

Canoe Pedagogy and Colonial History: Exploring Contested Spaces of Outdoor Environmental Education

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore how histories of colonialism are integral to the Euro-Western idea of wilderness at the heart of much outdoor environmental education. In the context of canoe tripping, I speculate about why the politics of land rarely enters into teaching on the land. Finally, because learning from difficult knowledge often troubles the learner, I consider the pedagogical value of emotional responses to curricula that address colonial implication.

Résumé

Dans le présent article, je me penche sur la mesure dans laquelle l'histoire du colonialisme fait partie intégrante de la conception occidentale de la nature sauvage au sein de programmes d'éducation environnementale intensive. Dans un contexte d'excursions en canot, je spécule sur l'omission fréquente des politiques territoriales dans l'enseignement environnemental. Enfin, puisque l'apprentissage à partir de connaissances complexes peut déconcerter l'élève, j'examine la valeur pédagogique de la réaction émotive dans les programmes d'enseignement se penchant sur le facteur colonial.

Keywords: wilderness, colonialism, difficult knowledge, canoe trip, outdoor environmental education, Canada

Part of the work of environmental education must be to confront the traumatic traces lingering in a nation born through colonization. For years as an environmental educator working in a primarily canoe trip based context, I put an emphasis on the land, tried to slow down and be quiet enough for students to develop a sense of place, a respect for this more-than-human world. But the trickiness of the place—the contested histories of space, the ambivalent role that the canoe played in Canada's origins, the very context for all of this learning—tended to go unacknowledged in my pedagogies. Among my colleagues, I believe I was unremarkable in this regard. Perhaps, for many outdoor and environmental educators, engaging with the ramifications of our colonial past and present seems beside the curricular point. But the very place of outdoor education—the outdoors, the land—bears a heavy imprint of colonization both in its histories of land cessions and in the dominant discourses through which wilderness space is so often imagined (as neutral, natural, and empty). The land the canoeist experiences is not just that of lakes, rocks, and trees—not just

the smell of dirt and pine, the feel of hot granite after a swim, the softness of sphagnum, the graceful movement of a snapping turtle, or the scrape of lichen. It is also a site of struggle, a tangle of contested meanings. If the land, like the canoe, is layered, my students and I seemed to be paddling through only the manifest layer of it.

My central object of analysis in this paper is wilderness; canoe pedagogy and outdoor education more broadly form the context for this analytic work. In Canada, both *wilderness* and *the canoe* are coded as symbols of the nation, symbols suggesting a just, good nation, with a history brimming with adventure and intercultural cooperation (for examples of such representations see CBC, 2007; Jennings, Hodgins, & Small, 1999). Canoe trips in Canada, then, are heavily loaded experiences, often carrying idealized notions about Canadian identities, fur trade histories, Aboriginal heritage, and fantasies of wilderness (Newbery, 2010). And yet, Canada, the canoe, and wilderness are highly ambivalent constructs, constituted or reconstituted through colonial experience—a dynamic that is rarely recognized in outdoor education. Accordingly, in this essay, I explore the problem of curricular absence: an absence of a critical pedagogy of colonialism in my own practice and in the teaching I have witnessed at outdoor centres, Outward Bound, and universities.

Canoe based learning takes many forms, and by far the most inspiring example I have ever encountered is that of the community driven Tribal Journeys of the West Coast. These extraordinary international cultural gatherings involve Aboriginal nations (from both sides of the Canada/U.S. border) carving canoes and paddling hundreds of miles to each year's host community (Neel, 1995). In this essay, however, I do not survey Canada's many rich examples of canoe based learning or environmental learning that are grounded in Indigenous knowledges. For reasons I outline below, I focus instead on the complexity of teaching histories of European imperialism, and I address the essay primarily to educators who are, like me, **settler-invader Canadians concerned with issues of social justice**. With Susan Dion (2009), I see how Canadian histories exert an urgent "call that [non-Aboriginal] Canadians (and especially teachers of Canadian history) examine their relationship with colonization" (p. 113); I believe that this very examination is a necessary first step in forging humbler and more respectful relationships with Aboriginal people.¹ Yet, recent scholarship in curriculum theory indicates the degree to which settler teacher candidates may be oblivious to and sometimes disbelieving of Canadian colonial histories (Mishra-Tarc, 2011) and the degree to which settler teachers can smooth over narratives that show Canadian people and the state as perpetrators of injustice (Dion, 2009). Moreover, I suspect that the failure to be self-reflexive about the intersections of colonialism and pedagogy is one of the factors that has led to the stereotypical representation of Aboriginal peoples and the appropriation of cultural practices in some outdoor education programs (see Hamilton, 2003).

Colonial histories and legacies always exist in the background of Canada, and the more we ignore this, the less we are able to create something better in

the present. And so, learning to form complex relationships to an ambivalent world and to come to terms with our own implication in colonial history and present is imperative in the endeavour of living together ethically in this nation of great difference. Because this kind of learning can trouble the learner, provoking perhaps resistance or a sense of being untethered, theories of difficult knowledge and the affective dimensions of learning anchor my explorations of this pedagogical work. This writing project is, for me, part of an attempt to be more mindful in my work as an environmental educator and as a British/Canadian canoeist living in Canada. I am trying to provoke a kind of thoughtfulness about objects of national significance (canoes and wilderness), and see thinking as one way, however small, of performing an ethics: thinking otherwise may lead to being and teaching otherwise. My hope is that this essay will sit parallel to and in support of the work of Aboriginal people and of the collaborative work between Aboriginal people and settler-Canadians.

To be fair, settler-Canadian history is not entirely absent from outdoor environmental curricula, but I do wonder about how it is made present. When colonial history makes its way into outdoor education practice, the details of the fur trade and the daily lives of voyageurs are what educators tend to focus on. Voyageurs (French, Métis, Scottish, and Aboriginal) worked many long and difficult hours in a day and tended to live few years. Their lives are not often idealized although they are often glorified; statistics of miles travelled, hours paddled, calories eaten, pounds carried, bugs endured, and lives lost create a sense of awe for these working-class young men. On canoe trips, students might learn voyageur songs while they paddle, or, in a university course, mimic a voyageur tradition by sharing a swig of rum to toast the crossing of a height of land. At outdoor centres, Trapper and Trader games are the most common curricular vehicle for teaching about the fur trade. These games combine orienteering, role playing, and a scavenger hunt to dramatize the trading relations amongst new settlers and various Aboriginal nations. Although this game provides a useful entry point for discussing historical complexity, I've noticed that, in practice, learning outcomes tend to be the general workings of the trade and the difficulty of surviving through the Canadian winter. Absent from most curricula is an acknowledgement of the ambivalent nature of this period in Canadian history: the fur trade was simultaneously a cooperative business venture between nations *and* a central prong of European imperialism that restructured Aboriginal economies and spread mercantilism and European culture across North America (see Dickason, 1995; Eccles, 1995; Lawrence, 2002). Colonial history is also commonly found in outdoor education's pioneer studies curricula in which students study the daily lives of working-class European settlers and how they lived on the land.

Studying colonial history in these ways, however, is very different from studying a history of colonialism. The former is often a study of the history of European hardship and progress; the latter implies a stance from which the learner encounters narratives of injustice. I don't believe that the former

curricula are always wrong (generally, I'm *for* rum before a long portage); rather, they are incomplete. I question the ethics of invoking voyageur lore as a means to inspire and captivate students without also exploring our own connections to the wider context of colonialism and capitalism of which the voyageurs were also a part. Similarly, a curriculum of pioneer life demands that we ask on whose land these pioneers were living and how they came to live there.

In the outdoor and environmental education field, I have often seen settler-educators enact curricula that respect the richness of Aboriginal thought and cultures, that revere the accomplishments of Aboriginal people, and that collaborate with Aboriginal communities (see for example the Canadian Canoe Museum). Creating opportunities for students to learn from and about Aboriginal cultures, while being mindful of idealizing and historicizing them, is an important way of combating the Euro-centrism that pervades educational practice. Yet I most often witness such educators still teaching in a way that avoids exploring the culpability of Canada and Canadian people. Presenting students with representations of how Aboriginal peoples have been strong, creative, and resilient throughout Canadian history, although vital pedagogical work, can sometimes empty the more important political questions of how marginalization and erasure in dominant narratives have come to be. Put simply, it is easier to teach about the good stuff and so we more often do; but I believe that learning from and taking responsibility for the bad stuff is also necessary to processes of reconciliation.

Some individual outdoor educators or outdoor programs may have sophisticated and nuanced ways of addressing the workings of colonial power in Canadian history, but scholarly explorations of such topics are relatively new. Emily Root (2009) interviewed a small group of outdoor educators in order to discern which life experiences led them to unlearn some of the colonial or Euro-centric attitudes that have shaped outdoor education practice. Her work reminds environmental educators that “learning to live well on the land includes learning to live well with the people of the land” (p. 126). Research that has, for me, been very helpful in thinking about colonialism in outdoor education comes from contemporary geographers. Bryan Grimwood (2011), for example, meditates on multiple cultural ways of viewing canoes and nature in the geographical space of the Thelon River. Andrew Baldwin (2009) explores the spectre of an innocent whiteness manifested in representations of Canada's boreal forest. Analyses of *wilderness* and *nature* that examine the colonial underpinnings of these notions themselves are particularly fertile for environmental education theorising. It is to the insights garnered from this work that I now turn.

The Problem of Wilderness

Wilderness, as it is commonly thought of today, variously implies a space of rejuvenation, of peace, of wild danger, of inspiration, and of adventure. This wilder-

ness is a destination eagerly sought and consumed by travellers and by environmental educators seeking to inspire students with natural beauty. It is a promise or a dreamspace, a place to meet or find oneself, a place to escape the ills of civilization or to work one's crooked nerve (Douglas LePan, as cited in Henderson, 1995). Wilderness and nature are often represented in dominant discourse as spaces of leisure, as places to unwind or, alternatively, wind up for an expedition. In the nature calendar, the park website, and our national imaginary, northern wilderness appears almost as neutral space, something that just is, something that exists outside of human history and activity (Braun, 2002).

Yet wilderness is neither natural nor neutral, but *cultural* and *hegemonic*, written through relations of power. This is a well-worn insight in academic circles and one which first came to me via William Cronon's (1995) landmark essay on the history of wilderness in Euro-Western thought. Wilderness as a desire-space, Cronon argues, is a new invention and lies in stark contrast to the more long-lived idea of wilderness as a harsh desert. For example, in the Judeo-Christian bible, wilderness emerges repeatedly as a place of moral confusion and despair, a place where one might be tested, tempted, exiled. However, these ideas slowly began to change through the work of nature writers and conservationists. Once thought of as the place of darkness where a person would go after being cast out of Eden, by the late 19th century wilderness had become synonymous with Eden itself. In American frontier mythology, wilderness was re-imagined as a place to heal the diseases of modern civilization: that space on the edge of society where the character of the nation could be reborn through cultivating the values of resourcefulness, adventure, and simplicity (Cronon, 1995).

This kind of historical analysis illustrates how wilderness is not something that simply is, but rather is a particular and changing story we tell of geographical space. Wilderness and nature both arise through thought; they are performed and made to take shape through the work of artists, environmentalists, and resource companies, for example. I use the terms *nature* and *wilderness* somewhat interchangeably here because they so often signify the same idea of naturalness, of existing before and beyond culture and built environments. Wilderness is sometimes thought of as a nature less domesticated. Canadian geographer Bruce Braun (2002), drawing on Jacques Derrida, put the idea of social nature this way: "...there is no place *outside* such cultural practices from which nature can be objectively known. Even when our relation to nature seems most immediate, it is profoundly shaped by the narratives, knowledges, and technologies that enable experience" (p.15). Different orientations to canoe pedagogy—for example, the canoe trip as a heroic quest (James, 1985) or canoe travel as a way of coming home, of becoming tenant rather than tourist in nature (Henderson, 1999)—simply posit and reiterate different (yet similarly innocent and uncomplicated) relationships to these shifting cultural constructions.

The maps of the contemporary canoe tripper provide a good example of how representations construct space in particular (invested and ideological)

ways, despite any impression they might have of scientific objectivity. For example, maps that show only water, land, and elevation with an overlaid grid of longitude and latitude subtly reinforce a sense of land as *terra nullius* (Dowie, 2009). During the planning stages of a canoe trip, I eagerly annotate topographical maps with portage trails, trail notes, or possible campsites. The maps, without my pencil etchings, indicate buildings, roads, marshes, rivers, lakes, land, and rapids but tell me very little of the social, cultural, or political history of the space beyond those buildings and roads. National and provincial park maps come pre-annotated with campsites and portages (but not Aboriginal history and present, the location of culturally modified trees, the presence of sacred sites, or the existence of land claims, for instance), in effect parceling a geographic space and claiming it for the tourist. Teaching students to read maps, then, also always involves teaching them to view space with or against the logic of the particular map. Maps are always partial, and what they leave out and what they emphasize tell us a lot about the investments and assumptions of the societies that produce them.

Because wilderness and nature are called into being by the meanings given them, are constituted by their own representations, they are human creations and thus subject to the whims and politics of human activity. The constructs of wilderness as a sublime landscape, as a frontier of redemption, and as a space separate or away from home all reinscribe a conceptual Western dualism separating people from nature. These lines of thought hold grave consequences for responsible sustainable living and for environmental justice. However, I want to instead draw attention to the ways in which these leisure-time fantasies also construct wilderness as, by definition, empty space, as unpeopled, as not home (Barron, 2003; Cronon, 1995). This line of thought holds grave consequences for the people who actually live and lived on these lands.

These kinds of contradictions accentuate the ways in which wilderness is a particularly Western concept. Aboriginal cultures and beliefs vary widely, yet in many cultures, wilderness is a foreign idea; indeed, globally, many Aboriginal languages have no word for wilderness. The space that settlers might call wilderness is also thought of as home, the backyard, or even the pantry (Dowie, 2009). When Anishinaapekwe educator Kaaren Dannenmann (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002) writes about the land around her home, she uses the language of community and describes the space as a series of relationships—relationships with beings living and non-living. The land, or “home,” as she describes it, is a carrier of memory, an “interdependence and interconnectedness of time and space and love” (p. 456). Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (1999) explains that “land, culture, and government are inseparable in traditional philosophies; each depends on the others” (p. 2). Other Aboriginal scholars (Cree and Anishinaabekwe) highlight the intimate connection between Aboriginal thought and place, the ways that land is integral to and inseparable from thought: knowledge is sourced in land (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007; Simpson, 2002).

Wilderness—that concept that pervades canoeing ethos and national identity and that persistently structures my own thinking—can be seen here as antithetical to worldviews arising from people deeply connected with land.

Some of the work that creates wilderness and nature is discursive; that is, it works through ideas and representations. In dominant and colonial images of wilderness, Aboriginal presence is either erased or Aboriginal people are themselves recast as nature, displacing them as human actors (Braun, 2002; Porter-Bopp, 2006). Part of the work of creating wilderness is also physical and material, and involved the removal of Aboriginal peoples from land in order to create and preserve these vast expanses of nature for the tourist. Not coincidentally, wilderness in what is now Canada began to be re-written as a recreational desire-space for wealthy settler-invader subjects in the late 19th century, during roughly the same time period that Aboriginal lands were being ceded and reserves were being created: discourse has material effects.²

Briefly exploring the politics of just a few national and provincial parks provides a stark illustration of this dynamic. In the west, Rocky Mountains Park (now Banff), a playground for elite tourists seeking comfort and adventure (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009), was established only a decade after land was ceded by the Blackfoot Confederacy under Treaty 7. Part of the territory of Banff has since been the site of a land claim from the Siksika First Nation (Siksika Nation, n.d.). In Ontario, during the creation of Quetico Provincial Park in 1913, many Anishinabe people were forcibly removed from their homes and prohibited from hunting and fishing on the new park lands (Gladu et al., 2003; Hodgins & Cannon, 1998). When Algonquin Park was created in 1893, Algonquin people were prohibited from hunting and trapping in the park, while at the same time logging companies operated routinely (Baker, 2002; Hodgins & Cannon, 1998). The park still carries an unresolved land claim from The Golden Lake Algonquin First Nation (Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 2011). Although the structure, goals, and administration of individual parks vary, the creation of many of Canada's parks was marked by the displacement of Aboriginal communities, the appropriation of land, and prohibitions or limitations on hunting, fishing, and trapping within park boundaries. These prohibitions existed and exist in contradiction of the continued right to harvest fish and wildlife as laid out in signed treaties (Gladu et al., 2003). In this way, park regulations can work as extensions of colonial power. In the last few decades, park management across Canada has become much more collaborative and more respectful of the rights of First Nations, often creating valuable economic opportunities for local communities. In many cases hunting rights have been restored, and some First Nations actively seek park creation on their territory to ensure protection against resource extraction (Polar Bear Provincial Park, for example) (Gladu et al., 2003; Hodgins & Cannon, 1998; Peepre & Dearden, 2002).

The history of parks is thus neither straightforwardly good nor bad; these are complicated geographical spaces. But so often we travel in these spaces with

students as if they were straightforwardly pristine and ahistorical. In Canada, national parks are seen as “part of the soul of our nation” (Copps, 2009, para. 20) and a “source of pride for Canadians and an integral part of our identity” (Parks Canada, 2010, para. 11). Nature and wilderness are typically understood as wild, unpolluted, and good: spaces outside of human history and thus unencumbered with human values like injustice or guilt. In our parks, then, the inherent goodness of nature stands in for nation and Canada emerges as innocent. Simultaneously, though, nature parks are complicit in the history of cultural genocide in Canada. The wilderness that resides in our national identity is a fantasy of Canadian homeland created in the interplay of desire and anxiety and is used to mask implication in colonial injustice.

The discursive absence of the politics of wilderness on our cultural landscape mirrors its curricular absence in much educational practice. Wilderness is a deeply ambivalent fiction that canoe trippers nonetheless enjoy and this contradiction haunts outdoor and environmental learning.

The Problem of Inspiration

So if wilderness and, in particular, nature parks bear an imprint of colonial violence, then why are discussions of injustice so often elided in outdoor education? These sorts of contradictions may have as much to do with structural issues as with individual failings.

Curriculum goals like developing communication skills or environmental connections, discourses like building a sense of wonder or stepping out of one’s comfort zone, and the practicalities of travel and campcraft may leave little time or space for also grappling with the implications of being a contemporary canoe tripper on stolen or disputed land. That is, issues of colonialism are rarely central curriculum goals of canoe trips, despite their inevitable presence, and thus they easily fall by the wayside. While leading women’s trips, for example, I often revelled in seeing women be strong and confident out on the trail, occurrences that were in line with the stated curriculum of “empowerment” that these trips were designed around. Yet, in a European-Canadian context, when white women take up space as canoe trippers in this historically masculine sphere, we are, in a sense, struggling against gender norms only to equally participate in the cultural work of sustaining the hegemonic mythology of the canoe and Canadian wilderness. This is a kind of *frontier feminism* in which our “liberation” also signifies our deepening implication in colonial relations. In this way, issues of justice and nation are always lurking, usually unseen, in the background of our work, even when our pedagogies are themselves framed with theories of social justice. In this case, a curriculum of feminist empowerment overshadowed the complexity of the place and the other issues of justice at hand.

Moreover, the theories and assumptions that frame outdoor education may make it more challenging for individual instructors to engage in a pedagogy

of colonial implication. For example, the most uncomfortable omissions in my own teaching practice occurred when I coordinated a course component that Outward Bound calls Rendezvous. Named after the Rendezvous of the fur trade that took place at the Grand Portage (and later Fort William) just up the lake from our base camps, this event was similarly a party for canoeists just in from the trail. During this evening of celebration, different groups of students would come together, share a meal and stories of their trip, and honour their accomplishments. I would often take this opportunity to give a brief dramatic overview of the fur trade, sharing some of the canoeing history of the region that they had just become a part of. But while I always recognized that we were on and had been travelling through Anishnabek land (the particular bands varied, depending on where courses were located), I was usually at a loss as to how to address the wider imperial context of the fur trade, the cumulative effect that the trade had on Aboriginal peoples and cultures, or the way that Anishnabek land had become Crown Land threaded through with recreational canoe routes. Simply, this kind of critique seemed incommensurate with the celebration of achievement befitting the end of a canoe course. “People come here to be inspired,” I was told when I was a fledgling Outward Bound instructor, a thought that, at the time, inspired me as an educator. Outdoor education is *inspiring*, *celebratory*, and *fun*, the very qualities that drew me to the practice. But I’ve come to see how these characteristics can limit as well as enhance learning.

Framing a pedagogy with inspiration or fun privileges some kinds of learning at the expense of other, perhaps more difficult, kinds. If we seek for our students to be inspired, for them to develop a sense of personal strength and to experience joy on the land, we may be less likely to also present them with a curriculum of colonial implication. Clearly, outdoor education presents all kinds of challenges and difficulties for its students: food packing, portaging, rock climbing, group conflict, and personal reflection, for example. The difficulty of encountering stories of social trauma, though, is of a different order and not always one that people eagerly sign up for. Although the idea of inspiring students seems at odds with, to directly conflict with, learning about colonialism, I am not convinced that the two must be mutually exclusive.

The cleansing of curriculum is not simply a product of teachers choosing inspiration over implication or a matter of teachers prioritizing connections to nature over history. Curricula that address violence and injustice can provoke anxiety for the teacher—anxiety about knowledge mastery, wounding students, complicity, appropriation, unruly affective content, and the unpredictability of student engagement. In response to anxiety and to uncertainty about how to proceed, it is easy for teachers to fall into what I call a pedagogy of palatability or what we might also think of as an education that doesn’t rock the boat. Often, our pedagogies work to contain conflict and anxiety, thereby containing, rather than opening up, possibilities for learning.

But while our students are challenging themselves with new experiences, we too must challenge ourselves to be more than palatable, to face perhaps

our fears of pedagogical failure or perhaps our own indifference. The kind of learning I am proposing is risky. It risks the loss of certainty, simplicity, and innocence; it risks unwieldy affect in the face of the suffering of others: it risks the self. We ask a lot of students when we ask them to consider histories of colonialism, Canadian injustice, and students' own complicity. Yet I believe that an idealized curriculum holds far greater risks in terms of living well in a complicated social world. Indeed, Roger Simon (2005) sees such "difficult learning" as provoking an almost necessary rupture, as "learning that will hold open the present to its insufficiency" (p. 102), perhaps as a learning that productively rocks present ways of knowing and of being off balance.

The Problem of Affect

In the first section of this paper I showed how histories of colonialism are integral to the idea of wilderness at the heart of much outdoor environmental education and argued that settler-invader educators and students are implicated in this history by our very presence on Aboriginal lands. I then speculated about why these narratives are often eclipsed in outdoor pedagogy, why the politics of land rarely enters into teaching on the land. Here I offer some thoughts on tackling this pedagogical work, particularly with settler-Canadian learners (who are more often unaware of these issues).

One very basic approach is simply to be more mindful of the places where we paddle and hike, to acknowledge with students that we are in traditional Aboriginal territories and on land with long and sometimes difficult histories. Educators and students could also seek permission for travelling on the land from local First Nations communities.³ The idea here is to travel with a sense of humility rather than entitlement. For environmental educators wishing to more explicitly address the injustices of Canadian history and present, some theories and approaches from the fields of difficult knowledge and pedagogical remembrance may be useful (see in particular Robertson, 1999; Simon, Rosenberg, & Eppert, 2000; and Simon, 2005). Much of this literature arose in response to the dilemmas of teaching about genocides and other forms of violence, and it grapples with the difficulty of responding as learners and as teachers to testimony and other narratives of suffering. In Canada, the past reverberates into the present and structures contemporary Aboriginal inequalities and conflicts over lands and resource use. Learning from Canada's history of cultural genocide (e.g., unfair land negotiations, residential schooling, outlawing cultural practices, Indian Pass legislation) will help settler-Canadians be more attentive to the complexities of living in Canada, of working with Aboriginal people, and of travelling outdoors. Yet such learning requires a thoughtful, uncertain, and open orientation to curriculum.

Deborah Britzman's (1998) concept of difficult knowledge illuminates why reflecting on colonialism in relation to canoe tripping might be so challenging.

Difficult knowledge signifies “both representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual’s encounters with them in pedagogy” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755) or might be thought of as “stories that disturb one’s sense of cohesiveness” (Britzman, 2000, p. 43). That is, *difficult* is used in the sense that it is bothersome; this knowledge bothers the ego or the unconscious. Encounters with difficult knowledge are as unpredictable as the unconscious itself and are often characterized by affective responses, defences, and missed or belated understanding. For some learners, curricula that threaten White and heterosexual privilege might constitute difficult knowledge. Encountering the suffering in narratives of community dislocations and of unjust Canadian legislation (narratives which would necessarily include Aboriginal resistance to such legislation) might differently provoke a susceptibility in other learners. Difficult knowledge is individual and enigmatic.

Depending on their specific contexts, outdoor and environmental educators could employ a variety of curricular objects related to Canadian history and contemporary Aboriginal/settler relations. The text of land cession treaties could be read alongside oral histories. Students could engage with narratives from guest speakers, novels, and survivor testimony. Artistic works provide exemplary texts for thinking with, and those that I find particularly provocative include the children’s story *Shin-chi’s Canoe* by Nicola Campbell (2008) and the Urban Portage performance art of Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman (n.d.). The canoe itself is a rich object through which to study Aboriginal ingenuity alongside the politics of appropriation, to explore how national symbols might both inspire and exclude, and to consider the politics of national mythology. However, in teaching, *how we think about learning and how we use texts is always more important than which texts we use*. That is, working with difficult knowledge demands that we primarily consider how learners engage with and respond to knowledge, instead of simply asking them to critique or accumulate it.

For example, in Susan Dion’s (2009) research, **the teachers tended to teach “the facts” of Aboriginal histories and in so doing, to slip away from the issues of suffering and the questions raised**. Problem solving how to be a good citizen and detailing factual events became a way of avoiding the affective force of the events, indeed, a way of *not-knowing* (Dion, 2009). In multiple ways, these teachers were eliding the very encounter that might have called the learner to consider the effects of colonial and racist aggression—that might have changed the learner and her relationship with the histories and with the present. Difficult knowledge is as difficult for teachers as it is for students, and the most important learning in any educational context is usually the teacher’s own.

Encountering representations of history and of wilderness (of ideal wilderness, implicated wilderness) is an affective experience—not just a conscious cognitive activity of taking in neutral knowledge, but an experience variously entangled in joy, curiosity, pride, guilt, fear, confusion, boredom, serenity, or perhaps anger. In general, when affect arises in contexts of learning, it might

better be viewed as a tell, as a volatile or unpredictable beacon pointing at an insight to explore, rather than as something to chase away or smooth over. Curriculum, in this view, might be thought of as our *response* to curriculum. If pedagogy moves from a focus on content to a focus on affective reactions, we may begin to understand how we are implicated with that in the text that we are defending against. For example, when students hate our social justice curricula, it doesn't mean that our curricula have failed. That hate indicates an abrasion at the juncture between the ego and knowledge; in other words, it indicates a location where learning may be teased out.

When affect arises in educational contexts, then, educators need to be prepared to help students work through their affective responses and to allow time for understandings to develop, for language to emerge from inchoate reactions, and for the belatedness that marks learning from difficulty. Above all, educators need to hold at bay the desire to rescue students from their emotional reactions to difficult stories and histories. According to outdoor adventure education theories, we learn from encountering complex and challenging adventure experiences. I believe we similarly learn from encountering complex and challenging ideas and narratives. Both types of encounters involve susceptibility and risk. Because outdoor experiential education is rooted in a philosophy of making meaning out of unpredictable and risky experiences, in some ways outdoor educators may be well poised to work with a curriculum of colonial implication. If outdoor educators are able both to create a non-judgemental atmosphere and to ensure adequate time and space for students to feel and think, they will be putting in place at least some of the resources that learners require in order to bear the fracturing and mending that come with difficult learning.

Conclusion

The very hope for a just and compassionate future lies, at least in part, in working through the traumatic catastrophes we have inherited. (Simon et al., 2000, p. 6)

Historical remembrance calls on us to feel and to act. The action of remembering in itself carries ethical significance: simply, proclamations of empty wilderness and the good nation can be hurtful to those whose histories of injustice at the hands of the nation are erased by such enunciations. Living as a settler-invader subject in Canada implies implication, for our homes, our wealth, our existence here are predicated on a long history of dispossession. Clearly, individual Canadian settler-invader subjects are not equally positioned in relations of power and privilege—particularly with respect to race, class, ethnicity, and geography—but our common legacy is that we are all living in traditional Aboriginal territories, living in a country that for over a century, with varying success and facing various forms of resistance, employed policies of cultural genocide toward Aboriginal peoples. Because wilderness is dependent on the

displacement of Aboriginal people, canoe-tripping in wilderness spaces is not and can never be innocent or uncomplicated.

In an allusion strangely relevant to outdoor education, Sigmund Freud (1930/1961) famously warns educators that education that does not prepare students for conflict, that idealizes the world for them, is like equipping people starting on a Polar expedition with summer clothing and maps of the Italian Lakes. Education, he surmises, fails to prepare the young for the aggressiveness and ethical complexity of the world in which they are to live. I believe that much canoe pedagogy similarly paints scenic and inspiring pictures for students. If to educate is in some way meant to be a *preparation*, we might become more curious about our attachments to the happy or simple narratives that frame our pedagogies. Idealized and uncluttered narratives do little to prepare students for the clutter and complexity of everyday social life. If we want to learn to live better—more ethically—in that complexity, we need to educate for complexity.

I framed this paper as a series of problems, and I am using *problem* in the sense of a puzzle, as something worth thinking about, worth unpuzzling. Wilderness, inspiration, and affect contain contradictions through which learning might be found. For example, how might anxiety about knowledge both hinder and provoke learning? What does it mean to be in nature or connect to nature when nature itself is both constructed and contested? Could a canoe trip in some way become a journey of reconciliation?⁴ These are the kinds of questions we should be puzzled about, lest environmental education also become eco-colonial education.

I envision an outdoor pedagogy that inspires and celebrates as well as provokes feeling and thought about our places in the world. Living well in this diverse nation requires a tenacious willingness to encounter and be changed by the stories of others. On canoe trips, both canoes and the land we travel through could become canvases for a pedagogy of implication, once we are able to leave behind the easier fantasy of environmental outdoor education as politically neutral and of nature as something that simply is.

Notes

¹ Susan Dion seems to use “Canadians” and “Aboriginal people” as separate categories; thus in this quotation, “Canadians” seems to mean specifically non-Aboriginal Canadians.

² Theodore Binnema and Melanie Niemi (2006), in their case study of the conflicts between Stoney people and Banff National Park, convincingly argue that the exclusion of Aboriginal people from parks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was not related to the desire to create wilderness (and that wilderness at this time was not considered unpeopled), but by the desire to preserve animal populations (primarily for sport hunters), to reduce interference with tourism profits, and to speed the process of cultural assimilation of Aboriginal

people. Whether or not the removal of Aboriginal people was driven by an ideal of wilderness, parks can clearly be seen as colonial spaces, constructed and maintained for the tourist.

³ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

⁴ Question posed by Lisa Korteweg.

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