows the students and their teachers to cooperate and learn reciprocity.

In finding a way to tell my truth, I found a way to help others tell their own. Project of Heart, through the hard work of many dedicated individuals and communities, is now in over 600 schools across Canada. In every province and territory, school children are remembering and honouring the young lives like their own that were lost or damaged in during the Residential School era.

And that identity I promised to reveal? In owning up to my own history, I found a way to describe who I really am at last: I’m the granddaughter of uninvited guests to Treaty 6 area. I presently reside on unceded Algonquin Territory in what is now the capital city of Canada.

What an honour! I only wish it hadn’t taken me 47 years to discover it.

PROJECT OF HEART

Project of Heart is an inquiry based, hands-on, collaborative, inter-generational, artistic journey of seeking truth about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada. Its purpose is to:

- Examine the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada and to seek the truth about that history, leading to the acknowledgement of the extent of loss to former students, their families and communities
- Commemorate the lives of the thousands of Indigenous children who died as a result of the residential school experience
- Call Canadians to action, through social justice endeavors, to change our present and future history collectively

Project of Heart acknowledges the families and communities to whom those children belonged. It was originally designed to bring awareness both to the settler community and communities of new Canadians. Project of Heart has evolved, through community ownership of the project itself, to educate all Canadians about the history and legacy of this crime and tragedy.

Students lead many of the project outcomes, demonstrating their learning through videos and multimedia presentations and decorating small wooden tiles. Each tile becomes a meaningful artifact, representing one of the thousands of young lives lost due to the effects of the Indian residential schools system.

WEB SITE: poh.jungle.ca/

TARGET AUDIENCES: All Ages, Education Staff, Educators, church groups, students

LOCATION: Province Wide

PROJECT OF HEART STEPS:

STEP 1 – Investigation into the History and Legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada
STEP 2 – A Closer Look at a Specific Indian Residential School (IRS), the People upon Whose Territory the IRS is Located and the Children Taken to the School
STEP 3 – Create a Gesture of Reconciliation (artistic gestures include: decorate commemorative wooden tiles, create feather wreaths, make a song or film/video, others)
STEP 4 – IRS Survivor Visit
STEP 5 – Social Justice Action
STEP 6 – Finishing up Project of Heart - write a blog post

TOWARDS DECOLONIZATION

Conservation Photography is not simply a photographer going into nice places and capturing good quality images of nature or people. Conservation photography brings the viewer into an environment, into a moment in time or space where something truly extraordinary is about to take place. It is about educating the viewer about special places that are at risk, of rare and endangered animals who need assistance to survive in a relentlessly changing world.

One photograph can touch the hearts and souls of viewers who will never, in their entire lifetime, have the opportunity to see or experience an almost invisible short-horned lizard whose habitat is at risk, or a stark and lonely prairie that is about to be tamed into a grain field.

It is about the photographer seeing an issue of conservation concern and bringing that issue into the hearts and minds of the public to ensure that years and years down the road, a child with a camera can also be overwhelmed by the beauty in front them.

Conservation photography is about capturing a fleeting image that tells a vast story about the people who help preserve our wilderness, who seek to keep traditions alive to ensure that your knowledge of them is increased – so that you too care about what happens to our precious places, species, and people.

JOHANE JANELLE
My contribution as a conservation photographer comes in many different ways:

I accompany scientists in the field and photograph their research and this helps bring to light their discoveries. They use these images for their research presentations and ultimately this benefits the species, their habitats, and our awareness of the issues.

Conserving prairie habitat is critical. As an educator, photography helps me focus students and visitors alike so that they can look at this vast landscape from many different angles. Sometimes people are overwhelmed by this vast sky, and they miss the details of this intricate landscape.

I use evocative photography to share environmental messages through visual media presentations and in print materials. A strong visual connection to the prairie helps everyone see the magnitude and fragility of this amazing landscape.

As a newcomer to the land of the living skies, I have had the opportunity to photograph a cultural tradition that is quickly becoming a species at risk “ranching/cowboys/stewards of the land”. Those men & women who have taken care of these lands for so many generations deserve our thanks for a job well done. The passing of these traditions to their children is a way of life that is rapidly vanishing with time and new government policies.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Long-billed curlew; one of many species at risk in our grasslands.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Young girl learning about the biodiversity of the prairies. Close-up of prairie crocus petals. Greater short-horned lizard with a telemetry backpack. The Mormon metalmark butterfly, a Species at Risk that only flies for 10 days before the end of its life cycle. A rancher tending his spring calves. Plains bison, a keystone species of the prairies. Sage Grouse performing their beautiful mating dance, a sight that you may not see in the near future. Did you know that the black tailed prairie dog is a species that provides a home to many other inhabitants of the prairie? Western saddle horn, a tool used every day on prairie ranches.
Sit on the edge the valley; imagine the past, feel the warm wind envelope and transport you to another time where millions of buffalo roamed free, right in front of your eyes. The heat rising from the bottom of the valley bringing you the sweet smell of wildflowers. Watch the eagle fly in search of his prey ... you have never been here, but now with these images you can imagine....

LEFT TOP: Tipi overlooking Timmons Coulee in Grasslands National Park; LEFT BOTTOM: on occasion pretty pictures are used for conservation photography; RIGHT: dreaming of the past in Grasslands.

To see more of Johane's images, please visit her website: www.johanejanelle.com
During these cold days, I am tempted to stay inside and hibernate the days away making art and warm drinks, rather than venture into the frosty outdoors. The more I take my children out though, the more I remember how essential it is to who they are. I see my own wild spirit mirrored in their freedom and love of this space as they stretch their arms towards an immense sky, walk hand in hand down our long curving driveway, and scream echoes into the valley to bounce off the hills. Even after they come inside, the peace of the outdoors clings to them and resonates through their play, both together and independently.

Living on a farm and experiencing the repetition of seeding and harvest, the rhythm of the seasons shape my children’s days in a way that I didn’t experience when growing up in Regina.

In a world so packed with people, the immensity and vastness of my prairie home is a sharp contrast. We live tucked away in the curve of rolling hills, surrounded by native prairie pastures and fields of grain. When I climb the hills, I can see miles and miles of snow-covered grass, whipped by an almost never-ceasing wind. At night the sky is so huge and dark and covered in pinpricks of light, that when looking up and not seeing the edges of the land, I sometimes scare myself, imagining I am falling off the edge of the world.

While my childhood world was shaped by houses and roads, and grassy alleyways, my children are grounded in the reality of our farming life. They see the fragility of our livelihood in the tiny green sprouts of wheat in the fields, the strange and subtle beauty of mossy lichen in the pastures, and the ferocity of nature in the severed mouse head on our deck, left by the cats. I can see the curve of the hills reflected in my daughter’s early artwork—houses, flowers, doors, all shaped roundly.

I grew up running through the wild grassy alleyways behind our house in Regina and would dream at night of traveling the grid, hiding in the long grass. When my family drove along the highways to visit relatives, I would imagine myself running as fast as the shadow of our vehicle in the ditch, racing over the hills that I live amongst today, searching for and longing to know the secret tree-covered spaces between the hills. I would imagine the curve of the hills cupping my body as I petted the whorls of grass like the rough fur of a giant animal. My family moved quite a bit while I was growing up, and wherever we were, I always found places outdoors to welcome me: a pasture with small cliffs and a culvert under a tall hill, sand hills and cliffs with a big tree root sticking out, just right for sitting on and looking down, a creekside field of wheat, tall enough to sit in and not be seen, a golf course with short sweet-smelling grass that just begged to be walked on barefoot in the dark.

Now I live on a farm in the hills with green and flowering things and dry water runs that must be explored. I don’t claim that this is the only place for me, because I can see myself in other times and places too—enjoying the presence of people and access to coffee shops and thrift stores and parks and noise, but being here has shaped me. The wind and the sky define my thoughts and dreams. The long winters and short intense summers, with months of brown in between teach me to see simple and often-overlooked beauty. Having married a farmer has also changed my relationship to the land, prompting me to find joy in rainfall and sadness for the parched ground, dependence on the weather for schedules and income.

I wonder now what dreams of vastness and silence will form my children’s dreams, and how the deep silence of our hills will affect their subconscious. I imagine how their daydreams will become their reality, how the coveted hidden and quiet spaces I longed for as a child are now mine to wallow in—the tangled spaces between the caragana bushes behind my house, and the huge white rock on the hill that stays cool even on the hottest summer days. I like to believe that my son and my daughter will grow up strong in this vast space and know that they are capable of big things.

MARIA ENNS is a stay-at-home-mom with a bachelor’s degree in arts education. Visual Art and Dance are the arts she enjoys sharing most with her kids, but Music and Drama find their way into the mix as well. She blogs about integrating arts education into her parenting and lifestyle here: www.backinthehills.com
RESOURCES

The Canadian Journal of Environmental Education (CJEE) is a refereed journal published once a year. It seeks to further the study and practice of environmental education by providing a thoughtful forum for researchers, scholars, practitioners, and post-secondary students.

Volume 13 has, in fact, become two issues. The first issue, 13(1), includes three papers that will open up conversations about art in environmental education. Its companion issue, 13(2), is guest edited by Rishma Dunlop and takes form as an "ecopoetics reader" about "art, literature, and place." Necessarily, these issues must be more than just about art; they need to be art too. This is emphatically demonstrated on the covers of both issues. Portions of poetry by Rishma are united with artistic representations by her long-time collaborator, Suzanne Northcott, to evoke geographies of Naramata Road. And, this issue begins with Rishma's complete poem and a recounting of their collaborations. Rishma's more comprehensive editorial about "art, literature, and place" opens Volume 13(2).

Volume 13(1) presents a diverse range of contributions that advocate and represent creative forms of expression, deep investigation of moral and ethical impulses, and critical consideration of the discourses and counter-narratives emerging from science and environmental education. It's clear from this collection that a variety of approaches are being taken to thinking about, and engaging with, environmental education. At the same time, a common thread tying the articles together is the authors' consideration of what might be needed for a more inclusive, democratic, and/or effective environmental education to flourish. From arts-based education to working with "messy" data in science classrooms to a revisiting of Leopold's land ethic, many ideas are proposed by the authors, providing directions to guide the field.

CJEE.lakeheadu.ca

WASTELAND
Filmed over nearly three years, WASTE LAND follows renowned artist Vik Muniz as he journeys from his home base in Brooklyn to his native Brazil and the world's largest garbage dump, Jardim Gramacho, located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. There he photographs an eclectic band of "catadores"—self-designated pickers of recyclable materials. Muniz's initial objective was to "paint" the catadores with garbage. However, his collaboration with these inspiring characters as they recreate photographic images of themselves out of garbage reveals both the dignity and despair of the catadores as they begin to re-imagine their lives. Director Lucy Walker and co-directors João Jardim and Karen Harley have great access to the entire process and, in the end, offer stirring evidence of the transformative power of art and the alchemy of the human spirit.

GOOD EARTH ART
"Good Earth Art" contains over 200 easy fun art projects that develop an awareness of the environment and a caring attitude towards the earth. Projects use common materials collected from nature or recycled. The book is filled with sensible creative ideas to help recycle and reuse through art, for all ages, and includes a charted Table of Contents, two indexes, and a great list of environmental resources.

HILARY INWOOD WEBSITE
www.hilaryinwood.ca
Hilary Inwood is a lecturer teaching art education and environmental education at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on integrating art education with environmental education to develop learners' environmental literacy in school and community settings. Her work as an educator and artist extends beyond the classroom to include school gardens, outdoor education centres, parks and galleries. Her website includes resources for practicing teachers to use eco-art with their students, articles and texts she has written on art education and environmental literacy, research reports, photos of her artwork and her students work, and her blog that she updates regularly about new projects.

NATURE’S ART BOX
Whether it’s a city park, a suburban backyard, a farmer’s field, or the sandy seashore, there’s a treasure trove of natural art materials out there. Twigs, vines, pinecones, flowers, leaves, rocks, shells, moss, feathers - they’re all gifts of the earth. Add just a few inexpensive store-bought items, such as glue, string, and wire, and anyone can create beautiful, natural works of art.

In Nature’s Art Box, writer, gardener, and nature-crafter Laura Martin offers 65 fun projects kids will love to make, using materials they can find just about anywhere. She explains how to make paints and inks from flowers and other plants; how to use shells, moss, seedpods, and cones to embellish large objects; how to build elf-sized furniture; how to decorate picture frames, birdhouses, and keepsake boxes with woodland treasures; and how to dig clay, weave vines, and make natural dyes to color T-shirts.

While Martin teaches kids to see the possibilities of the natural world, she also teaches them to respect what the earth offers. She warns them against stripping bark off live trees, plucking every flower in the field, and clearing the ground of every nut and seed. Nature’s Art Box helps kids learn to be good artists and conscientious stewards of nature’s resources.

OF LAND & LIVING SKIES SUMMER 2014
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LEARNING THE LAND through photography

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As an educator, Johane Janelle uses evocative photography to share environmental messages to students and visitors alike so that they can look at the vast prairie landscape from many different angles. Sometimes people are overwhelmed by this vast sky, and they miss the details of this intricate landscape. A strong visual connection to the prairie helps everyone see the magnitude and fragility of this amazing place.