

INVESTIGATING LEARNING OF THE EMBODIED SELF IN MOTION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis disseminates a study investigating the contexts and personal movements connected to social-ecological justice learning, experienced by three student-activists throughout their lives. Woven from a range of theoretical orientations, the study's framework aims to articulate a foundational basis for socio-ecological justice learning. The central subject of the framework is the situated "mind/brain/body" learner – "in motion and in transition" – negotiating intersubjective experiences within influential social, cultural, and ecological contexts (Biesta, 1999; Boler, 1999; Ellsworth, 2005; Lave and Wenger, 1991; McKenzie, 2008; Weis and Fine, 2003). In the life-course of the learner, there are many significant lived experiences through which meaning and value emerge in relation to socio-ecological justice. These experiences of the learning self (Ellsworth, 2005) may serve to support or obstruct socio-ecological justice advocacy. Extending from these foundations, the qualitative study sought – through "narrative learning" (Goodson et al., 2010) and "collective witnessing" (Boler, 1999) – to bring past learning and newly emerging reflection into a collective conversation of the way socio-ecological justice has come into presence in the lives of three student-activists. To this end the study's aims are: i) engage in a participatory narrative process in order for participants to explore, witness, and better understand their own previous learning experiences, meaning, and values in relation to socio-ecological justice; ii) through this process, engage participants in current learning about themselves, each other, and their socio-ecological actions; and iii) contribute to the literature on socio-ecological justice learning, particularly on collaborative processes of self-reflection as a potential vehicle for contributing to socio-ecological learning. The study's methodology adapts a heuristic research model elucidated by Clark Moustakas (1990) through incorporating attributes outlined in a participatory action research (PAR) framework.

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Chapter One

Introduction

A Personalized Point of Departure

The idea of education is a global constant, yet at the same time it encompasses innumerable forms of interpretation and application. The complexity and diversity in the modes of activity that are described as education suggest that questions of education are not easily or simply answered. Yet, for those of us taken to imagining an alternately ordered future in which the wellbeing of the earth and its human and non-human communities takes primacy at all levels of social discourse and decision-making, the question of education is preeminent. This is due to its particular role in the lives of learners the world over. Although education represents a complexity and diversity of meaning and value orientations, a consistent underlying aim is the pursuit of developing an understanding in learners of the world about them. Again, although this aim involves varied interpretations (and often unquestioned assumptions), it does begin to focus the essential process of framing questions about the function of education that are foundational to the development of any educational program.

The complete range of activity reflected in this work, and my learning as a Master's of Education student in general, has been guided by a vision of education empowering a more careful address of the world and oneself within it. It has been a movement toward the clarification of a process of inquiry and reflection that may inform my endeavor as an educator and global participant toward a more socially and ecologically stable future. As this pursuit has unfolded, my questioning has come to center on the nature of learners' lived experiences as they influence the development of meanings and values learners have in relation to themselves (and I of myself), as selves in the world. In other words, I have become focused on an examination of

the range of identity or subjectivity formations that dialectically emerge amidst a complexity of lived-contexts, and to an extent serve to shape the way we come to engage social and ecological issues. Through my learning, the focus has narrowed further to center on the possibility of social and ecological justice (or socio-ecological justice) as a foundational organizing objective for educational programming.

As I reflect on my own learning in relation to socio-ecological justice, I am able to discern a movement in both orientations of meaning (conscious representation and signification) and values (the determination of what is worthy). I have found that an important aspect of this reflection resides in the way emergent meanings and values take into account how my actions or life-ways intersect – often conflicting – with the lived-contexts of others (and ecological systems) throughout the world. Forms of emotional and cognitive tension emerge where previously held notions of myself as participant in the world intersect with new meaning and valuation born of an increased knowledge of my impact on social and ecological systems. As a result of this tension, I have been provided openings to question previously held meaning and values that have guided, and continue to influence, a perception of my role and impact in the world.

This, I have found, is not a straightforward inquiry project. It is complicated by reinforced and reified socio-cultural patterns of value and meaning that saturate my lived-contexts. Philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu employs the term “habitus,” describing “a process of socialization whereby dominant modes of thought and experience inherent in the social and physical world (both of which are symbolically constructed) are internalized by social agents” (Robbins, 1991, p. 84). If, following Bourdieu, we accept that dominant modes of thought and experience (or values and meanings) come to be internalized, it follows that our

reflection may be limited to the extent that this “habitus” works below the surface of the reflective process. Personally, I have found that the manner in which I have experienced these socio-cultural patterns is not easy to identify, and therefore, question: analogous to a fish attempting to describe what it is to live beneath the water surface. However, I recognize that conversations and interactions with colleagues and individuals working in advocacy capacities have been instrumental in enabling me to take up new openings for reflection on currently held meanings and values.

An appreciation for and acknowledgement of the learning potential offered through these interactions has further guided this work. It struck me how experiences with others, and within a diversity of places and spaces, have enabled me to pose novel questions of myself and the way I come to engage my life-course. In particular, I find it provocative how witnessing (to the extent possible) the process of how others arrive at meanings of themselves in the world elucidates the diverse, complex nature of one’s own learning. Such interpersonal crosscurrents serve to expand the range of possibilities for developing and amending meanings and valuations about who we are and who we aspire to be. It is these experiences and interpretations that have provided a focus for this study: namely, the possibility of creating conditions for learners to collaboratively interrogate held meanings and values related to socio-ecological justice.

Given these foundations, it is evident that articulations of learners and learning included in this thesis deliberately and self-consciously avoid reductive characterizations based on instrumental ends. In particular, this thesis resists iterations that posit the nature and function of learners and learning as drivers of a nation’s economic preoccupation. Prominent environmental education theorist David Greenwood (2010, formerly Gruenewald) contends that considering the nature and function of pupils and schooling fundamentally as an economic instrument is

incommensurate with aims of social and environmental sustainability. Indeed, it is easy to see that where educational professionals adopt a “taken-for-granted” (Greenwood, 2010, p. 142) market narrative regarding the role of learners and learning, there remains little room for robust inquiry into current social, political, and economic systems.

It appears necessary, therefore, that researchers interested in empowering socio-ecological justice education must recognize the centrality of educators’ assumptions of the nature and function of learners and learning in society. To name this obstacle is helpful in understanding why, it seems, responses to social and environmental calamity are not to scale with the present reality. As Paul Hart (2010) contends: “[e]nvironmental education, by its very nature, challenges traditional education provision to engage educational issues that, like environmental issues, are political, contested, and involve deep philosophical struggles with positioning arguments” (p. 157). Thus, any attempt to integrate environmental education into educational programming that does not excavate entrenched market-based assumptions and take on requisite philosophical struggles operates as no more than a form of window dressing. Taken together with Greenwood's critique, this analysis begins to explain how schooling can deflect away from the reality of increasing crises in social and ecological systems. In order to deconstruct current assumptions of the role of school in society it is perhaps necessary to be very clear about how we as justice educators understand the function of learners and learning in society – and to what end.

The way learners and learning are framed in this thesis can also be contrasted with a behaviorist orientation to theorizing. While there is no clear consensus among theorists on how the field of environmental education is progressing, there appears to be an agreement that thinking and practice are moving away from a behaviorist paradigm, which has informed

educational structures from the outset of state-sponsored schools (e.g. Cassell & Nelson, 2010; Payne, 2006). In a recent article, Arjen Wals (2011) offers his view of this development in environmental education as beginning from a behaviorist model and transitioning toward an emphasis on social learning. In his discussion, Wals concludes that “[p]eople’s environmental behaviours are far too complex and contextual to be captured by a simple causal model” (p. 179). As such, a more effective approach to justice education endeavors toward “learning that leads to a new kind of thinking, alternative values and co-created, creative solutions, co-owned by more reflexive citizens, living in a more reflexive and resilient society” (p. 181). This orientation to social learning advocated by Wals resonates with the way learners and learning are understood in this thesis. A more detailed discussion of learners and the learning process is provided in Chapter Two.

Framing the Study

Often theory seeking to foster in learners a form of deep, personal reflection investigates the potential to “trigger” (de Frietas, 2008) novel processes of self-inquiry and examination – as an essential complement to increased awareness and understanding of social and ecological concerns (e.g., Bradford & Hey, 2007; Kanpol, 1990). It is hoped that such a shift will lead learners to respond to socio-ecological calamity in a way that moves beyond cognitive awareness of particular circumstances, towards engaging the “mind/brain/body” (Ellsworth, 2005). For Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) the term “mind/brain/body” serves as a kind of shorthand for her view of embodied experience as the context for the emergence of knowledge and self “in the making” (pp. 1-2). In Ellsworth’s discussion, the mind/brain/body of the “learning self” signals the primacy of “embodied experiences that pedagogy plays host to: experiences of being radically in relation to one’s self, to others, and to the world” (p. 2). This turn towards thinking

relationally (p. 4), to radically address interconnections among learning selves and lived-contexts, resonates with the vision of socio-ecological justice learning framed in this thesis.

However, rather than exploring pedagogical “triggers” for provoking the shift that has been mentioned, this study focusses on the possibility of establishing conditions through which openings for the shift may be collaboratively created. The orientation to openings, in contrast to triggers, recognizes the will and creativity of learners in coming to terms with who they are in the world. Thus, an emphasis on openings implies a participatory methodology. Further backdropping this research is an awareness that current mind/brain/body meanings and values have been constituted over time and within particular social, cultural, and ecological contexts. In this research project, myself and three student-activists engaged in a series of collaborative discussions (two one-to-one interviews per participant and one focus group). These discussions were aimed at illuminating the mind/brain/body context-mediated processes that comprise the participants’ positions in relation to socio-ecological justice. Our intention was to reflect on ways to collaboratively enhance awareness of and inquiry into these mind/brain/body learning processes.

To that end, the aims of the study were to: i) engage in a participatory narrative process in order for participants to explore, witness, and better understand their own previous learning experiences, meaning, and values in relation to socio-ecological justice; ii) through this project of tracing learning back, engage participants in current learning about themselves, each other, and their socio-ecological actions; and iii) contribute to the literature on socio-ecological justice learning through considering a collaborative process of self-reflection as a potential vehicle for deliberately excavating and reengaging embedded socio-ecological meanings and values.

In order to guide this participatory research endeavor, the study required a methodology designed to be open and reflexive to the participants' contributions as they developed throughout the data-gathering process. These features are foundational to the Heuristic Research Methodology, outlined by Clark Moustakas (1990) in the book *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Application*. Based in phenomenology, this qualitative research approach involves both inquiring into the nature and effect of lived-experiences and addressing learning as it relates to current values and meanings operating in one's life (p. 10). The basis for analysis, described by Moustakas, involves "searching for qualities, conditions, and relationships that underlie a fundamental question, issue, or concern" (p. 11). In practice, this work requires spending a considerable amount of time with the data, working out an organizational framework (i.e., articulating qualities, conditions, and/or relationships) for disseminating salient aspects of the participants' contributions. The framework established in this study centers around three themes: Intersubjective Experiences (Biesta, 1999; Feather, 2000; McKenzie, 2008), The Learning Self (Ellsworth, 2005), and Narrative and the Learning Self In Process (Ellsworth, 2005; Goodson et al, 2010). Data are analyzed along these themes and seek to accurately represent the stories shared by participants.

As indicated, the inquiry process itself was explored as a potential avenue for learning toward socio-ecological justice. It was envisioned that through the interviews and focus group, participants would gain insight into how patterns of lived-experiences, learning, values, and meaning have coalesced – and perhaps conflicted – over time; and, how current dispositions related to socio-ecological justice may have been shaped by these tensions. Such insight is associated with a deepening sense of self, and of the way lived-contexts become iterated within personalized views on the world. The deliberate interest in exploring learning through research

indicates a relationship to the aims of Participatory Action Research (PAR), as a complementary methodological framework to the Heuristic component. In the study, participants were invited to illuminate and examine significant lived-experiences (individually and collaboratively) as a means to creating new openings into learning and self-understanding related to socio-ecological justice. Inspired by PAR, this project was driven at all levels – in reviewing, writing, discussing, analyzing, struggling, and reflecting – by a regard for the potential and necessity of learning in the promotion of socio-ecological justice.

The following sections further describe the study, and establish the theoretical framework that underlies the project's design. Chapter Two reviews related literature, elaborating conceptualizations of learner, learning, intersubjectivity, narrative, lived-contexts, socio-ecological justice, pedagogy, and research, as they each add an essential piece to the overall picture of this work. Chapter Three articulates the methodological foundations of the study, and outlines the organizational attributes guiding the research process. Chapter Four is dedicated to sharing the participants' stories. In this chapter, the reader is enabled to join with participants, journeying back through lived-experiences in order to engage the processes of the learning self in relation to socio-ecological justice. The final chapter discusses potential implications for thinking about, researching, and designing socio-ecological justice education.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this thesis first provides a conceptual basis for *socio-ecological justice* as the central aim to theorizing on teaching and learning. The review then aims to highlight theory that takes into consideration complex socio-cultural and ecological contexts of the “situated” learner (Lave & Wenger, 1990); and, how these contexts work on and through the learner, serving to potentially enable or stifle socio-ecological justice learning. Finally, the chapter reviews literature that offers some insights into how socio-ecological justice pedagogy might explicitly engage the complex social, cultural, and ecological contexts of learning; and in particular, how research might play a role in effective pedagogical design.

Socio-Ecological Justice

An enormous catalogue of literature exists in the fields of social justice and ecological justice education including such identifiers as: “cultural studies, citizenship education, queer theory, critical race theory, multicultural studies, postcolonial theory, anti-oppressive education, and feminist theory” (McKenzie, 2008, p. 362), as well as environmental education, education for sustainable development, ecological literacy, ecological justice, place-based education, outdoor education, natural history education, and a range of other adjectival terms. However, this study focuses particularly on contexts and situations of learning that are considered to center on both social and ecological issues, addressing the issues as inextricably interwoven (e.g., Bowers 2001; Furman and Greenwood, 2004; McKenzie, 2008). This perspective is illuminated in Greenwood’s (2008) statement (generated together with Chet Bowers) that “human culture has been, is, and always will be nested in ecological systems” (p. 309), and positions “environmental

issues [as] in fact cultural issues, and often vice versa” (McKenzie, 2008, p. 361). I use the term “socio-ecological” in this thesis to indicate this intersectionality of social and ecological issues.

Additional education literature grounded by the interconnected concerns of social and ecological justice has followed a range of varied trajectories; including, for example, theory on sustainability education (e.g., Nolet, 2009); vocational education (e.g., Arenas, 2008); pedagogical strategies (e.g., Di Chiro, 2006); children’s literary resources (e.g., Osler, 1994; Wason-Ellam, 2010; Wheeler, 2008); and, lived-experience (Howard, 2008).

The scope of literature reviewed in the study extends from the focus on the intersections of social and ecological issues in education to consider learning conceived as both socially mediated and influenced by the ecological, with an emphasis placed on individuals’ learning experiences from within social, cultural, and ecological contexts. The remainder of this background section will thus review related literature on learning to help set the context of social and ecological justice learning understood in these terms.

The Situated Mind/Brain/Body Learner

Essential to the work of socio-ecological justice education is the understanding that education and learning must *not* be narrowly conceived as bracketed within the controlled spacial and temporal barriers of the school. Indeed, as Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2003) state, “[learning] occurs at dinnertime, in front of the television set, on street corners, in religious institutions, in family planning clinics, and in lesbian and gay community groups” (p. 96). The curricula of such learning events are a complex host of intermingling experiences, mediated by social, cultural, and ecological contexts, exchanged and transformed through interactions among people, between people and the built environment, and between people and the non-built environment. The terms social, cultural, and ecological signify the multiplicity of lived-contexts

experienced by learners: taking into consideration the role of social interactions, cultural formations, and ecological relationships. Some of these experiences are formative in the life of the individual, with the individual's creation of meaning and values embedded within the dynamic, transitioning web of contexts. The constitutive quality of these experiences in one's life is the central interest in theories of intersubjectivity in education. As an introduction into thinking about intersubjectivity, educational philosopher Gert Biesta (1999) states that "the individual is in some way constituted through the community" (p. 205). Such a foundational position posits learners' lived-experiences amidst social, cultural, and ecological contexts and the emergence of the individual as an essential site for study.

In *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) endeavor to integrate learning theory and social theory through conceptualizing "learning as a dimension of social practice" (p. 47). Their intention is to create a space to examine the formation of the individual as he or she endeavors to negotiate meaning from his or her lived-experience against a "dialectic between learning and its socio-cultural context" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15). Of interest to Lave and Wenger (1991) is the participatory role of the "agent:" an interdependent actor within a social system of "world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing" (p. 51). By situating the role of the agent as a "person-in-the-world" (p. 52), Lave and Wenger attend to a recognition of the "inherently socially negotiated character of meaning" (p. 50), and the individual's active role within that. This conception is consistent with the view of the individual as an embedded actor within a web of social, cultural, and ecological contexts, and yet does not offer insight into how that negotiation process functions or how education might better take it into account in relation to socio-ecological justice learning.

How do experiences in these social, cultural, and ecological contexts, received through sight, sound, and feeling, imprint initially upon the individual? And how are they engaged by the individual through a responsive process of interpretation and learning? In *Places of Learning*, Ellsworth (2005) offers a conception of the “experience of the learning self” in order to address the integration of an embodied “self” that is “*in transition*” and “*in motion*” within the contexts that constitute an individual’s “experience” (p. 16). Ellsworth suggests that “experiences” are located in “events of mind/brain and body,” and can be understood as complex, embodied exchanges between an individual and their social, cultural, and ecological contexts that may potentially lead the individual “toward previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world” (p. 16). Ellsworth’s emphasis on the mind/brain/body being simultaneously implicated in both experience and learning, orients one to thinking about these as whole body considerations, and thus attends to the complexity and process involved in context-mediated, intersubjective learning.

In *Narrative Learning*, Ivor Goodson, Gert Biesta, Michael Tedder, and Norma Adair (2010) add a dimension to theorizing on the role of lived-experiences – present and past – in the development of the learning self (Ellsworth, 2005). They do so through studying the interrelationship among “life, self, story, and learning” (p.2); and, in particular center on “ways in which people *learn* from their lives ‘in’ and ‘through’ the stories they tell about their lives” (p.3). The authors place an emphasis on life-narratives as the medium for what they term narrative learning: illuminating “the *storying* of the life and the self” as “a central ‘element’ of the learning process” (p. 2). The phenomenon “storying” in the life of an individual is conceptualized as a complex process that cannot be reduced to a depiction or portrait of the life of the individual (p. 2). Rather, the “storying” of the individual, over time, must be addressed

and engaged as, to an extent, constitutive within the life of the individual. In other words, the stories one tells play a significant role in the way one's life ultimately unfolds.

This foundation provides an opening for Goodson et al. (2010) to imagine the potential for learning, as stories tend toward an orientation that is “reflective and evaluative” (p. 2). In particular, the authors highlight stories that speak to why the narrator had conducted her or his self in some manner in response to a lived-event; and, how this experience may have evoked some transition or motion (learning) in the course of her or his life. The authors describe this learning potential in the following way: “The stories we construct about ourselves and our lives in such situations can help us find new meaning and new direction or can support us in coming to terms with the ways things are and with who we are” (p. 2). This study engages and explores a more specific and deliberate take on the authors' description of narrative learning, and seeks to develop it against a mind/brain/body framework. Indeed, the potential for participants to learn “in” and “through” the stories they tell (particularly in relation to socio-ecological justice) is a valuable contribution to this study.

Learning for Socio-Ecological Justice

The learner. Attending to the considerations illuminated above (namely, that experience and learning are complex, lived processes, and that meaning and values are to an extent socially mediated) frames a specific challenge to socio-ecological justice education. In Hart's (2007) view “[t]here seems little doubt in the minds of learning theorists of the need to explore relationships between culture and learning at many levels of social interaction” (p. 47), which for Hart likely stems from the recognition that “interactions with people in one's environment are major determinants of both what is learned and how learning takes place” (p. 48). The position that learning occurs at all times and in all lived events dissolves the presumption that it may be

entirely managed by an instituted professional agenda, or that it is entirely a cognitive matter. Consequently, effective design of socio-ecological justice education must respond to learners being situated within a landscape of diverse contexts from which they are continuously generating meaning and values through the mind/brain/body (Ellsworth, 2005). In other words, there is a need in socio-ecological justice education to empower learners' troubling of experienced social, cultural, and ecological events that would be otherwise overlooked as benign "information" or as aproductive to the social and ecological order: learners must, to the extent that is possible, become their own "gatekeepers" of the social, cultural, and ecological contexts and messages they learn from (McKenzie, 2004).

Often forms of justice education require disrupting the tenets of the prevailing socio-political order (e.g., Friere, 1970; hooks, 1994; Orr, 2002); an objective limited by the fact that learners, teachers, and educational institutions are typically embedded within the targeted social system. Problematically, the development of meaning and values from lived-experiences are influenced by these patterns: therefore, likely serving to censor the content and extent of what is questioned and/or shifted. Hart (2007) elucidates the influence of social contexts on learners in the following way: "social groups act as discourse communities to provide cognitive tools (ideas, concepts, theories) that individuals appropriate to make sense of experiences" (p. 48). Similarly, Chet Bowers and David Flinders (1990) describe the influence of root metaphors as socio-cultural mediators, "provid[ing] the individual a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for understanding new phenomena" (p. 32). Beginning from a whole-body rather than cognition-specific orientation, Megan Boler (1999) extends this to include emotion as a socio-political medium including "internal norms and values" reflected by "emotional rules and expression," which are constantly influencing individuals in the context of their lived experiences (p. xiii).

Notwithstanding the seemingly limited autonomy of learning within embedded educational settings implied by these articulations, Hart (2007) offers that "[b]eyond enculturation, the assumption is that, by participating [in social communities], students will also learn to question and extend their own knowledge and thinking" (p. 48); and, concerning the emotional, Boler adds, "[t]he analysis of how emotional rules can be challenged and how emotions can be 'reclaimed' as part of our cognitive and ethical inquiry seems to provide the students hope for changing the quality of their lives and taking action towards freedom and social justice" (p. xiv). Following Hart and Boler, although social constructs can impose constraints on the extent of critical engagement, they can also serve as a vehicle for experimenting with novel positions for attending to socially produced contexts and experiences.

The question then becomes, what kinds of learning conditions can evoke this sort of experimentation? A collaborative approach to socio-ecological justice learning enables dialogue and other forms of shared experiences, illuminating learners' practices of questioning lived experiences and the influence this questioning has on their understandings and directions. The merit of such dialogue resides in the potential collision of contributors' various articulated understandings of social, cultural, and ecological experiences. The result is an opening for learners to question and extend "knowledge and thinking" (Hart, 2007), and to challenge "emotional rules and expression" (Boler, 1999).

In such a process, each contributor is called to attempt to recognize the socially, culturally, and ecologically mediated learning that has informed their understandings and practices in the world. The troubling of unseen, ignored, or overlooked experiences, and of how they are to be examined and evaluated will also occur in part through bearing witness to the impact of such experiences on the lives of others. Articulating this mode of relationality, Boler

draws on the concept of “testimonial reading” through which she emphasizes the necessary “task” of “recogniz[ing] oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront” (p. 166). For Boler, “[t]his task is at minimum an active reading practice that involves challenging [one’s] own assumptions and worldviews:” a practice aimed at generating a willingness to “inhabit a more ambiguous and flexible sense of self” (p. 176). Although it may be unrealistic to presuppose an adept “testimonial reading” by one contributor of another, it serves as an aim to which the collective process may strive. In other words, each contributor’s self-inquiry may be enhanced through opening and attending to narrative accounts provided by others.

In addition to what may be gained from bearing witness to another’s lived-experiences, this form of dialogue may also enhance the potential of learning *in* and *through* one’s own life-narratives, as delineated by Goodson et al. (2010). As contributors generate meaning through sharing and discussing lived-experiences, new questions may be posed to oneself, new meanings may emerge at the confluence of “life, self, story, and learning” (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 2). It is envisioned that through such a collaborative endeavor, learners are provided a venue to test out forms of subversion in order to re-imagine their role within the socio-ecological order.

Education. Emerging out of such conceptualizations of learning, experience, intersubjectivity, and the significance of social, cultural, and ecological contexts, are a series of questions which dedicated educators must address. How can learners be prompted to actively and openly examine socially, culturally, and ecologically mediated contexts as a response to concerns of socio-ecological justice in their lives? What range of pedagogical experiences may be effective for enabling such examinations? And, what possible obstacles and dangers lie within such educational strategies?

These questions correlate with Greenwood's (2003) advocacy towards "challenging each other to read the texts of our own lives and to ask constantly what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved" (p. 10). Greenwood (2003) links literatures of critical pedagogy and place-based pedagogy into a "critical pedagogy of place" – weaving together works of Stephen Haymes, Chet Bowers, and David Sobel. Although Greenwood compellingly advocates the merit of such a pedagogical framework, he does not theorize pedagogy and education to the extent of articulating spaces and interactions that may evoke in learners this "reading" of life-texts.

Building from Greenwood's *Critical Pedagogy of Place*, Marcia McKenzie (2008) expands thinking on learning possibilities set within the social and ecological with respect to place and space and the rich embodied and intersubjective experiences generated for and by learners. It is the "place in between the thought and the sensed," experienced by the learner via moments and locations of "friendship, art, literature, irony, cultural difference, [and] community" (along with countless, unpredictable others) that McKenzie perceives as holding the greatest potential for educating towards more socially and ecologically just ways of being in the world (p. 362). Collaborative processes of exploring personal meaning and values are certainly one such relational "place" of learning, and can provide the instigation or "problematization" required to enable critical reflection related to socio-ecological justice learning (Foucault in McKenzie, 2009).

In considering such collaborative pedagogical processes, Boler (1999) attends to the emotion involved in "questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions," exploring the notion of a "pedagogy of discomfort" (pp. 175-176). Through recognizing the emotional implications of such a pedagogical approach, Boler anticipates and attends to the resistance inherent in such an educational process through discussions of "defensive anger, fear of change, and fears of losing

our personal and cultural identities” (p. 176). Boler’s aim is to first reconcile a question of “how *collectively* it is possible to step into this murky minefield and come out as allies and without severe injury to any part” as an integral step toward “collective witnessing” (p. 176). Indeed, often learning for socio-ecological justice involves a feeling of discomfort as learners’ life-ways are revealed as connected to social oppression and ecological degradation. Boler is cognizant of this necessary yet potentially harmful aspect of justice education, and energizes thinking on how to facilitate the questioning of beliefs and assumptions while at the same time supporting learners along the way.

The weaving of these education theories begins to establish a foundation from which strategies for effective educational practice may be derived: a foundation emphasizing place, critical reflection, emotion, interrelationship, spontaneity, collective witnessing, intersubjectivity, community, and many other considerations. Additional contributions may be drawn from work on intersubjective deconstruction (e.g., Davies et al, 2006; McGushin, 2005; Metcalfe & Game, 2008; Tarc, 2005), decolonization (e.g., Agathangelou & Killian, 2006; Gibson, 2006; Green, 2001; Paredes-Canilao, 2006), and particularly those that address these efforts in relation to learners’ experiences (e.g., Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; St. Denis & Schick, 2003; Villenas, 2006; Weis & Fine, 2003).

Research and learning. Various research methods have been employed to trace back through lived experiences in order to shed light on current circumstances including through strategies of: “memory work” (Grenfell, 2005; Kaufman et al, 2001); auto-ethnography (Caracciolo, 2009; Nayak, 2003; Sameshima, 2007); journal writing (e.g., Ezer, 2007; Keats, 2009; Kimpson, 2005; Yang, 2008); photo/video voice (e.g., Goldson & Nichols, 2009; Meyerowitz & Zinni, 2009; Mueller, 2006; Zenkow & Harmon, 2009); and artistic expression

(e.g., Gosse, 2005; Leitch, 2006; Nickerson-Crowe, 2005; Noel, 2003). These research methods represent avenues for research and practice consistent with a conception of socio-ecological justice learning at the heart of this study.

There have been, however, few empirical studies conducted that partner participant and researcher in an explicit and transparent participatory endeavor inquiring into the forces and experiences that have shaped meaning and valuing processes (e.g., Cahill, 2007); and even fewer directed toward educational programming for social and ecological justice. Working towards these concurrent aims, Jones and Enriquez (2009) and Noel (2003) conducted studies involving graduate students as part of two courses focused on social justice education. Jones and Enriquez (2009) draw from Bourdieu's notion of "habitus," defining it as "the embodiment of past experiences marked by present speech, actions, tastes, and dispositions" (p. 146). They use this concept to examine participants' engagement of their own habitus' as they employ a self-directed form of "critical literacy" (p. 149). Noel (2003), on the other hand, uses a methodology of artistic expression to first enable participants to represent their responses and reactions to course content; then, returning to the artistic representations, participants reflect on how and why they have expressed their responses to the course in such a manner. In both cases, the aim of the research project is to support or enable more personally engaged forms of learning towards social justice, and to inspire thinking and discussion around ways this may be accomplished.

These studies begin to suggest what is implied by "collective whitening" when connected into practices of learning and inquiry as a way of gaining insight into learners' meaning-negotiation processes and what may be possible for learners in terms of how they are able and enabled to (re)engage the contexts of their lives. Recognizing limitations imposed by the socially mediated nature of learning and the embeddedness of the participant and researcher,

the endpoint of inquiry is not a claim of truth or even understanding about individual learners/participants, but hopefully generative snapshots from their experiences of self-discovery and learning.

Summary: Literature Review and Research Foundations

Guided by these theoretical foundations in the existing literature, the aim of the proposed research project was to facilitate a set of collaborative dialogues in which participants and researcher endeavored to “story” (Goodson et al., 2010) a series of lived-experiences that had influenced each participant’s meaning and values related to socio-ecological justice. Through the dialogical process, participants were invited to examine the mind/brain/body (Ellsworth, 2005) impact of these experiences, as well as the mediating effect of social, cultural, and ecological factors at work in the context of experience. These intersubjective places and spaces of experience and learning (Biesta, 1999; McKenzie, 2008) guided the direction of inquiry as participants’ articulations of them opened up new avenues of questioning. A focus on experiences of the learning self (Ellsworth, 2005) was central throughout the data-gathering process. As participants related experiences described as creating motion or transition in their lives, they were carefully examined in order to discern the extent of learning generated as a result.

These research design features demonstrate how the literature has framed the study. This is further evidenced in the research aims: namely i) to engage in a participatory narrative process in order for participants to explore, witness, and better understand their own previous learning experiences, meaning, and values in relation to socio-ecological justice; ii) through this process of tracing learning back, to engage participants in current learning about themselves, each other, and their socio-ecological actions; and iii) contribute to the literature on socio-ecological justice

learning, particularly focusing on collaborative processes of self-reflection or narration as a potential vehicle for deliberately excavating and reengaging embedded socio-ecological meanings and values.

The broader conversation engaged by the study is one that imagines spaces of learning and communities of practice (McKenzie, 2008) in which learners are working to understand themselves as participatory agents integrated within social, cultural, and ecological contexts. This process involves “collective witnessing” (Boler, 1999) and careful personal reflection – and is wary of reified norms permeating social, cultural, and ecological contexts. This broader conversation asks how educational programming might take into consideration socio-ecological justice learning understood in this way. It asks how collective narrative inquiry into past learning might open spaces for renewed understandings of selves in the world that are better tuned to social and ecological stability and health.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Methods

As indicated, the aim of this study is to inquire into learning through exploring a collective narrative process, tracing back across lived-experiences of the learning self that have influenced participants' meanings and values associated with socio-ecological justice. Toward this end, the study draws together two methodological frameworks, heuristic research and participatory action research. Discussion of the two frameworks sets the foundation for outlining the organizing features of the study. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to making transparent to the reader the thought and intentions employed in the design and undertaking of the research.

In his book *Heuristic Research*, Clark Moustakas (1990) delineates a design for research based on a method of inviting researcher and participant into a creative dialogical process aimed at distilling the “nature and meaning” of a particular mode of experience. Notably, Moustakas qualifies this objective as being ongoing or never complete; yet, he contends that what is achieved is a deeper “knowledge of the phenomena” (p. 11). The heuristic research process converges a diversity of orientations to reflecting on the subject of inquiry and attends to the complexity of the participant's endeavor to articulate their experience. Moustakas (1990) states that this process entails engaging “perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge [each] represent[ing] an invitation for further elucidation” (p. 10). By following emerging directions for further investigation, the momentum of the research process requires collaborators to “be open, receptive and attuned” in order to progressively move toward a deeper understanding (p. 16).

A strong match with the study's theoretical framing of understanding learning as socially mediated and as taking place through the mind/brain/body (Ellsworth, 2005; Lave & Wegner,

1999), the design of the research process is informed by Moustakas' guide to heuristic research. As mentioned earlier, the path of the research process was determined reflexively as participants worked to generate a descriptive picture of their learning experiences over time. In the heuristic research process, the researcher's aim is to generate dialogue in which articulated reflections become openings for more in-depth forms of questioning posed by both researcher and participants. The potential of this process is that collaboratively, through iterations of description and subsequent analysis, researcher and participant are ideally able to move systematically into deeper discussion on the subject, generating a map of participants' reflections throughout the process.

Another helpful component of Moustakas' research framework is his articulated conception of the limitations to researching human experience. With these limitations in mind, he discusses the aims and possibilities of such research. The objective of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic methodology is not to disseminate a claim on "the truth" about the researched human experience, but to illuminate a process of discovery: of "com[ing] to know more fully what something is and means," from the intersecting perspectives of researcher and participants (pp. 10-11). The disseminated findings, then, illustrate the collective work towards self-understanding and open communication, inviting the reader into the discussion in order to expand and enrich thinking on the topic.

This type of approach, when undertaken with a group of research participants, can be considered a form of participatory action research (PAR). Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2000) contend that in order to orient participatory action research, the researcher must consider "what is implied when participants . . . take the construction and reconstruction of social reality into their own hands" (p. 572). Such a consideration was conceived of in a

particular way in this study. The manner in which participants engaged the construction of social reality was in terms of their own vision of that “reality,” and the way they view themselves in relation to it. Thus, the *action* undertaken in the research emerged in the form of “storying the life and the self,” as an approach to learning in relation to participants’ engagement in the world (Goodson et al., 2010, p.2). In this framing, it is the meaning and values associated with the world that are taken into participants’ own hands, therefore offering insight into the way they conduct themselves in their lives.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) further contend that participatory action research “emerges when people want to think ‘realistically’ about where they are now, how things came to be that way, and, from these starting points, how, in practice, things might be changed” (p. 573). As participants questioned “where they are now” and “how things came to be that way,” they generated insight into the processes – conditioned by social, cultural, and ecological contexts – through which their learning experiences have been constituted. Considerations of how “things might be changed,” regarding meanings and values related to socio-ecological justice, were explored as participants shared their views on how these processes may be shifted, in moving towards what they consider more ideal social and ecological justice conditions.

Recent efforts in PAR have culminated in extensive, integrated projects involving a diversity of participants working in varied ways to identify, name, and educate in response to social and ecological problems (e.g. Cahill, 2007; Fine, 2007; Torre, 2009). While the scope of this study is not as extensive as many of these recent studies, it parallels their methodological frame. Indeed, the vision for this research involves participants negotiating and potentially shifting meanings and values as a means to empowering their continued learning and action.

Throughout this thesis I argue for the potential in recognizing learners as having constituted meaning and values, and that effective socio-ecological education cannot ignore this contextual reality. A corollary of this is that in some way or other, learners experiencing socio-ecological justice instruction are negotiating these meanings and values in relation to their perception of the truth and of reality – perceptions inextricably entangled in notions of the self. Through engaging learning in this way, the process undertaken by participants can be understood as a form of action, aimed at individual and social change. The participatory element can be recognized in the interviews and focus groups, where participants were active in guiding the process.

During the data-gathering events, participants were instrumental to informing and directing the inquiry process. Thus, one may conceive of the research as being conducted *with* participants, rather than *on* them. This was evidenced in the reflexive development of participants' investigations into lived-experiences during the one-to-one interviews, culminating in life-narratives that may be likened to a kind of self-study (Goodson et al., 2010). The participatory method of data gathering was also explicitly evidenced in the focus group as participants posed their own questions to one another as they sought to build understandings and connections across expressions of meaning and values related to socio-ecological justice. While in some instances PAR participants are active in the analysis and dissemination stages of research (Kindon et al., 2007), in the present study participant involvement concluded at the data-gathering stage. However, the manner of data analysis sought to retain participants' voices to a great extent, allowing the voices to come through in the dissemination.

Research Design and Methods

Participant Selection. A sample-set of three participants was chosen for the study. The number of participants was relatively small due to the intensive nature of the research endeavor. Participants were selected from the greater population according to the following characteristics: they were over the age of eighteen, they demonstrated an interest in learning, and they were involved in advocacy work for a social and/or ecological justice organization. The first two characteristics were satisfied by drawing from a pool of students enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan; the third characteristic was satisfied through focusing the search on the network of advocacy groups active at the University.

The rationale for defining the pool of possible participants in this way was to optimize the depth of data that could be collected within the scope of the study. By engaging young adults, rather than younger learners, I hoped a level of abstraction could be achieved within the limited time defined by the research process. This is not intended to imply that a similar research model is unsuitable for younger learners, but that in the context of this study, a level of proficiency at articulating and analyzing lived-experiences was needed. The reason for selecting for a demonstrated interest in learning was to correlate with a central theme of the study: namely, the possibility of learning understood in terms of personal motion and/or transition and as experienced through intersubjective, context-mediated lived-events (Biesta, 1999; Ellsworth, 2005; McKenzie, 2008). However, demonstrating an interest in learning through enrolling in post-secondary education does not ensure that students' views of learning are consistent with the one explored in the study; furthermore, the exclusion of non-post-secondary students is not intended to suggest that such individuals do not embody a deep commitment to learning in relation to personal and social change. The focus on social and ecological justice advocacy workers stems from a presumption that these individuals have in some way sought to apprehend

their participatory role as agents in the production and reproduction of their socio-ecological surroundings; and, to some extent, have consciously resisted dominant societal norms and practices. Also, notably, advocacy groups often include a mandate of social transformation. Thus, members will have likely worked to create a method to disrupt a targeted issue of socio-ecological justice.

Data gathering. The data gathering process was designed to enable a heuristic exploration of past learning experiences that had been influential on participants' lives in relation to socio-ecological justice. The process also sought to trace participants' current learning as they journeyed through the collaborative research process. This was undertaken via three interactive events of data collection: including two semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with each participant and one focus group involving all participants. Supplemental data were collected in the form of journal entries written by participants on an ongoing basis as they reflected on the questions raised in the study. A guide for the interviews and focus group is provided as Appendix A.

During the first semi-structured interview, participants were engaged in one-to-one discussions focused on narrating a series of lived-experiences that had impacted their meaning and values related to socio-ecological justice. As participants articulated experiences they felt had a bearing on them, the articulations became the focus of further inquiry, aimed at examining the impact of the experiences from differing vantage points. As participants elaborated on their responses to influential lived-experiences, they were encouraged to reflect on and give an account of the source of the response. To this end, participants were prompted to consider thoughts, emotions, intuition, values, presuppositions, etc. in their reflection on the lived-experiences. Through this method of questioning, a more complete appreciation of the

significance of lived-events could be illuminated and connections between lived-events newly recognized.

The second semi-structured interview built on the first, with previously collected data serving as a reference point for facilitating discussion. During the second interview, participants were asked to reflect on how influential learning experiences have contributed to the way they view their current relationship and role in the world. In other words, how have influential lived-experiences served to shape participants' sense of self in the world? And, in particular, to what extent are participants aware of the influence of these experiences on their association of meanings and values to the world? Finally, the second interview explored participants' views on possible strategies for illuminating and inquiring into influential social, cultural, and ecological contexts as an important aspect of their learning.

During the final focus group component of the study, the three participants and researcher entered into a discussion about how each individual has engaged the questions guiding the two previous interviews. The purpose of generating a group discussion on how the questions have been addressed and the outcomes that followed was to enable each individual to contemplate and sample accounts by the others. This was done with the hope of further contributing to the participants' understandings and actions, as described previously in relation to testimonial reading and collective witnessing (Boler, 1999). The aim of the focus group discussion then moved toward considering ways to advance a mandate of personal awareness and action in relation to how one's processes of learning have an impact on one's participation in the world.

Data Analysis

In Moustakas' (1990) description of a heuristic research methodology, he outlines a process of data analysis aimed at providing an "individual depiction" of each "co-researcher's"

contribution, which “retains the language and includes examples drawn from the individual co-researcher’s experience of the phenomenon” (p. 51). Such an orientation lends itself to this research project as one objective is to present a substantive and accurate account of participants’ efforts to articulate experiences that have shaped their learning. The manner in which this is to be undertaken, according to Moustakas, requires a close and personal engagement by the researcher with the data. Such a process is unavoidably interpretive and therefore requires a careful and reflexive scrutiny of the imprint left by the researcher.

Organizing the data. The underlying aim of the data analysis was to illuminate participants’ learning within lived-experiences that have and continue to shape present embodied meanings and values in relation to socio-ecological justice. In order to present a generative rendering of participants’ contributions, three themes are derived out of existing theory that was reviewed in Chapter Two and that were consistent with the data collected. The themes slowly took shape as the data were read through, notated, and eventually categorized. Data collected with each of the participants were collated and organized along each of these three deductively derived themes, generating a framework for analyzing the audio-recordings, transcripts, and journal entries. The themes consist of the following and are elaborated in the results chapter below: intersubjective experiences (Biesta, 1999; Feather, 2000; McKenzie, 2008), the learning self (Ellsworth, 2005), and narrative and the learning self in process (Ellsworth, 2005; Goodson et al., 2010). Although the themes are discussed separately, they are not intended to represent or imply independent forms of experience. Rather, they are intended to illustrate differing lenses with which to engage the participants’ contributions.

Credibility

As previously indicated, the objective of the study was not to draw conclusions about how socio-ecological justice learning functions in general. Rather, the aim was to excavate and examine influential learning experiences, offering an empirical venue for engaging theory that considers and values embodied, context-mediated socio-ecological justice learning. In the process, the study explores the potential for learning set within collective spaces of shared life-stories where openings for new interpretations and valuations are made possible. Therefore, the question of credibility rests in the organization and dissemination of the participants' contributions: are the data disseminated in a manner that preserves the spirit of the participants' voices? Is the reader provided a thick account of participants' lived-experiences, which may then be held up against theoretical renderings for comparison? The first question is a central concern of the heuristic research approach (Moustakas, 1990), and therefore has served as a foundation of the data analysis undertaken here. As often as possible, participants' voices are kept intact in order to reduce the interpretation on the part of the researcher. Addressing the second question stems from the first. Since the participants' voices feature prominently and consistently in the findings dissemination, readers are provided an opportunity to draw their own connections to the theory; and, through reading the participants' stories, readers are naturally invited to enter into a similar reflection on meaningful learning experienced in their own lives.

Ethics

Ethics approval guiding the conduct of this study was obtained through the Behavioral Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan, which follows the national standards outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Participants were provided consent forms at the outset of the data-gathering process, outlining the purpose, procedures, confidentiality, contact for participants' rights, and right of withdrawal (see Appendix B). At the outset, participants

were made aware of the limitation to confidentiality created by the focus group stage of the data-gathering process. Notwithstanding this limitation, participants felt comfortable enough to sign consent forms and generously contribute to the study.

Chapter Four

Findings

In this chapter, each of the participants' contributions are presented in turn, offering the reader a coherence and consistency aimed at facilitating a close engagement with the stories so generously shared by participants. As a result of the heuristic research method, the data tended to lack organization or sequence as conversations veered in and out of and across description, reflection, and new avenues of inquiry. Three themes (namely, Intersubjective Experiences, The Learning Self, and Narrative and the Learning Self In Process) have been drawn from the data and are helpful in lending a framework to organize the findings. This framework also illuminates some links between the data and the theory reviewed in the study, which will be elaborated in the discussion.

The findings are organized into four sections. The first three are dedicated to the participants Cynthia, Nathan, and Lauren (pseudonyms). Each of these sections begins with a brief introduction, giving an indication of the participant's lived circumstances at the time of the data gathering, before moving on to the core of the data analysis for that participant organized using the three themes. The fourth section contains findings from the focus group discussion involving all of the three participants. Rather than organizing focus group data into the thematic framework employed in individual participant analyses, it was desirable to retain the natural flow and development of the focus group conversation as it progressed. The intention behind electing to analyze the focus group data chronologically was to illuminate a sense of how the discussion

dialectically emerged in the space of the ninety-minute conversation. The dialogue among participants offers a window into the type of participatory learning process that is envisioned in this thesis. Woven through the focus group conversation are instances and opportunities for participants to connect their stories and interpretations to the stories of others: re-engaging the meanings and impact of past learning experiences, and opening new possibilities and trajectories for learning and action in the future.

Elaboration on Themes

While the three themes elaborated below are helpful in organizing the data, lived experiences are complex and not easily categorized. As mentioned, the process of establishing themes out of the data was slow and uncertain – requiring several attempts. At times, stories related by participants contained features of two or all three themes, presenting a challenge when selecting one over another. However, since the significance of the data is not strictly determined by the organization of data into themes, disagreement on the basis of theme selection does not amount to a disagreement with the findings overall. An in-depth description of each of the three themes is elaborated below.

Intersubjective experiences. The contribution offered by the conceptualization “intersubjective experiences” is the space it provides to engage the significance of context in the emergence of learning. In an earlier discussion of the situated socio-ecological justice learner, it was theorized that the manner in which an individual learner will engage justice issues is to an extent constituted through a matrix of embodied perceptions and cognitive evaluations that have co-arisen via lived-events. Howard Feather (2000) summarizes this perspective: “The bodily character of the subject’s perceptions ensures that they are always situated perceptions rather

than those of a detached observer” (p.4). Such a position emphasizes the contexts from which meanings and values arise, recommending these as important avenues for analysis.

In the data analysis, the aim was to organize articulations of intersubjective experiences as they operate at the level of “discourse communities” described by Hart (2007), and also operate in relation to Boler’s (1999) notion of “emotional rules and expression” (xiii). That is to say, a wide net was cast in order to draw together articulations of lived-contexts that are described as influencing participants on multiple levels. For example, experience with family, peers, mentors, near and distant communities, natural environments, literature, etc. are all found to be intersubjective experiences that influenced participants’ learning. It is Feather’s (2000) contention that “we do not wholly control the field of perception which ‘we’ observe around ourselves. Rather we are immersed in it and it always has a generality which escapes conscious organization” (p. 4).

The learning self. Grounded by Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (2005) description of the learning self, this theme seeks to draw together articulations offered by participants through which such intersubjective experiences as described above are presented as effecting or enabling some *motion or transition* in self, in relation to socio-ecological justice learning. For Ellsworth such forms of movement arise out of “an assemblage of mind/brain/body” that occurs as a result of experience (pp. 4-5). These types of movements are a central component in understanding how meaning and values are constituted over time within the participants’ lives. Furthermore, the question of how these movements are generated and operate in the lives of the participants as learners is essential for those imagining what socio-ecological justice education might be. In other words, not only is it important to gain a better understanding of the role of intersubjective experiences in learning, as well as the learning possibilities of remembering and articulating

those experiences; but the study aims to better understand the internal mind/brain/body learning process, or movement, that happens during and resulting from those experiences.

Narrative and the learning self in process. Introduced in Chapter Two, the concept of “narrative learning” (Goodson et al., 2010) seeks to illuminate the role of storying one’s life as a vehicle for learning. This form of learning is intimate and embodied, potentially guiding us to “find new meaning and new direction or ... in coming to terms with the ways things are and with who we are” (p. 2). For Goodson et al., *narrative* is much more than a representation of past events, it is living project through which modes of understanding and senses of self from past and present coalesce and collide. In narrative, the “meaning” of a lived-experience is never finished: fresh inquiries give rise to new openings for what may be gained through personal reflection.

Throughout the study, this process of inquiring was undertaken in a deliberate manner, as participants, in a sense, “narrated” themselves and their lives. Both directly and indirectly, participants extended stories of lived experiences, telling accounts of how the experiences affected their perceptions of the self. These stories, however, did not depict a sense of self that is constant and structured: on the contrary, participants’ comments were framed by movement, growth, and flux – features that resonate with Ellsworth’s (2005) rendering of a self in process. Thus, the final theme collates narratives as a way of working through and shedding light on the process of self in the making.

An aim of the study is to explore the potential of bringing the role of intersubjective experiences into heightened forms of “conscious organization,” as a method towards enhancing socio-ecological justice learning. For example, returning (through narration) to experiences within family and peer intersubjective contexts may reveal value and meaning orientations that

have been assimilated by participants. These orientations, in the process, may be deliberately called into “the field of perception we observe,” thus becoming an object of self-inquiry (Feather, 2000, p. 4). Indeed, exploring the potential in narrating influential learning experiences as an avenue for generating new forms of self-inquiry and perception is central to the vision of this study. I do not intend here to downplay or disregard the role of intersubjective experiences that operate outside of “conscious organization” (Feather, 2000), but rather to consider what may be gained as experiences are called forth and questioned in terms of their influence.

In what follows I provide an analysis of each of the three participants via an initial introduction and then discussion following these three key themes.

Cynthia

Cynthia is a twenty-five year old student in the first year of a teacher education program. She perceives her studies in education as a venue for engaging what she terms “justice work” (Interview 1). Although Cynthia indicates she has been involved in justice work for several years – in particular, working with women’s issues – she views teaching as a way to support justice initiatives while sustaining a living for herself. In tandem with her undertaking of a Bachelor of Education, two additional lived, or intersubjective, contexts are cited as informing Cynthia’s engagement of socio-ecological justice work: namely, Cynthia’s affinity for travel as a way to better understand global social, political, and ecological circumstances (Interview 1); and a community of artists who come together for “art jams” in order to work through aspects of their lives (Interview 2). Cynthia cited these contexts as domains in which meanings and values regarding socio-ecological justice issues are positioned at the forefront of her day-to-day activities and decision-making; and were, as a result, illuminated in conversations with Cynthia as tangible referents to guide her self-inquiry into how she engages these contexts. Cynthia self-

identifies as a Canadian of German ancestry, female, and middle class (signaled by her education and absence of personal debt). Cynthia grew up in a rural setting, was raised Catholic, but has since adopted a Spiritualist belief system.

Intersubjective experiences. These lived contexts or intersubjective experiences related by Cynthia comprised of *interpersonal* relationships, and of *place* – both in terms of the cultural dynamics of a place and its ecological dimension (see Greenwood, 2003; McKenzie 2008). Articulations of the way in which Cynthia engaged these contexts and how they came to influence her life arose organically through the heuristic interview process, and yet were discussed in relation to a chronology of experiences over time. Throughout the data gathering, Cynthia situates stories of intersubjective experiences that have shaped her development in thinking about socio-ecological justice issues.

A key interpersonal area Cynthia highlighted as influencing her socio-ecological learning involved relationships with individuals who are passionate and active towards concerns beyond themselves. Several relationships of this type were presented by Cynthia as guides along her path. In the following excerpt, Cynthia recalled the impact of becoming friends with Sarah (pseudonym) while travelling on her own as a young woman.

So, the first time I travelled was when I was (I mean I travelled without my parents) was when I was 18 and I moved to Barcelona for a year. And actually the first person who kind of befriended me there had just come back from a project in Guatemala, and that is where she had met her now, I mean, life partner. And, they had been doing work there, and she is kind of like, she was an – and that is so funny because she is at a totally different place in her life right now – but at that point, she only owned like two shirts and a pair of pants. She had like no money and she was looking for secondhand clothing, and she was doing all of

these little things that were based on her travel experiences in Guatemala. And, I think she, yeah and it is so interesting to talk to her because every time I talk to her she wants to go on another project. ... I mean, travel for her really taught her a lot about the world (Interview 1).

Although several stories of the kind emerged, this experience marks one of the first interpersonal encounters Cynthia viewed as pivotal to the shaping of her engagement with socio-ecological justice. Cynthia described the experience of meeting Sarah as creating a window for her to peer into “another world:” one that she ultimately embraced (Interview 1).

And then, so when she [Sarah] came out of that she was like “what can I do in my personal [life]?” She was kind of trying to change things in her personal life. And I was like, “that is really interesting. I never really thought about checking the labels on my clothes before,” you know. And I’m not saying that that’s going to change the world, but I am just saying those are the things that I had never thought about before... just meeting her travelling was like my first kind of window to, I guess another world too. And when I got back to Saskatchewan I started, I was looking for something on campus, like a place where I could work in justice things, because she had affected me and kind of turned this on for me. ... I know definitely meeting her was a pivotal point for me for sure in terms of social justice especially (Interview 1).

The impact of Cynthia’s experience meeting Sarah in Barcelona continued to press upon her life and decision-making as she returned to her home province. Cynthia shared how this pivotal interpersonal (as well as place-specific) experience guided the emergence of additional interpersonal and place-specific experiences that indicate a pattern of experiences that have influenced and inspired her.

And when I got back I was like, “okay, now what am I going to focus on?” ... And so, I went to the Women’s Center on campus, and at the time Julie Sams (pseudonym) was the director. It was her first year as director, and she was like this crazy passionate organizer with like a wealth of knowledge and just the sweetest personality in the world. And I mean just being around her drew you into wanting to help out with things. So, I started going to workshops at the center and volunteering to help out with there. And then through that I was like, “oh this is, you know, the people I am meeting here are really interesting, passionate people who are looking for, you know, essentially like looking to help people balance out equalities” (Interview 1).

As Cynthia contemplated why it was an emphasis on women’s issues that ultimately won her focus, she indicated that women’s issues – and in particular those of single mothers – had been central in a number of work and personal experiences in the past.

The range of experiences Cynthia had during her time working at the Women’s Center with Julie Sams encouraged her to engage issues advocated at the Center in the context of formal education. This new context is marked with new forms of interpersonal and place-specific experience that continued to shape her learning.

So then the second semester I started taking, when I got back, I just took women and gender studies classes ... it was a third year women and gender studies class was my first introduction with Stephanie Smith [pseudonym] who is like by far one of the most crazy, insane researchers I think on this University campus. And just taking her class really really spoke to me ... I think the material we were reading was so, I felt like I could relate to it in the way it was written in a way that was always asking you to bring your personal experiences (Interview 1).

Stephanie, Sarah, and Julie emerged in Cynthia's account as the only guides to socio-ecological learning that she mentions by name. These women were elevated in Cynthia's mind due to their passion and activism, which Cynthia found inspiring. As Cynthia proceeded in her pursuit of meaningful endeavor she would encounter relationships that were less than inspirational, and some for which she would find herself evoking inspiration in others. However, through each of the relationships Cynthia describes, she indicates how the experience has shaped her learning in relation to socio-ecological justice.

Cynthia's intention of working "in justice" served as a basis for her shifting into a Teacher Education Program. Teaching was seen as an avenue in which Cynthia could sustain the work that she was passionate about while at the same time provide for her needs (Interview 1). However, Cynthia's perception was that her reasons for being in the program isolated her from her peers, and also from the broader aims of the program. These elements created a unique context of relationships for Cynthia to work within. Cynthia's reflection of the way she engaged this intersubjective milieu brought to light a felt sense of marginalization and how she was to respond to that.

Especially in the College [of Education], often my assumption or my feeling is that my experiences are vastly different from other people who are there, and I guess my intentions for being in Education are very different, because I came to Education like with in mind that I wanted to work in justice. Like, it was like I was doing justice work and getting sick of not getting paid to do it. And I was like, "I have to find a venue where I can do this and actually be able to financially support myself so that I can continue to do this work." ... Whereas, I felt like a lot of other people had come to Education really for different reasons that they, you know, they were really excited about. ... So that made me feel really like, I

guess just really displaced and out of, like I didn't fit in. Um, so I found myself censoring ... like I um I felt myself having to censor a lot (Interview 1).

Yet, what Cynthia discovered was that through the interpersonal engagements and within the space of the program there emerged an informal social setting in which she could express her convictions more fully. As a result, Cynthia was able to embrace a community that she found helpful to her learning. Cynthia began to recognize how her passion could come to be passed on to others.

I mean, there is definitely a couple of people I can think of who are like, you know, like "let's go for a beer." Like, "what the hell were you talking about in class, that sounds really cool?" You know, so there were some, like I said there was kind of a really small pocket of people ... and actually it got bigger as the semester went on. Um, so it started with kind of like one or two and by the end there was about ten of us who were like kind of started to go out. We were like, "hey we kind of like each other, and we are getting into this." And some of those people had entered Education not thinking about justice, and then took some of the Foundations classes and were like, "hey, oh my gosh this is huge, I have a huge responsibility here and I don't know anything." And, I thought that was really magic to watch because people's eyes were like getting bigger. And, I have learned a ton too, I mean, but I really saw like some of those lenses starting to become you know possible for people that haven't had it before (Interview 1).

Amidst what at first seemed to be an alienating setting for Cynthia's justice intentions, over time she was able to find allies. To an extent, Cynthia attributes this to an understanding of when to raise certain forms of critique and when to remain silent. Cynthia's relationships within the College of Education provided her insight into how she might foster connections

with those who do not share her beliefs and values; and, perhaps more importantly, how to nurture seeds of critique in others which would otherwise be absent.

While in the process of completing her Bachelor of Education, Cynthia felt the drive to seek out new avenues for learning about justice in the world. Resulting from this drive was a six-month experience within a rural, indigenous community in Mexico. During this powerful learning endeavor, the role of place was pronounced in Cynthia's discussion of her experience.

It was really interesting to be living with a rural, indigenous people, and seeing how they, for example, for understanding something like racism, even ecological things, and how farming is changing in North America, and how that is affecting rural people... it's like a really important source because it's, it puts you, its experiential right. It's like an experiential kind of knowledge I guess.

I was just always focusing on basic needs [while living in the rural village]. So I would wake up in the morning and I knew that I had to go and haul water and feed chickens and pigs, and go do whatever kind of things that needed, like some days we would go and pick chilies because we needed to pick chilies... like it was sustenance living. Like I was essentially eating everything out of that area because we were too poor to buy things, right. And, I mean I artificially created my poverty by saying, "I'm going to take this much money and I'm not going to spend anything else, and I'm going to have to learn to live, or survive, or figure out my way to live."

The above experience is illuminated in more depth under the subheading *The learning self*, as Cynthia was able to make explicit correlations between day-to-day events and particular learning outcomes.

Place and interpersonal relationships were similarly emphasized in Cynthia's discussion of her process of decision-making. The contexts for addressing difficult decisions involved places and social contexts in which artistic inquiry and expression were made possible. In the following excerpts, Cynthia emphasizes the importance of artistic opportunities to her learning.

I think that when I was younger it definitely, especially when I was like sixteen or seventeen, I had a first period spare and I spent all my time in the art room in first period. So that was when I had time carved out into my day to deal with things. And so, it came out in an artistic way because that's when I had time and space and quiet, because I was the only person in the art room first period for two years kind of thing. So I think, I mean that was just a space for me, and I continue to do that... I usually carve out a whole afternoon to be alone and you know, I'll work on a piece if I'm going through something and I can't sort it out.

Over time the contexts in which Cynthia undertook this artistic mode of decision-making took different forms. One in particular involved a group of artists engaging the experience of making art together as a social and possibly therapeutic practice.

When I was suffering from insomnia, we had regular art jams at my house. And actually like we were having art jams like at least once a month, and that was a really interesting thing to do because there were no rules. It was kind of everyone came and created art together and kind of looked at it and shared it and said, "oh this is what I see in your project," "Oh, I'm seeing this." And, it wasn't necessarily as like profound as like putting like okay this is all of the whatever depression I'm going through, and try to sort it out... Although, for some people that might have been elements that existed in their work (Interview 2).

Cynthia's description of these lived events enabled her to consider and comment on the influence they have had on the way she engages lived contexts and, in particular, the role of socio-ecological justice in her life. Intersubjective experiences with individuals exhibiting a passion for social justice, volunteering in rural Mexico, and private and collective artistic inquiry and expression frame Cynthia's account. These relationships and places are perceived by Cynthia as important contributors to her socio-ecological justice learning.

The learning self. The manner in which Cynthia articulated how the interpersonal and place-specific experiences influenced her socio-ecological understandings resonates with Ellsworth's theory of the learning self. The ways Cynthia related influential learning experiences as "movements" of the mind/brain/body (Ellsworth, 2005) are outlined in this section. Although these "movements of the learning self" are presented under a separate heading, they are set against the backdrop of the intersubjective experiences from which they were derived.

Cynthia cites her relationship with Sarah as pivotal to her movement in socio-ecological justice learning, fostering inquiry into conditions of inequality in the world. As Cynthia transitioned through the data-gathering process, she sought to trace out a series of significant learning experiences that extended from her relationship with Sarah. The following excerpts outline a process of learning that guided her toward feminist theory.

Like, I was just looking for something where I was balancing out inequalities because she (Sarah) had gotten me starting to ask questions, I guess... questions like "where is my food coming from?" you know. Questions like "where are my clothes being made:" things that were, I guess, affecting me personally (Interview 1).

So, I think that's why I kind of came to feminist theory. It was just really a series of events of meeting Sarah and then getting back and looking for some meaning in my life, and then moving into, moving into volunteering at the Women's Center, and then from there thinking, "oh, maybe I should take a class because all of these people seem to, you know, be into this and I might as well try kind of thing" (Interview 1).

Further movement in Cynthia's learning was attributed to her volunteer experience in rural Mexico. In the following excerpts, Cynthia depicts the deep form of learning she associates with the experience, which was precipitated both through effects of witnessing abject inequality and being dependant upon the local ecology for survival. This movement in learning emerged from Cynthia experiencing first-hand the social and economic conditions impacting her host community. While Cynthia had an understanding of these conditions prior to her arrival, through the embodied experience, she gained a deeper and more personal understanding of their effect on peoples' lives. The emotional aspect of this learning is exemplified below in Cynthia's exasperation at the oppressive circumstances met by those she stayed with, irrespective of the importance of their labor.

So that was a great teacher to me in terms of ecology and in terms of really learning about some of the justice things going on. Just looking at like, I mean the people in the village depend on the environment for their income too. So if the chili prices drop I mean they have no, they have no control over that. And they are kind of just victims of whatever happens.

One thing that has happened in the last ten years in the village where I was, people have to introduce fertilizers and chemical sprays to different crops, because of the way money works. So, they can't get a loan unless they are going to guarantee to be using sprays on

crops, and they have to get a loan because they are too poor because they don't get good prices for their crops to start with. ... So, again like you just really feel like, "oh my god," we are really at the bottom of the rung, and really we are the most important part of the whole piece because we are doing the food production, and without us, you know, people in the city wouldn't be eating, right (Interview 1).

As introduced in the above excerpt, the experience also created a movement in Cynthia's learning related to the ecological. While Cynthia felt a strong connection to the place in which she had grown up, it could not compare to the connection that developed after just six months living in Mexico, depending on place for sustenance. Cynthia's articulations of this further emphasize the embodied nature of the learning.

I think it affected me in realizing how little I knew about my own environment in Saskatchewan. I grew up on the prairies, but I feel more connected to that land base in Mexico that I was in for six months, because I was living on it completely. ... So yeah, I was completely eating off that land and really starting to learn about different plants and how they were helpful, and feeling tied again, like I said, to that land base in a way that I never felt tied to the land base here. ... And I'm somebody who, I've always loved to be outside and, you know, I love nature right. Like, I have always loved observing insects and that sort of thing from little up (Interview 1).

The learning Cynthia gained in Mexico carried with it implications as she returned home to Canada. In Mexico, Cynthia was enabled to observe a deeper relationship to land, which at the same time provided her a clearer perception of what it is to live within a consumer-based culture. The opportunity for Cynthia to engage her learning in an embodied form and in a novel location

generated new ways to reflect on her life in Canada, and new ways to take up socio-ecological justice in her day-to-day actions.

Coming home, and then not quite feeling like I am at home because there is still kind of part of you there. So you, so I guess just being able to bring that experience into what my life is like now, living in a city and being back into living in, you know, living in a very consumer-based culture (Interview 1).

Taken together, Cynthia's articulations of powerful socio-ecological justice learning emphasized the experiential and embodied nature of this learning. In addition, the learning was driven by an interest in gaining a better understanding of the world in order for Cynthia to offer a contribution through engaging in "justice work." As a result of the pivotal learning experiences described, Cynthia sought out new spaces and avenues for advancing her learning, which would come to shape the way she perceives herself in relation to socio-ecological justice.

Narrative and the learning self in process. Interwoven within Cynthia's stories of intersubjective experiences and their resulting socio-ecological learning is the development of a sense of herself over time. Narrations of how Cynthia perceived herself were presented in relation to these experiences. According to Goodson et al (2010), the process of narrating oneself in this way carries the potential of contributing to one's learning and personal development. In this section data are analyzed that illuminate Cynthia's sense of herself and her learning in relation to socio-ecological justice.

Through these articulations, Cynthia relates how her learning toward socio-ecological justice has required her to be strategic about which aspects of herself she reveals in a range of social venues. This may be interpreted as a coping mechanism of developing critical analyses of socio-ecological contexts, while still having to reside within and negotiate those contexts. As an

illustration of this, on several occasions Cynthia reflects on how she carefully rations displays of intimately held views of the socio-ecological so as to avoid alienating both herself and others: this includes within relationships with family, colleagues, and friends. In Cynthia's perception, the origin of how she publicly narrates herself within differing socio-cultural settings can be traced to growing up having to negotiate two sides of her extended family that are very distinct in terms of socio-economic status and values. Cynthia recounts this circumstance below.

I think from really little up I was forced to adapt to lots of different situations, new situations, not because I moved around a lot or anything like that, but because of my mom's family and my dad's family have extremely different political views. Um, so like my dad's family helped, my great grandfather was one of the main organizers of the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Foundation), and my mother's family is like on the New York Stock Exchange. Like, you know, like millionaires basically. ... I grew up like going to this grandma's for one Christmas and then the other grandma's for Thanksgiving. And one grandma's was like a farmhouse where we were eating everything off the farm because that was the way it was... And, the other grandma lived in this enormous mansion, and actually everyone in that family lived in crazy huge houses... for a kid who is five anyways, two different experiences. Like, and often I had to adapt how I, I always had to be dressed different in both places too (Interview 1).

So, you know, I kind of had to morph. It's like, "oh, we are going to see grandma, you have to get dressed up." ... I mean it is still, if I go to see that grandma, I mean I have this set of random designer clothes that I own, you know. So I kind of have these two, I had these two plain identities (Interview 1).

So, moving into a new situation, I'm usually able to kind of figure out what the social cues are too... it has like made me learn that there are different ways to act around different people, right. So, you use different sets of language... there are all these little things that help you be able to understand and connect with people from differing backgrounds (Interview 1).

The entry point that led Cynthia into discussing this learned ability to “morph,” in terms of how she presents herself according to the social context, stemmed from a reflection on how she had been able to easily adjust to new social situations while travelling.

I was definitely playing with a lot of identity things at that time [the span of time encompassing the Mexico trip]. I still am right; we always kind of change our identity. And that is one of the fun things about travel too is that you can kind of remake yourself, or you just do without trying. You just morph because you're learning so you change (Interview1).

As introduced above, Cynthia's articulations of experiences in adapting to diverse social settings included a tendency to censor herself at times when she has felt that her views and values were incongruous with those of her peers. As a result of this awareness, Cynthia is able to privately hold dissident socio-ecological values and beliefs in opposition to the dominant order, while maintaining amicable relationships across diverse social groups.

It kind of sounds silly when I say it out loud, but it's true, like when I have to hang out with teachers at the college here, I have to put on different clothes than I wear when I go out with my, you know, friends who are activists, you know. So, and I also act a lot different in the College too, when I'm in class I have to censor myself a lot more. I find

myself acting differently, but that is so that I can connect and actually have friends in the College, so [I] don't go crazy right [laughter] (Interview 1).

Cynthia's discussion of how she narrates herself in different settings identifies a discord between that which she believes and feels and that which she interprets as acceptable conduct within dominant social discourses. Fortunately, Cynthia is adept at reading and negotiating milieus that may be hostile to her views. That said, it is clear that Cynthia's passion for socio-ecological justice in some way sets her apart from others who have not undergone a similar type of learning. This circumstance is an unfortunate consequence of Cynthia's dedication to "balancing out inequalities" (Interview 1).

Final comments. As Cynthia underwent the research process, she traced memories tied together with threads of influence and outcome to weave an image of how she has arrived at meaning and values related to socio-ecological justice. Throughout the interviews Cynthia identified relationships and places that had significant impact upon her learning, and spoke of having to censor the critique she had honed as a result of this learning. Although Cynthia provides a rich account of her engagement, there still remains much in terms of unearthed values, influences, and tensions that lay below the surface of her expressions. That which is gained from Cynthia's contribution is an opportunity to witness her process of articulated and attending to the aggregate events of her life-course and how they influence the present.

Nathan

Nathan is a twenty-five year old Education student who views his membership in the teaching profession as involving a responsibility to socio-ecological justice, and to civic responsibility more broadly. Through conversations with Nathan, it became apparent that his mode of engaging socio-ecological justice has been shaped through a commitment to asking

“difficult questions:” both in relation to workings within the world and to his life-course (Interview 1). Notably, this commitment has resulted in Nathan periodically setting aside time to “take stock” of his life, guided by an interest in being honest with himself (Interview 1). Nathan shared how an emphasis to honesty has become a guiding principle to his life-choices, and has led him to the teaching profession. The connected endeavors of posing questions and “taking stock” are embedded within an overarching aspiration toward learning, which Nathan holds as fundamental to his day-to-day activities. Indeed, learning emerged as a prevalent theme in conversations with Nathan, often identified with processes of personal development and/or personal struggle. Nathan’s transition to attending honestly to deeply held values and intents required troubling and decoupling from pursuits of financial and social ascendance. Nathan identifies as Male, Caucasian and Métis, middle class and Agnostic.

Intersubjective experiences.

The interpersonal venues Nathan highlights as guiding his learning emphasize the influence of his parents and grandparents, and relationships with peers. The places of Nathan’s socio-ecological justice learning include family gatherings at home, formal educational settings, and a work environment that Nathan found to be detrimental to his wellbeing. In Nathan’s discussion he expresses how relationships with family and peers have at times led him in opposing directions – which he would follow to varied ends. In an instance where peers played a role informing his career path, Nathan viewed the social group as reifying wider societal narratives of what it is to be successful. Thus, Nathan elucidates an additional problematic associated with the influence of peers on learning. In what follows, influential relationships that have contributed to Nathan’s learning are illuminated; these relationships, however, operate within (and are influenced by) wider socio-cultural factors.

An early motivation for Nathan to engage topics of socio-ecological justice was in order to participate in discussions with his parents and their friends on a range of social, political, and ecological topics. Nathan identified this interpersonal dynamic as a pivotal intersubjective context for his learning. These experiences, throughout his development, provided a venue for Nathan to direct his inquiry and focus to constitutive social, political, and economic factors.

One of the areas that it [a process of questioning] began with was that I would always see my parents and their friends having complex conversations about complex issues and I wanted to be a part of those conversations. As a young person, I just wanted to be one of the people who was having the complex conversations with my parents. So, I have had to raise myself to the ability – or they have helped me. But I’ve had to push myself to be more so I could have those conversations with them. And part of it was just my competitive drive, I am naturally competitive ... and I like to know more or do more than the other people in the room (Interview 1).

The competitiveness spurred by these interpersonal experiences surfaces in a later instance, as Nathan gives an account of his original decision to pursue a career in business. The decision was ultimately amended, and Nathan was forced to reestablish his motivational ground.

We further see the impact of interpersonal experiences in the way Nathan attributes his impulse toward understanding socio-ecological justice concerns to an “inquisitiveness” passed down from his parents and grandparents.

My parents made it a point to institute in both their children that the most important question to ask is “why?” And I think that is where it initially began. And then, from there it has been slowly built upon through the years of education and training (Interview 1).

Or in the later years, when I have changed some beliefs that don't necessarily correspond with theirs, they have asked me, well how have I come up with this. And I say well it's your fault. But I think the reason why they always asked it [why?] was both of them have always been searchers of information, they have spent the vast majority of their lives, even in an unprofessional manner (especially in an unprofessional manner) trying to advance their knowledge and their understanding of the topics that interest them; and so, some of it has been passed down through the generations, for my dad especially. His parents have always had a certain level of inquisitiveness in them, and it's been transferred onto him and he's transferred it onto his children. He has taken it further than his parents have and I've taken it further; me and my brother have both taken it further than he has (Interview 1).

Nathan contends that his current sphere of friends is similarly committed to raising difficult questions and working through them together, which has guided and shaped his practice of questioning. The dynamic of this social sphere is important to Nathan as a venue for exercising his inquisitiveness without encountering resistance.

The vast majority of my friends are very similar to me in many ways; they all have an inquisitive nature. Most of them are university educated. Even the ones that aren't, the only reason they are not is because they decided that they preferred other fields than the ones offered at the university. But they all share certain foundational principles; and, one is that they are always searching for answers and that they are not afraid to ask difficult questions, and maybe not find an answer to that (Interview 1).

I mean, one thing that happened, or that people realized is that unless you are around a group of similar people to you, and if you are a naturally inquisitive person, there will

always be a rejection of your form of thought. There will always be a rejection of, or pushback against asking a question (Interview 1).

A significant aspect of Nathan's socio-ecological learning involved a "turning point" in his professional aspirations. Nathan identified his school peer group as a significant influence on his early decision-making in regards to his life-pursuit. Through his development as a youth, Nathan established a set of values that involved a drive toward culturally determined articulations of success and fulfillment. However, through a circumstance in which Nathan was able to experience a sample of the imagined lifestyle, the purported benefits broke down. As a result of the experience, Nathan was enabled to deconstruct his value system, and reconstitute it through the course of personal struggle.

I originally entered university to go into Commerce, get a degree, get my MBA, and in the end enter the business community and try to make some money doing that. Then my goal was purely financial. I mean I feigned the whole – my dad or mom would ask me, "well are you having fun?" I would be like, "yeah, of course I am." I left after my first year of university. I took a couple of years off. I got the opportunity to do the job that I was going to be doing if I got my degree ... I realized, "you know what if I have to wake up every morning and do this, sure I may be driving a Porsche but I will hate every second of my life" (Interview 1).

As Nathan traced this learning back to why at the time he had chosen to pursue a career in business, a clearly articulated motive proved elusive. However, cultural narratives of achievement in the jobs marketplace can be seen to work on and through Nathan's peer group. In Nathan's description, these narratives define what it is to be successful, and how happiness is achieved.

It was kind of the goal of most of the people I graduated with. I mean, I graduated in a class of three hundred plus people. Out of those three hundred plus people, thirty-five of them I had been in every class with me since I was in kindergarten. Those thirty-five people, all of us went to (or thirty-two of us) went to school, and all of us have our degree in something. ... And all of us started off the same way: it was like “oh well, we will go, we will all become lawyers, or we will become doctors, will make tons of money and everything will be great.” So I think that was part of it. Honestly I don’t know why I picked it. I wanted a flashy car, the nice house (Interview 1).

Ultimately the career in business wasn’t to be for Nathan as his motives toward such a career path gave way to a different set of values, due to the unhappiness and lack of fulfillment felt working within the intersubjective spaces of the business field. However, this transition did not occur in the absence of personal struggle, which provided the groundwork for a process of learning that has been transformational in Nathan’s life-course. It was an inspirational contribution from teachers in his life that led him to perceive the profession as a suitable venue for him to help others.

I could have gone elsewhere with my educational career, and I decided that I wanted to become a teacher because it’s where I felt I could do the most in helping out those around. And there have been so many good teachers in my life that have helped move me toward where I am that I felt it was part of my duty to return the favor. Not to mention that teaching is amazingly huge fun. ... If we do not enjoy the job, no matter what material good we gain out of it, it will not replace that lack of joy (Interview 1).

Influenced by his parents and grandparents, Nathan’s dedication to “helping out those around” was grounded by a recognition and appreciation of the supports that have enabled

him to attain his current level of achievement. Such an appreciation was ingrained in Nathan by his parents and, in particular, his grandparents who have an intimate understanding of both poverty and the importance of community. In the following excerpt, Nathan describes his valuation of community, signaling a correlation between an embrace of cooperation and quality of life.

I know that I have been given a lot either from society, from my community, from other people. If nothing else, I've been given a lifestyle which allows me to develop the understanding and knowledge to go to a place such as university, or college, or what have you. ... It's like well, you have been given so much in your life. You have been given the opportunity to go to university, and you have been given the ability to – well for myself, I have been given the ability to live in an upper-middle-class community my entire life (Interview 1).

I mean, my grandparents raised their children, and they were both (well they were all) extremely poor. So they understood that without the assistance of those around them, they would not have been able to succeed as much as they had done. ... Both of my grandparents were raised in poverty and raised their children in poverty, and all of their children have been extremely successful in their life, and that would not have occurred without the community around them. And both of my grandparents and my parents made sure that all of their grandchildren understood that this was the case; and, that you are one member of the community, without the community you are nothing, you are a person wandering in the desert (Interview 1).

As Nathan described his learning through the above relationships, the heuristic process concentrated on a question of discerning which and how experiences may be beneficial and

which and how they may be potentially harmful. As Nathan worked this out, he shared how through his learning he has developed a caution in relation to how experience and learning are evaluated. In the end, Nathan posited that the key to such a form of self-inquiry is awareness.

Well I hope that I am aware of the elements that (of my past) that have influenced who I am; and, I hope that I – more than being aware of them – I hope that I am able to judge whether they are positive or negative events, or truly positive or negative events. To me one of my biggest fears is giving the wrong value to the wrong event. Whether it was something that I thought was positive and had influenced me positively had in fact influenced me negatively, and I was just not aware of it, unpacked it. So I think that is the first step: that you have to be aware of it ... to determine which events you want to emulate (Interview 2).

Similar to Cynthia, Nathan drew on a range of intersubjective experiences to map his learning and personal development over time. Nathan's description included an elaboration of how the events had informed his life-course; particularly, how he came to pursue a career as an educator. These elements of Nathan's contribution are further elaborated in the remaining analysis.

The learning self. In the process of illuminating pivotal learning in relation to socio-ecological justice, Nathan endeavored to provide a description of how the learning operated within, and how it came to influence his life-course. That is to say, Nathan reflected on the internal development of his learning as it had occurred over time. In the following section, Nathan depicts his learning in relation to decision-making, reflection, intuition, personal growth, and emotion.

Returning to Nathan's discussion of his learning as he shifted from pursuing a career in business to a career in education, he described how this experience has created an opening for personal reflection. Through Nathan's depiction below of a profound embodied consequence, he correlates the shift in his meaning and values with this tumultuous experience.

I don't think it would have been possible then [referring to the type of reflection he ultimately underwent]. I don't think I could have examined my life properly at that point. ... For the most part, to make a change in your life, you need to be in a state that you're not happy with; and not just mildly unhappy, you need to be in a state of near destruction. So, I don't think that when I made that original career choice I was in a position where I could have been, that I was in that position (or physical position) where I could have made that choice. I think that I had to have that experience that happened after that point (Interview 1).

For Nathan, recognizing his desire to provide a contribution through his life-endeavor involved interrogating his view of success and social positioning. According to Nathan, the transition may not have been possible in the absence of some form of personal crisis.

In the following excerpts, Nathan outlines how lived experiences have created an array of points of view or lenses employed in his decision-making. It is Nathan's view that these lenses come to be formed through a deliberate process of reflecting on lived experiences.

For me, when coming up with decisions I hope that the fact that my understanding, that my decision making process helps me understand something similar to that, that I am able to look at a situation and explore it from multiple points of view. And, understand whether or not it is a good decision, hopefully I will make the better of two decisions (Interview 2).

Mostly, how I deal or how I create multiple lenses is through life-experience, through the education that has created me now, because I have had more than one experience in a number of situations I have seen. And I have had to come to understand that, or not just that but have also seen the results of my experiences. ... It's through basically a process of reflection. If you are able to reflect on your life, and if you do reflect on the experiences of your life no matter how insignificant, you will start to look at things from multiple points of view (Interview 2).

However, Nathan recognizes a limitation in relation to the range of lenses that he is able to draw on. He goes on to provide a description of how intuition comes into play in reconciling this limitation.

It is a concern that, well for me it is a concern that I do not possess every viewpoint necessary to properly analyze something. ... But you hope in those situations that you have this wonderful gift called intuition that you are able to rely on and create, maybe not a perfect viewpoint, but a manageable viewpoint or usable viewpoint to help these [decisions] (Interview 2).

Nathan further elaborates how he perceives his learning, in terms of the way his use of a range of lenses serves to advance the learning process. Introducing the idea of "growing in experience," Nathan delineates this in terms of developing new lenses through which to view the world. Notably, Nathan emphasizes the importance of being cognizant of the learning process itself; otherwise, as he has found in his own experience, the outcome of learning may be detrimental.

Like I said, you try to create a framework that works within your experience and you have to make, I think one of the important things is to make a conscious awareness that you do

not have every lens; and to keep on growing in your experience; and to understand your experiences so you can perhaps the next time you come to making that decision, you are better informed in it (Interview 2).

So for myself I think it is incredibly important that you personally discuss, and challenge, and provide knowledge on how you learn because without understanding you would ... just continue the negative aspects of your life (Interview 2).

So within my own life ... I have had positive experiences in my history of learning – in my educational history – and there have been negative aspects. So if I had not thought about that process throughout my life, then I would not... then those negative aspects that appeared to be positive would have remained positive insights. Whereas those positive aspects that appeared to be negative initially, they would have not influenced me now as much as they had (Interview 2).

For Nathan, this learning process is not entirely a cognitive matter. Creating an opening to talk about the intimate or emotional aspect of learning for socio-ecological justice, Nathan relates a conversation between he and one of his teaching practicum students. The background of the conversation was the student's experience listening to the story of a survivor of the oppressive Canadian Residential Schools Program.

... one of the things that she [Nathan's student] told me was that without having that first-hand knowledge of someone that had lived through the experience and that was able to recite their experience and talk about their experience intimately, which I think is another important aspect: to have that intimate connection. But without having that intimate, that person who was able to speak about it intimately, then to them it would have just been an *other*. It would have been something completely detached from their experience. And I

think that comes with most people that you speak to who are socially conscious, and who are environmentally conscious: that they have had the experience in their life, at some point in their life where they have witnessed something or they have had something pull them into that experience where they are able to compare that and use that in their life (Interview 2).

Through relating this story, the notion of witnessing as a part of learning also emerged. In response to a question of the value of interpersonal witnessing to the process of self-reflection, Nathan emphasized it as a source of support toward new modes or lenses of reflection.

I think to do it [personal reflection] entirely on your own is unrealistic ... first of all it is challenging, especially when you are trying to create new experiences that influence your decision-making process, then you are not able to properly reflect on it without another there to stimulate you. You can do it on your own, I have done it on my own in the past, and I have seen others do it on their own. ... I find that it is more of an active process than, or more of a self-aware process than anything else. It's not a spontaneous event, you have to make the attempt to consider the events in your life (Interview 2).

Throughout Nathan's discussion on socio-ecological justice learning, he discussed a transitioning away from early established meaning and values: which he recognizes as saturating his peer relations as a youth, and as assimilated from wider cultural narratives of success and financial gain. The embodied experience of this transition involved cognitive and emotional discord and dissonance, leading to a restructuring of Nathan's meaning and values. The result of the learning process was a closer address – involving self-analysis, intuition, and emotion – of what he himself holds to be meaningful and valuable. In Nathan's view it is paramount that he

carefully evaluate the processes of his learning, so that he will pursue a life that is joyful and fulfilling.

Narrative and the learning self in process. Aimed at relating how he viewed himself in relation to socio-ecological justice, Nathan discussed how important learning experiences over time have caused him to narrate himself differently. Nathan views the ability to be honest and truthful with oneself as developing over time. As a result of important learning experiences in his life, Nathan feels he has taken up a more deliberate approach to illuminating and addressing his identity, values, and intentions. Notably, Nathan regards an experience with depression as a catalyst to coming into (or actualizing) himself. In the following, Nathan narrates the way he sees his socio-ecological justice learning reflected in his sense of himself. A learning process that has involved excavating an idea, generated from without, of what he ought to be; thus, creating an opening for Nathan to more honestly address who he is.

I feel my values are more me now than they were then [the space of time in which Nathan pursued a career in Commerce]. I think that I was trying to compromise to someone else's concept of what people should be. Now I believe I am more honest and truthful about who I am and what my intentions are. I feel that I, well I spend considerably more time now reflecting on what I do than what I did then; and, I spend considerably more time now trying to break down the negativity in my life, and why it is a negativity, and how to reverse that process. So I think that is something that I did not do in the past; that over time I began doing for reasons – well, some reasons are known, I mean a few years ago I was severely depressed and I had to take stock of my life, and it is something that I continually have to do. So that was one of the things that, one of the reasons why now I take a

considerable amount of time to do that ... and why I try to be honest with myself
(Interview1).

I would say that the effect, I hope the effect has made me a better person; it has made me search out the better of answers, the better of two choices or ten choices or fifteen choices
(Interview 2).

The way Nathan narrated himself shifted through his learning toward socio-ecological justice. While he has emerged from this shift with a positive sense of himself and his life-course, the transition has proven difficult. That which Nathan needed to overcome was a reified narrative that people ought to aspire toward social status and financial gain: a narrative that was embedded in his peer relationships as a youth, as well as symbolized in many other forms in Nathan's intersubjective experience. As Nathan questioned the narrative that led him into the field of commerce, he elected to look inside in order to replace values of status and purchasing power with values he perceived were better aligned with who he really is.

Final comments. As with all of the participants, the course of Nathan's engagement with socio-ecological justice has been marked by tensions with discordant social, cultural, and political factors at work on his life. However, as a result of the struggle, Nathan feels like the meanings and values he has fostered through the learning process have guided his life-course in a positive direction: one that he feels resonates with who he is, and reflects his sense of civic responsibility.

Lauren

Lauren is a twenty-year-old university student and dedicated activist. Lauren spent her developmental years in both urban and rural settings, early recognizing cultural and value distinctions that characterize each of these spaces. Lauren identifies as Caucasian, female, and

middle class. She does not identify with a particular religion, but wonders if permaculture could be considered a religion of sorts. Through the data gathering process, Lauren shared how intersubjective experiences within the rural and urban settings had affected a sense of belonging and well-being. Relating a trained, intimate attention to how these experiences had impacted and informed her life, Lauren indicated how this attention has been and continues to be employed in articulating a philosophical ground for her life. On several occasions, Lauren made reference to this “underlying philosophy,” which serves as a compass as she navigates day-to-day experiences (Interview 1). As one might anticipate, in Lauren’s depiction the road to establishing such a philosophical ground has not been straightforward or uncomplicated, yet it has proven invaluable in developing a sense of who she is.

Intersubjective experiences. As Lauren contemplated the types of factors that had impacted her, she tended to refer to the nature of the influences in general terms. That is to say, rather than focusing on the specificity of intersubjective experiences, she sought to elaborate more generalized accounts of social, cultural, and ecological spaces of her learning in relation to socio-ecological justice. For instance, Lauren provides a backdrop to her learning contending that socio-ecological concerns have precipitated a widespread pessimism, which she observes throughout her social milieus. In this example, Lauren identifies a broad reading of intersubjective experiences, which taken together have guided her to this assessment of the social consciousness. As Lauren’s contribution unfolded, she identified more specifically influences that have shaped her learning. The local activist community is one such intersubjective setting Lauren identifies as contributing to her learning. Through Lauren’s engagement with the community she was provided a source of information and collective action toward socio-ecological justice aims; however, she still felt a need to establish her own meanings and values

even as they somewhat diverged from tendencies Lauren observed within the community.

Below, Lauren introduces her perception of a pessimism reflected in the social consciousness.

Um, I think given that like once you start dissecting everything that's going on in our society, like it doesn't really leave you with a lot of hope. It is nice to have a reason to believe that it is possible to have a different way of living (Interview 1).

Lauren relates how a thin level of pessimism may be gleaned from the media, anecdotal conversations, and other daily experiences; but that she recognizes a deeper, more informed level of pessimism within a burgeoning body of activist research and writing that she accesses in her learning pursuit. Lauren references these intersubjective spaces below in responding to a question of how she had arrived at such a perception of diminished hope.

Well, initially it would have been like pointed out to me through you know through the media. ... So there is always this air of pessimism in the media, but it goes deeper than that (Interview 1).

Um I think it's really through experience, just the majority of conversations that you hear, just like passerbys, or you know on television shows, or conversations that you have with people. People tend to be very pessimistic about X – whatever situation. ... Um, and then, just if you go through like a bookstore or if you're browsing the internet, the majority of stuff is going to be about either things that are wrong with the world or kind of these very superficial solutions to something that's wrong (Interview 1).

Um once you start reading into how our society actually functions; how you know say food systems function; how what they call a democracy, you know, actually functions; you know how the way the developing world is living, it's affecting the developing world. You know, when you start looking into all of these things, you know, sure it looks good from

here – from our vantage point it looks good – but, in general, for the other ninety percent of the population, not to mention all of the other organisms that are living on the planet, it’s completely a different story (Interview 1).

More explicitly addressing intersubjective influences that have contributed to the above perspective, Lauren references an “underground” community of writers and researchers who have guided her thinking. While, in this case, Lauren emphasizes literature provided by activist writers, this too could be considered a form of interpersonal engagement.

Um I think that it’s probably that sort of slowly evolving sort of underground current of sort of individuals who have done research into where this, like what’s going on; and have written books for, you know, that kind of thing to bring it to awareness. I think that people also just kind of have a general sense of like doom and gloom, that things aren’t right to begin with. ... there are, you know, writers and activists and people like that who are sort of slowly developing this body of literature that has a sort of alternate perspective (Interview 1).

Communities of activists also serve as face-to-face interpersonal contributors to Lauren’s socio-ecological justice learning. In Lauren’s view, the above-mentioned sense of pessimism similarly penetrates the activist circles and spaces she engages. For Lauren, the presence of the pessimism is connected to a tendency toward leveling specific accusations against individuals rather than conducting a more systematic critique of underlying causes. Lauren identifies this tendency, in particular, among activist groups where a strict code of sustainable behaviors is imposed.

I think it is easier to blame [] individuals than to blame the system because if you start seriously critiquing the system, then we would have to think about changing it. Whereas, if

we are just blaming individuals then it's, um you know, you could pass it off as a personality influence. But, you know, the contrast of that, like you can't blame individuals for the system that they live in. It wasn't like you are the one who made it this way: it was generations and generations, you know, billions of people making certain decisions. ... Um and I think that is a big problem with a lot of activism is that there is a lot of mindsets going around that: "oh," you know, "you are driving your car today, so you are contributing to global warming." You know, that's a very obvious example, but there's a whole host of other ones. But you have to look a lot deeper than that, it's not so much about convincing individuals to change their mind about driving cars as it is about making a system where that is not (I don't know if I want to say possible) yeah, possible; where it's, where people don't find it necessary to drive the car (Interview 1).

With regards to the importance of place as intersubjective experience, Lauren spoke to the significance of a local bookstore as a site to explore alternative or "underground" print materials and keep up to date on local activist events. Although she views her passion for environmental activism as a long-standing personal attribute (briefly referencing her family's influence), Lauren recognizes how it has developed in relation to a variety of activism locations she has experienced.

Um well one thing I discovered Alternative Conversations [pseudonym] ... and I was like "ooh books." And these are all, you know, interesting. And it was like, really I didn't know that about the food system or that kind of thing. So just having an alternative media outlet was a big thing. Um I was always kind of interested in environmental issues right from the get-go. Um so whenever there was, whenever there was something that came up, like I would see a poster for a meeting, like, you know, the first Green Life [pseudonym]

meeting there, and some of the Tar Sands conferences last year and stuff. I would just sort of, you know, go out to them and see what they were about. And I was sort of starting to realize that my, that my perspective on things was sort of slowly starting to change. Um I think I was already thoroughly aware of what was going on just because my family is fairly, they put a lot of effort into educating themselves on these sorts of issues (Interview 1).

Likewise, experiences in nature, and in contrast to the built environment of the city, are an important contributor to Lauren's development as an activist. Tracing the intersubjective experiences of her learning back to before she got involved in activism, Lauren highlights experiencing what she describes as a "meaningful life," which, for Lauren, is tied to being close to nature. Upon moving to the city, Lauren aligned herself with the activist aims due to the incommensurability of the meanings and values she grew up and those she saw as underlying the social and spatial arrangements of the city. In the following, Lauren responds to a question of why she was drawn to searching for deeper understandings of socio-ecological justice.

Um well I think it was because I was, ... people in general don't find it attractive because it requires a lot of um having to question yourself, critique your own beliefs, and that kind of thing. ... I found it attractive because I had already sort of experienced a bit of a more, I don't want to compare it really, but what I saw as a meaningful life: just sort of living on an acreage and sort of I guess it's experiencing nature firsthand and that kind of thing. And then, moving to the city and having to compare that to, you know, the constant traffic and um people always, people always being more worried about what other people think than, you know, like their own personal developments and stuff like that. So when I saw that

contrast, that made it um like it was kind of only natural to start asking questions about why that was (Interview 1).

Speaking further to her learning as a youth, Lauren identifies interpersonal relationships and her reading of philosophy as additional intersubjective experiences informing her socio-ecological learning. Presented below, Lauren illuminates these through responding to a question of how a committed practice of self-evaluation came to be in her daily life.

So I think just through the people that I was raised with, I got used to being fairly critical about my thought processes very early. And then, that just sort of became a habit I guess. Um so, and I was always interested in reading philosophy when I was younger. One of the major themes in philosophy is, you know, making sure that you have to question your own beliefs a lot to make sure that they are fairly solid (Interview 1).

Through her discussion of intersubjective experiences impacting her socio-ecological justice learning, Lauren emphasized the interpersonal and place-specific influences of her youth growing up on an acreage and those of activist communities she engages at present. While Lauren did not speak at length about any specific family member or activist group, she described the influence of activists in general as offering both knowledge and relationships that have informed her learning. Across these experiences, and reflecting a feeling of urgency, Lauren began by sharing her perception of a widespread pessimism linked to fears of social and ecological calamity. This she later contrasted with her perception of what contributes to a “meaningful life:” drawing on her experience growing up. It is through illuminating these intersubjective experiences that Lauren outlined the development of her learning and action toward socio-ecological justice.

The learning self. Events of learning discussed by Lauren often involved a deliberate, self-motivated drive towards new forms of understanding and acting, which she articulated in terms of an “underlying philosophy.” However, as illuminated in the following excerpts, and similar to Cynthia and Nathan, the role of personal struggle (intellectual and emotional) was similarly viewed as a central factor in the process.

Yeah, it’s very challenging like mentally and emotionally to see your perspective changing to other things because you have to let go of a lot of you know deeply held beliefs that you had, and that’s always difficult. Um, so there was definitely that aspect of it (Interview 1).

Lauren’s dedication to reflexively unpacking and reformulating her set of beliefs has proven difficult, but it has provided a measure of confidence that she is on the right track. This suggests that, for Lauren, learning is not absolute or finalized, but involves trial and error, moving forward and back, and experimenting with different possibilities for understanding and acting in the world. Although Lauren views her development process to be fraught with challenges, as indicated below, she holds that it has been nonetheless worthwhile.

Yeah, I found it was, I found it was very annoying that I was like that for a long time, because I wasn’t, I had a hard time finding as you said like some sense of groundedness. ... I was eager to latch onto a certain set of beliefs and just sort of go with it, but then I would question it a bit and it wouldn’t really hold true. So, I was frustrated by that. Um, but after awhile, the more and more I read, the more ideas I started to build up. And I think that I probably, you know, that I am right now fairly satisfied that they [set of beliefs] have got some sort of basis in fact or whatever. So um, over time I would say that it was worth all of the frustration and all of the effort (Interview 1).

Through Lauren's learning process, she has come to articulate an aim of establishing a sound philosophical ground as the central focus of her learning. Notably, Lauren cites self-critique as a key component to developing this ground. For Lauren, once the ground is found to be steady, then a sense of a vocation naturally comes into one's perceptual field.

... once you build up your sort of underlying philosophy about life and you find sort of that ground that sort of always holds steady no matter how much you question it, then anything that you continue to build on top of that must sort of fit into that vocation. Um, it's kind of, I don't know, it's really not a process that you would really think about really, it's just kind of automatic. And I think that probably everybody does that to a certain extent, but a lot of people haven't necessarily been self-critical to the point where they kind of build up themselves on very wobbly ground (Interview 1).

Um, so I think it is just kind of an automatic process that everybody goes through; that once you have sort of that groundedness set up for yourself, that is just, everything else just sort of gets built on top of that (Interview 1).

Offering further insight into how her learning process operates, Lauren elaborated on how inquiry and critical analysis factor as key components. In her description, as Lauren encounters arguments that are contrary to her meanings and values, she is compelled to reconcile the dissonance through conducting research. In the following, Lauren expresses how this dissonance registers to her perception.

The majority of the time – at least this is how it had been in the past – I tend to know that I disagree with it [something Lauren had read] but then I don't know why I disagree with it; and then I have to go back and do like further research and think about it until I've figured it out. Um, like now more and more often I am, I guess I've gotten better at just sort of like

on-the-ball critical thinking so I am able to figure out what my counter argument is right on the spot. But usually it involves me like having to, having to go and like actually sit down somewhere and think about it and do research and like look up, you know, other people's takes on that issue or that kind of thing (Interview 2).

Um, I think it's kind of like an intuition thing um where I have kind of already formed sort of a philosophy about um how life ought to be or, you know, that kind of thing. So when something doesn't concur with that, it's kind of like a gut reaction that I disagree with it. But then I want to make sure that that's not just a gut reaction, that it's actually founded in, you know – you know, it's actually logical. So I'll go back and do further research (Interview 2).

Throughout Lauren's discussion of her learning, she emphasizes her objective to articulate a sound life philosophy and conduct analyses that align with her socio-ecological meanings and values. Below, Lauren touches on her approach when coming up against ostensibly logical yet unsettling arguments. As she begins to address the topic, Lauren indicates her suspicion that logic is not the only means to advancing learning.

... there's a lot of arguments that can appear logical, but they are based on like unfounded premises that like don't get, like you have to look for what the premise of the argument is that's not necessarily correct. And then, and that is not always obvious. ... like I don't take logic for granted or anything like that. I don't think logic is the only, you know, way of perceiving things. ... It's just that things that appear logical aren't always so (Interview 2).

Um, I guess sort of a general sense that, that you know just pure, straight logic doesn't really encompass everything (Interview 2).

Lauren's discussion of the fallibility of attending to situations through logic alone provided an entry point into considering how her learning has informed her decision making. Outlining this connection below, Lauren returns back to her emphasis on the intellect, citing a need to apply reason to situations in order to surface underlying issues: therefore, informing sound decision making.

Well I guess in those kinds of situations I would look for sort of, what's the, like what's the underlying issues here. Like the way I would reason through like that specific example is that, the underlying issue isn't so much that ethical clothing is really expensive or that, you know, most jobs that you're going to work at are, you know, unethical in some way. But rather it's more of a, it's more of an underlying systematic problem, that you are not going to solve yourself by, you know, buying clothes from The Healthy Choice (pseudonym) or working, you know, wherever. It's like everybody, like individuals have to participate in the system, so I guess it's more of an issue of making yourself aware of the underlying problems, and then figuring out what you are going to do about them. So I know there's a lot of people who are, you know, there are all these sort of innate paradoxes in their lifestyles and stuff, and they are just racked with guilt because of these problems (Interview 2).

It's, we can't really feel guilty for a system that we didn't create ourselves right. So it's more of an issue of figuring out, "well what would an alternative system that didn't, you know, force people to, you know, live these paradoxical lives?" And then figuring out, "how do we get from this system to that system?" (Interview 2)

As Lauren elaborates on her decision-making, she accounts for the presence of both the logic and emotion as potentially opposing factors, and having to somehow reconcile the division

or “paradox.” Through her discussion, Lauren comments on a facility in reorienting her thinking due to the critical personal reflection she undergoes in her decision-making process.

Oh yeah, it’s easier if you, if you’ve gotten to sort of like a point where you can pinpoint, you know, why you are thinking a certain way; then it definitely makes it easier to, you know, adjust your thinking if you have to or, you know, make reasonable decisions (Interview 2).

It depends on the circumstances whether it’s easy or not. Um, but I guess like that would happen when I’m, when I realize that ... like there is some sort of paradox in the way I’m thinking. ... it’s like if the more emotional is saying one thing and the more, you know, logical is saying another thing then there’s a bit of a paradox there. Then you would have to, you know, figure out what was the, like why there was that paradox, and then just move from there (Interview 2).

Lauren provides a specific example, endeavoring to clarify her discussion on this point.

I can think of a couple of examples. The vegetarian thing for one: not so much the becoming vegetarian, but the reasons why I was vegetarian that kind of shifted from, you know, just being like eating animals is bad to, you know, just like, figuring out where a person’s responsibility for, you know, matters outside of oneself. And that definitely, like it affected how I thought about like other issues relating to, you know, ecology or whatever. So yeah, so yeah that has definitely happened before where it’s, I’ve encountered some sort of, you know, eureka moment or, you know, read something ... where I made a definite shift in the way I thought about things (Interview 2).

Lauren views her decision-making process as a means to take responsibility for her life: to bring her thinking and decision making into conscious awareness and critical reflection.

As described below, Lauren views this process in terms of becoming more engaged with her life.

Oh absolutely, because then if you start doing that you become like consciously aware of how you make decisions and what are like the underlying reasons why you think in a certain way. So like if you are aware of that then it's like you are probably, you know, able to make decisions that are (well not better) but you are able to make like conscientious decisions about ... Um it's like, I don't know, it seems like it would be more like there is merit in that because that means they are taking more responsibility for your life, right (Interview 2).

If you are trying to figure out the root of why you are thinking the way you are thinking then you're taking more responsibility for your life and your decision-making process moves up from like sub-consciousness to consciousness. So it's, I don't know, I guess like, I guess it makes you more engaged with your life and what you're, and what you're doing (Interview 2).

Lauren's idea of being "more engaged" in one's life links back to the foundational process of developing an "underlying philosophy," which she elucidates throughout her contribution. To be engaged in one's life, for Lauren, is synonymous with critically and reflexively developing a personal life-philosophy. While in several instances, Lauren discusses the role of intuition and emotion, as well considering the potential limitation of logic, she overwhelmingly articulates her learning in terms of cognitive processes. It appears that Lauren is aware of the presence of emotion in her learning, but does not seem to actively engage the emotional or embodied dimension as she seeks to develop her underlying philosophy. That being said, the question of hope reoccurs in Lauren's contribution, suggesting that her learning process is somehow tied to this embodied attribute.

Narrative and the learning self in process. While Lauren spoke at length about her process of learning related to socio-ecological justice, she spoke little about how she perceived herself through this learning. That is, she seldom spoke to (or narrated) how her socio-ecological learning contributed to the way she views her self in the world. An important exception to this, reported below, is Lauren's comment about seeing herself as a "misfit" within dominant social spaces, and how her interest in activism is tied to her search for belonging.

Let me see, I guess this is two years ago that I had completely sort of uprooted from my home by Forest Lake [pseudonym], moved to the city and was sort of on my own for the first time. So I was very very lonely. I was always kind of a bit of a misfit so I didn't really make friends, and I didn't really make friends very easily. So that was, you know, a big issue. Um a lot of my sort of motivation beyond sort of the research for, you know, deeper meaning in environmentalism, a lot of my motivation was in like looking for people who shared, you know, similar interests or were sort of looking for the same things I was. Um, so yeah, I think like loneliness and feeling alienated from the people around me was a big issue. You know, and going back to the whole idea about people being very concerned about fashion and that kind of thing here makes you feel vey isolated and cut off from ... yeah, I'm sure they feel isolated and cut off from each other too, but. So um, so that was a big thing (Interview 1).

Rather than accommodating herself to value and behavioral cues Lauren perceived in the city, she set out to locate communities and spaces that affirmed her sense of self – as well as resonated with what she holds to be meaningful in life. As a result of Lauren's pursuit of belonging, an array of groups and resources became accessible, allowing her to further her questioning and enhance her understandings of socio-ecological justice.

While Lauren is reluctant to make direct statements regarding the way she views herself in relation to others, she narrates herself as having avoided some of the traps that have ensnared others' meanings and values. Lauren outlines a number of preoccupations in which people (particularly in the city) tend to get entangled: particularly, through allowing themselves to become transfixed with appearances and personal aggrandizement. In the following excerpt, Lauren draws a connection between avoiding these traps and fostering meaningful relationships in her life.

In general it's been a positive thing because I can see an opportunity to develop, you know, relationships that are actually quite meaningful or do things that are quite, you know, meaningful to you and that kind of thing. Um, it can be frustrating because – and as I say this I don't want to like sort of place myself above other people – but a lot of people, you know, in the city haven't, you know, are still sort of caught up in the mindset of having to, you know, get from step to step to step in accomplishing their plan. So it does tend to alienate you from other people after a bit. But, you know, and that's not to say that, you know, I'm above all these people. It has more to do with, you know, your life-circumstances. And if people happen to, you know, be born into, you know, a different family or into different circumstances then, you know, there's always that chance that they would evolve differently as well. But also it can be frustrating just in terms of, you know, developing relationships with other people. But in general it's, uh, I find that it's worth it to have to go through that process and work a bit harder to make friends or, you know, find work that is actually, that you actually feel is meaningful and that kind of thing (Interview 1).

In addition to these excerpts in which Lauren narrates herself in relation to her socio-ecological justice learning, she contended that her learning will never be complete; and, that her hope is to be able to inspire others to pursue their own development. In this way, Lauren spoke of a self in process, growing (or evolving) through ongoing learning and the drive toward what is meaningful in life.

Final comments. Woven throughout Lauren’s contribution is a detailing of her conscious and diligent endeavor toward building an “underlying philosophy.” Yet there is more to Lauren’s story: namely, that the terms of this philosophy are such that it must provide a framework for transforming pernicious social, cultural, and political arrangements that presently exist; offer hope; and aid Lauren in fostering meaningful relationships and aspirations in her life. It is towards the aim of realizing this transformation – so that people should not have to live innately “paradoxical lives” (Interview 2) – that Lauren engages in socio-ecological justice learning.

Focus Group

The overarching aim of the data-gathering process was to explore a method of drawing to the surface influential socio-ecological justice learning experiences that have impacted participants’ life-course. In particular, the study was concerned with experiences that have had a bearing on the way participants engage socio-ecological justice in their day-to day lives, including in relation to how they understand their own learning and how they narrate themselves in relation to the world. The vision behind seeking transparency of these types of influential lived-events was to better understand socio-ecological justice learning and to generate openings for study, imagining new ways of taking up socio-ecological justice learning. Data were gathered in two stages: stage one involved two interviews in which participants individually sorted through memories of influential lived experiences in order to articulate an account of their

present engagement with socio-ecological justice; in stage two, a focus group was convened to create a space for “collective witnessing” among participants as they discussed the lived experiences illuminated in stage one (Boler, 1999).

During the focus group, in order to facilitate the type of dialogue required for the possibility of collective witnessing, each of the participants gave a brief account of their work in the one-to-one component of the data gathering process. As the participants’ stories unfolded in the space of the focus group, each participant was invited to connect co-participants’ stories to their own lived-experiences, and add insight along the way. It was hoped that the result would be the co-creation of a broadened range of inquiry that could inform new ways of engaging and seeking clarity about socio-ecological justice. Although the participants had, in the past, conversed with others about issues of socio-ecological justice, it was novel that the dialogue centered on stories of how each participant had come to current meanings and values related to the topic. The analysis of the focus group data seeks to illuminate moments during the discussion where participants established symmetries along the lines of their experiences that might aid in the co-development of new understandings and potentially new behaviors. These symmetries included a focus on travel, academic study, and place in relation to learning; an array of socio-ecological challenges; activist communities; and the fluidity of identity. At the conclusion of the focus group, there was a consensus among participants of the value provided through listening to and connecting with one another’s stories. This value was articulated in terms of its potential as a vehicle for learning and, simply, as a rare opportunity to listen to others and be listened to.

In the focus group reporting, I begin with participants' accounts of learning linked to the way intersubjective experiences connected to travelling had provoked powerful emotions, influencing their socio-ecological justice learning.

Nathan: Do you really ever notice that when you are traveling – because I've just had my first major traveling experience not that long ago – I noticed that when I came back that there was a rush of emotion that had to be dealt with before I was able to really do anything else. I'm still feeling it, I'm still going through it. I'm just wondering if that was something that you ... associate with your travels and kind of in this in-between period that you find so frustrating?

Cynthia: Yeah, for sure that's like the transition period of like reflection and trying to redirect and cope with all of the new information that you have in the experience that you have had. ... What are you finding? Like what are you finding you are going through in terms of transitioning? [to Nathan]

Nathan: Well, for me – like you are talking about new experiences – for me what, like myself I have changed and have become a different person because of my travels.

Nathan's account of the emotional and personally transformative impact of his travelling experience stemmed from witnessing conditions in Guatemala that, although he had an understanding of, once directly experienced, took on new emphasis. Cynthia viewed this correlation between travel and powerful learning as an avenue to connect with Nathan's discussion.

Nathan: I was aware of most of what I saw. It has been a reinforcement of it in many ways and that's where I'm finding that my personal change has come. Because I have never realized that some of these ideas that have been presented to me, that I'm aware of, or that I have

thought about, or that I accept were really as strong as they are. Like, that they exist as prevalent in other cultures, or are so much more prevalent in other cultures than are here.

Nathan: And for me that was one of the major shocks was the degree at which I saw this.

Cynthia: Yeah, for sure. I think that's why like my academia and travel continue to cycle, because they affirm one another.

As participants further discussed the learning potential existent in travel, an interest in the role of experiencing unfamiliar places was raised. In the following Nathan and Cynthia suggest that through observing attributes of unfamiliar places, it is easier to be aware of problematic socio-ecological circumstances because they have not yet been subsumed within what is taken as commonplace.

Nathan: I find it's more difficult locally than it is when you travel because, especially when you are processing in that idea stage before you really enter action, um because you are so unconsciously unaware of your surroundings that you, it's much easier to brush things off than it is if you are in somewhere that is unique and strange.

Cynthia: For sure, I think that happens definitely. Every time I come back it's always like physical things about the landscape that shocked me ... but also the social landscape: there are things that you might get accustomed to and then you come back and you kind of have to adjust again to social norms. And like, so then you start to kind of, you know, question, or those things that maybe at one point in your life you unconsciously accepted as truth no longer are unconscious. You become very conscious of them.

As the conversation proceeded, Lauren was drawn into the dialogue by the idea of social norms being called into conscious engagement through different intersubjective experiences:

namely, those of familiar and unfamiliar places, or the practices and norms associated with those places.

Lauren: And what about like social norms that you suddenly became conscious of?

Cynthia: Like specifically, I mean the easiest thing like being a woman in kind of a very machoist environment really changes the way, you know, you like, like I had to be really careful about going out in certain places by myself, what I was aware of, who I was walking with. I had to be really conscious of those things living in Mexico. ... You can't act like you do when you're in Saskatoon, right. So that really, that was a huge shift for me coming back and being able to like go back into, going back into an environment where I was safer to kind of walk around and talk to who I wanted to and not having to worry about things like that. If I was going to go out dancing at the bar, you know that's not something that like I had to be really conscious of, you know. So I mean that's like socially in terms of understanding like a gender thing I guess that came strong for me.

Nathan: ... building off of that one, just being a guy who was with a group of girls in a country that is like that: because Guatemala is almost exactly the same way. You get used to doing certain things automatically. Like, if one of them [female companion travelers] wants to go out, they always ask for someone to, especially if it's after dark, they will ask ... if the guy can go with them. Or, you are told to have a guy go with you. And you are just use to offering. It's like, "hey do I need to come with?" And, you are here and offering, "well I need to go to the washroom," "do you need me to come with you?" [Laughter] I mean it's not really something you have to think about.

Drawing a parallel to the gravity Nathan attributes to justice concerns he experienced in Guatemala, Lauren describes a heavy weight imposed by the socio-ecological justice imperative

she feels in her life. Through Lauren's description of this weight, she was able to connect with Nathan regarding their feeling of the seeming insurmountable challenge that is before them.

However, as portrayed in the following excerpts, both participants conclude that there is a slight ray of hope streaming from the far end of their perception.

Lauren: I'm not sure exactly how this relates but like I have a tough time with it just like, I don't know, I've done so much reading I guess over the years about like how many problems and like issues that there are in the world, and that it's like too much for any one person to be able to grasp. And so like sometimes it just, like, makes you feel like really just, I don't know, out of place. ... So like how do you, like, how do you live with that knowledge ... just like how can you deal with the fact that like things could get really bad without, you know, also losing your sense of just like, you know, happy to be alive?

Nathan: How do, you know, like sometimes I get the feeling that my actions are basically a Band-Aid, like it's not actually going to heal anything it's just stopping the bleeding, or slowing it down.

Lauren: Sometimes like it feels like I don't know we're living, you know, the "movie version" of Lord of the Rings, you know, where like everything is just like this big epic thing [laughter], and it just like seems so hopeless and I don't know, like there is that like kind of, there is like a ray of hope but it's just like everything just, like, takes on this degree of just like, epicness.

Nathan: It's off in the distance, and as you walked towards it, it keeps on moving further off in the distance [laughter].

Lauren: So that is something that I experience now and again.

Expanding on this felt sense of “epicness,” the conversation moved to the participants’ assessment of the emergence of contemporary socio-ecological justice movements at the global level.

Cynthia: I think that the issues are shifting. Um, I think the issues are shifting but I think that people have always had struggle with social and environmental things.

Nathan: I think that social component has existed for a lot longer than the ecological component. Um, depends how you think about it.

Lauren: We are also dealing with issues on a global scale that we haven’t before. ... Except for maybe like the global wars or something like that. But just in terms of like, like worldwide environmental devastation and like worldwide social issues, and just like all of these themes and you know the gap between the rich and the poor and all of these themes they have been happening for approximately 10,000 years on a more localized level.

Cynthia: People are more likely to be able to engage in an issue if it’s personal to them, right. And sometimes the global doesn’t feel personal because it’s not local it’s not right in front of you. So that’s one way that now may be it’s really different.

Nathan: Yeah I think that now there is more, well I’m going to kind of contradict you here, I think it has existed on a global level to a degree, it’s just that there hasn’t been that global awareness, because now we are able to understand what is happening around the world and see it and experience it. ... I think one thing that has changed in this whole discussion though is the understanding that what we do in Canada affects someone in Australia, and what happens in China affects us; and, that we cannot think of things in an insular manner anymore.

As conversation on this topic proceeds, Lauren raises the problem of navigating a discordant ideological field among communities of activists she works within. Stemming from Lauren's introduction, the participants offer complementary thoughts, contending that closed ideological stances tend to be born out of recognizing the full weight of socio-ecological calamity in the world. The phenomena of such closed ideological stances are likened to religious dogma, and are considered in relation to the way these entrenched positions are connected to identity.

Lauren: ... there's been this kind of like emerging debate in like some of the stuff that I've been getting involved in. In, I guess you could call it like the more of an anarchist version of things, where things are more on the radical side. And you know people are more of the mentality that like, you know, "the system is not working." "We have to like – reforming the system is not going to work – we have to like completely have a new system." And then there's this slightly different school of thought that is more along the lines of, "but this is the system we've got right now, um we have to try to work from within that." So there are these two different like, I guess you could call them ideologies that I've just been like coming up against a lot in the last few months. And it's just like, I don't know, it just keeps on getting me thinking about how people can get so dogmatic about a certain ideology. And that they don't, and that they become completely closed off to like what other people have to say.

Cynthia: I think you've tapped like a really interesting, just like a really interesting topic, and that's like what I label as fundamentalist environmentalism, where it's like you're shut off to any other like way of thinking except for your own. Because you just need some kind of certainty, because there is so much badness around you. So then people become fundamentalist about their way of thinking because it's their way of coping with this situation

being so, so extreme. You know, it's like it's one way of coping. People do it in religion too, right there trying to cope with things so they become really extremist in religion.

Lauren: And that's where I've sort of started to like think how it's like so not useful too like think of people in like groups as much as we do. Like we have this compulsion all the time to, like divide people up into groups.

Through the discussion, the participants illuminated a connection between fitting into delineated groups and the role this plays in the way individuals narrate themselves. While such a practice depicts a concretized mode of narrating oneself, Lauren questioned this practice at its foundation. As a result, Lauren created a space for participants to discuss a less static rendering of the self, and how it is influenced by socio-ecological justice learning.

Nathan: I think kind of dealing with the whole religion that Cynthia was bringing up, ... I think kind of dealing with what you are talking about, about religion it kind of, it's kind of the same way that many people define themselves through their faith. That especially on the extremist side, people are defining themselves through their actions through their cause.

Lauren: When you said that thing about, like, how like it does have something to do with identity, and immediately it may be think of just like the Facebook thing. And just how like it appears like people need to identify themselves as a certain person. So they're like, well I like, you know, this and this and this on Facebook and that's my identity. And it's like, well identities can be a lot more fluid than that; so, or flexible or something.

The question of fluid identities invited the group to address ways in which their own identities may be understood as fluid. As a result, each participant was able to relate to the idea that their identity was more fluid than static; and, each perceived a link between the way they narrated themselves and their socio-ecological justice learning. In the following, participants find

common ground in terms of how socio-ecological justice learning has impacted the way they narrate themselves, and how their learning has contributed to a divergence between their own narratives of who they are and others' perceptions of who they are.

Cynthia: And I think that's, I mean that kind of ties into what I was talking about, travel is that.

As your identity ... as you begin to realize how fluid identity is, when you come back to a place and things haven't changed as much or people remember you a certain way and they haven't been with you as your identity has been shifting, to be really really difficult to be able to incorporate that part of yourself into your self and into your everyday life and into the way you think and into the way that you talk.

Nathan: I think it's true with just time. I mean over a long enough period of time we all change and develop new identities. And one of the things that I noticed myself doing is, kind of, a chameleon act where, yeah with some friends, with some people, I act completely differently than I do with others.

Lauren: Well it's interesting because I noticed that like I do that around my family or like the people that I've known the longest, more, because like my family have grown up with a certain version of me. And like, when I like start to evolved as a person and they're just not keeping up. So like they always expect me to act a certain way, so then I'm more likely to follow along with that because sometimes it's just easier to go with the flow of like how your relationships had been up to that point; instead of just like being like oh I'm not that person anymore. So, that's kind of interesting.

As the focus group reached a conclusion, the conversation shifted into a collective reflection on the research process itself. All of the participants found the experience to be valuable. That which was highlighted in discussing the focus group process was the opportunity

to listen to one another and connect with one another's stories. For Cynthia, the metaphor of a cycle seemed most appropriate to articulate her experience. In the following excerpt, the cycle signifies an ongoing process of telling stories, making connections, and learning. Notably, Cynthia's description of the cyclical learning process bears a close resemblance to the description of "narrative learning" articulated by Goodson et al. (2010).

Cynthia: I do think it's interesting that you're talking about, like, it seems very easy to connect into other people's stories. ... I think that is like an effective way of learning or telling stories or trying to connect things that may be seen in very different but they actually are very closely related. Like what you are talking about with the interviews I guess. All of this stuff just seems so cyclical, I keep seeing circles, like cycles.

Cynthia: I think what you're saying is has a lot of truth in it Vince because what it does is it sets up an open mind because it gives you perspective from which to kind of value what each person is saying; so, makes it easier to listen when you can maybe understand their learning, their learning process and the thought process. You know because your learning and your thought process are connected right. So then it's like, if I understand better where they're [co-participants in such a process as undertaken in the study] coming from, and their thought process, and how the learning occurs, then it's like okay I can understand where this perspective is coming from too. And, you know, where their thinking is coming from. So I think it is valuable. It's really valuable.

For Nathan, the focus group component outweighed the individual process aimed at surfacing each participant's learning; and suggested that rather than undertake the initial stage of the research, his experience would have been enhanced through convening multiple focus group sessions in order to achieve a more detailed sharing of each participant's learning experience.

Nathan: I think that it would be very valuable for the start of a course, but I think you would want more focus groups than just one. Um, to me I would have preferred ... if we would've had three or four focus groups, each an hour or two in length, we could've gone into so much more detail than we have.

Vince: Even in lieu of the individual interviews?

Nathan: Yes. Because, there are things here that I am thinking about that I just didn't think about when we did the individual interviews, simply because of the type of day I was having, of no one helping me recall a memory. So it's something that would be extremely helpful at the beginning of the course, but just more of it.

For Lauren, the value of the focus group experience was found in the care in listening it fostered. Lauren emphasizes this value of through stating that such circumstances are rare, and that there is an increasing awareness of our collective ability to listen one another.

Lauren: And it's really nice to like have this experience where you've facilitated this atmosphere where we are like listening to each other, because this happens like not enough. And I think that that's been like talked about a fair bit about how we've got this issue where we have a hard time listening to each other completely. So. You know so it's nice to be able to like facilitate that kind of situation.

Final Comments. The value that participants associated with listening to one another's stories suggests that the focus group went some way to facilitating the type of "collective witnessing" Boler articulates (1999). Throughout the dialogue, participants were able to find symmetries in their socio-ecological justice learning along the lines of: intersubjective experiences, discussing the influence of travel and activist communities; movements of the learning self, concerning the process of becoming conscious of and troubling social norms; and,

a correlation between participants' learning and the fluid manner in which they have come to narrate themselves. While participants may have been apprehensive at the outset of the discussion, through illuminating powerful learning experiences, and sharing conceptual and emotional responses to those experiences, they created a space in which these disclosures were accepted and encouraged. It is notable, for instance, that Laura and Nathan were able to find a connection in relation to the emotional weight each had felt as a result of their learning toward socio-ecological justice. The support created within the collective space and the commitment to carefully listen to one another seemed to be a catalyst, enabling participants to generate new insights into their meaning and values related to socio-ecological justice, and as a result create openings into new forms of learning around justice issues in the world.

Chapter Five

Discussion

In the opening introduction to this work I expressed an intimately held view of education as a vehicle for responding to global socio-ecological instability and degradation. The impetus of the study has been to explore openings into thinking about how education might better serve this vital function. Woven from a range of theoretical orientations, the study's framework aims to articulate a backdrop for socio-ecological justice learning. The central subject of the framework is the situated mind/brain/body learner – in motion and in transition – negotiating intersubjective experiences within influential social, cultural, and ecological contexts (Biesta, 1999; Boler, 1999; Ellsworth, 2005; Lave and Wenger, 1991; McKenzie, 2008; Weis and Fine, 2003). In the life-course of the learner, there are many significant lived experiences through which meanings and understandings emerge in relation to socio-ecological justice. These experiences of the learning self (Ellsworth, 2005) may serve to support or obstruct socio-ecological justice advocacy. Extending from these foundations, the study sought – through “narrative learning” (Goodson et al., 2010) and “collective witnessing” (Boler, 1999) – to bring past learning and newly emerging reflection into a collective conversation of the way socio-ecological justice has come into presence in the lives of three student-activists.

The study's conclusion is organized around the following questions: i) in what ways do gathered data interconnect with the types of learning articulated in the literature reviewed in the study? ii) What are the implications for the design and delivery of socio-ecological justice pedagogies? iii) What are some implications for future research?

Correlating Data and Theory: Implications for Socio-Ecological Justice Pedagogy

While many excerpts from participants' contributions correlate with the theory, a series of particularly salient connections are highlighted below. Ellsworth's (2005) description of "the learning self" has been a common idea woven throughout this work. The types of experiences that occupy Ellsworth's interest are those that guide the learning self "toward previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world" (p. 16). This conceptualization of learning is held, in this thesis, as instrumental to progressing toward a more socially and ecologically just future. To begin, the discussion will concentrate on depictions of these types of learning experiences and their relation to the theory. In particular, I will highlight data that links learning to interpersonal relationships, social norms as barriers, the possibility of "collective witnessing" (Boler, 1999), and socio-ecological places.

Mentorship and interpersonal relationships. The role of interpersonal relationships as mentorship emerged as an important intersubjective component to participant learning. In an early reflection, Cynthia makes reference to Sarah (a travelling companion met in Spain) as an entry point into tracing through her process of taking up new ways of thinking and being in the world. Cynthia's learning involved several pivotal relationships of this kind, which emerged in the course of the data gathering. Through relating each of the relationships, Cynthia illuminated a new dimension added to her sense of self in relation to socio-ecological justice. For example: Cynthia's relationship with Sarah provoked inquiry into the impact of her life-ways on others around the world; Julie Sams inspired Cynthia to get involved in the University's Women's Center; and Stephanie Smith empowered Cynthia via her scholarship in Women and Gender Studies and provided a valued lens for interpreting the world.

These experiences of the learning self exemplify the role and significance of interpersonal relationships in coming to understand ourselves in the world (Biesta, 1999; Feather, 2000). Indeed, Cynthia cited Sarah's established life-course, Julie Sam's passion for activism, and Stephanie Smith's innovative genius as sources of inspiration contributing to her learning. Moreover, each relationship described by Cynthia emerged within a specific place: Sarah in Spain, Julie in the context of the Women's Center, and Stephanie in the Department of Women and Gender Studies. The contexts of these relationships played an important role in the way the relationships developed and the impact they would have on Cynthia.

In a similar way, Lauren articulated her socio-ecological learning as being, to an extent, guided by the environmentalist leanings of her family, and engrained through an intimate, embodied relationship with place. These experiences led Lauren to intuit a view of a "meaningful life:" a perspective that came to bear upon Lauren's negotiation of social, cultural, and ecological contours of her life in the city. For Nathan, the value of civic responsibility was handed down from his parents; and, in particular, his grandparents for whom the experience of poverty had fostered an appreciation for community and reciprocity. Nathan emphasized the influence of his parents also in developing a disposition to critically assess his life and decision-making. During lively discussions held among Nathan's parents and their friends, Nathan would set himself to contribute (or compete) in the dialogue. This objective served as an early motivation for Nathan's engagement in matters beyond himself. The idea of civic responsibility and a value of learning perhaps enabled Nathan to redirect his aspirations from a path of financial gain to one of civic contribution and personal fulfillment in the field of education.

These findings support theorizing on socio-ecological justice learning that recognizes social contexts and the role of the interpersonal as powerful mediators in the process of coming

to understand ourselves and the world about us (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Hart, 2007; McKenzie, 2008; Weis and Fine, 2003). The meanings and values imbued at the contact point of our most influential relationships remain with us as we negotiate the myriad interpersonal encounters of our day-to-day lives. These relationships occur within increments of time and physical space, but also carry a quality that in some way or other remains, influencing our thoughts, actions, emotions, even our imaginations. Reflecting on the participants' contributions, it seems likely that effective socio-ecological justice education requires taking into account and engaging powerful interpersonal relationships in learners' lives – past and present. Furthermore, the heuristic process undertaken in the study, which was aimed at “storying” (Goodson et al, 2010) participants' learning, may offer the reader some ideas about how narrative activities may be employed as a potential pedagogical tool for engaging past and present interpersonal experiences.

Norms as barriers and the implication for identity. In Biesta's (1999) and Feather's (2000) discussion of the intersubjective, the theorists emphasize the constitutive influence of the community on the “emergence” of the individual, contending that this constitution is never fully recognized or recognizable to the individual. Consistent with Biesta and Feather, Boler (1999) draws attention to “emotional rules and expression,” existent within lived contexts, that reify “internal norms and values” at work within these spaces and relationships (p. xiii). Troubling the role of community norms and values in the course of his life, Nathan discussed his transition from seeking a career based on the pursuit of financial gain to one based on personal enrichment and civic responsibility. Nathan cited going through school together with a cohort of highly motivated classmates as a central influence on his early decision-making. Within the group dynamic (and reflecting outward norms), social status and monetary gain were projected as

prominent features of each member's imagined future. As Nathan's anticipated life began to manifest, he was faced with a conundrum as the lofty promises of the imagined future gave way to the reality of deep feelings of unhappiness. The result of this period of transition (marked by depression) was an increased awareness of the pervasiveness of unquestioned and/or unconscious meaning and values imposed from without, which has led Nathan to a careful observation and evaluation of the way these phenomena emerge in and through his life.

A parallel to Nathan's account, Cynthia described barriers she feels in professional, family, and social contexts to censor or silence deeply held socio-ecological meanings and values. Rather than perceiving these influential relationships as platforms for personal growth (enabling Cynthia to continue to become who she is) they are viewed as obstacles that must be negotiated. Lauren, too, illuminated a struggle to find venues that are supportive of inward examination and exploration aimed at socio-ecological justice learning. Rather than spaces to ask tough questions and experiment with understandings, those which Lauren found were communities that seemed to require acquiescence to outward norms and values in one form or another. Even as Lauren sought out communities embodying the spirit of activism, she related how these groups adapted their own forms of "emotional rules and expression" serving to demarcate membership within (Boler, 1999, p. xiii).

Building on Cynthia's comment about having to censor her critical analysis, during the focus group the three participants shared thoughts on experiencing a "fluid" aspect of identity. To this end, each participant expressed a performative or "chameleon" element in the way they tend to present themselves in various social settings. The shared perception was that in order to maintain amicable relations, forms of critique related to socio-ecological justice were necessarily silenced. One facet of this phenomenon – about which all participants felt strongly – resulted

from long-term relations expecting participants to remain as they were prior to pivotal learning experiences. All of the participants reported recognizing themselves taking up identity positions, with family and long-term friends, they might have occupied at earlier stages in their lives. These iterations of identity, personal growth, and censorship served as an area where the three participants could find common ground. Notably, the discussion of fluid identities enabled, at several instances during the focus group, personal connection between participants in relation to their learning.

The above discussion illuminates ways in which the privileging of normative meanings and values within social contexts can serve as a formidable barrier to socio-ecological justice learning and expression. Through the data gathering process, participants were invited to illuminate ways in which this type of disciplining operates in their lives. While the extent to which each participant is able to account for the impact of external norms may be limited (Feather, 2000), such an inquiry process may serve to mitigate the impact of the barriers. As the participants shared contexts in which they tend to disclose or reveal certain meanings and values, they created an opening to express the full extent of their conviction toward socio-ecological justice. In addition to this, participants created an opportunity to explicitly address the tension of learning to critique and reject social norms while at the same time having to live within them.

Collective witnessing. Boler's (1999) concept "collective witnessing" depicts a collaborative venue in which pervasive yet often-disregarded inequalities are brought to the forefront of inquiry and examination. Boler's "collective" is tasked with conducting a "testimonial reading" of the inequalities, opening to the possibility and implication of each individual's own complicity and responsibility (p. 166). This articulation of a learning context deliberately engages the discomfort and personal accounting that seem necessary for achieving

the aims of socio-ecological justice education. While a strict realization of Boler's vision of collective witnessing may not have been possible due to the scope of the study, a parallel may be drawn in relation to the type of learning environment that was created during the focus group. For Lauren, the key attribute of the focus group was the commitment to listening, which had provided the greatest possibility for learning and personal growth. Cynthia perceived a value in the opportunity to gain insight into the thought processes of others as a vehicle for achieving a clearer understanding of sometimes contested views. Nathan felt that the value of the focus group outweighed that of the individual interviews. Notably, within the space of the focus group, Nathan believed he was enabled to recall and reflect on memories that would have otherwise remained hidden.

These sentiments provide an indication of the way the collaborative conversation was perceived by the participants. Through the course of the focus group, each participant shared strikingly intimate accounts of their lived-experience, and the learning that had resulted. A clear example is found in Lauren's account of finding it difficult to address her own life and happiness in relation to the overwhelming aggregation of social and ecological issues she concerns herself with. Although Lauren wasn't able to conceptually reconcile this conundrum, her feelings were legitimated, and she was offered solidarity within the space of the group. Other such examples included: Nathan and Cynthia finding common ground reflecting on the embodied response to witnessing third-world poverty; the three participants discussing causes and ramifications of dogmatic approaches to activism; and, Cynthia's conceptualization of the "cycle" as a metaphor for the embodied learning process.

It is proposed here that the idea of "testimonial reading" offers a key contribution to theorizing around socio-ecological justice learning (Boler, 1999, p. 166). The reason, following

Boler, is that the impact of this learning often involves a powerful emotional response: one that is commonly associated with coming to view our ways of being in the world as problematic. As participants described their learning journey toward socio-ecological justice, in the interviews and focus group, it was clear that this learning was tied to tribulation in each individual's life. Therefore, the process of surfacing these learning experiences in the space of the focus group – in a rudimentary way – modeled a form of collective witnessing (Boler, 1999). In this way the focus group data provides some insight into the significance and possibility of actively generating collective spaces where learners can safely open to and experience the emotional implication of socio-ecological justice learning.

The role of socio-ecological places in learning. In Greenwood's (2003) theorizing on place and learning, he advocates a critical reading of our lives as requisite for conducting ourselves in the world. In his discussion of a "critical pedagogy of place," Greenwood articulates the contexts of teaching and learning in terms of "our *socio-ecological* places" (p. 7, emphasis in original). It is within these places, Greenwood charges, that we must investigate and own what is false and dangerous in our meanings, values, and actions, and find a way to live harmoniously within places that are already damaged (2003, p. 9). During the focus group, Nathan and Cynthia maintained that inhabiting unfamiliar places while travelling had generated in them new readings in relation to both the cultural and ecological dimensions of their lived contexts. Together, Cynthia and Nathan expressed that experiencing the human and material consequences of globalization had brought life and immediacy to the theoretical and journalistic accounts of their previous learning on the topic. That is, the two participants regarded their learning within nations impoverished by global economic policy as an important foundation to their political, social and economic critique.

During the individual interviewing process, Cynthia presented a detailed account of her daily activities living in rural Mexico, through which she explained how her presence within novel spaces and ways of life brought into question many elements of her lived experience she had previously taken for granted. A significant aspect of Cynthia's learning came in the form of an acute recognition of how her life was inextricably tied to the land. Although Cynthia felt that she had previously nurtured benevolent meanings and values in relation to the Earth and ecology, she came to realize how far removed her Canadian lifestyle was from the land. Emerging from this learning experience was not only a deeper connection to the land, but a deeper appreciation of those who till the soil. Cynthia expressed her anger regarding the contradiction of farmers often being denigrated and disempowered, while they play the most essential role in society. Furthermore, Cynthia's learning through this place-based experience evoked a profound shift in her identity. Upon returning home, what Cynthia felt was not a return to her previous sense of self, but rather an ambiguous self, yet to be determined. Cynthia's learning within the socio-ecological place of rural Mexico enabled her to deconstruct previously held meanings and values, and open to the formation of new, more harmonious ways of being in place (Greenwood, 2003).

While the above accounts from Cynthia and Nathan illuminate learning from experiences abroad, not all socio-ecological places of participant learning referenced in the study were international. Indeed, Lauren identified the nature-spaces of her acreage at Forest Lake (pseudonym) as an important context of her learning. For Lauren, the effect of growing up within the places of the acreage informed what she would come to know as a meaningful way of life – based on the opportunity to foster genuine relationships with family and friends, as well as a deep relationship with nature. Lauren articulated her understanding of the meaningful, in part,

through contrasting her life on the acreage to what she experienced moving to the city. Navigating the novel socio-ecological context of the city, Lauren felt that her meanings and values were marginalized by a dominant concern for consumer-based interests. These interests permeated the socio-ecological places of her daily experiences, provoking Lauren to seek out individuals holding similar meanings and values to her own; individuals, as Lauren would come to recognize, who were often engaged in socio-ecological justice activism.

A parallel that may be drawn across the participants' learning illuminates the role of novel, unfamiliar socio-ecological places in evoking new forms of analysis, enabling each participant to amend, clarify, and ground previously held meanings and values related to the socio-ecological. The learning related by participants correlates, in a particular way, with Greenwood's (2003) advocacy toward a pedagogy of place: namely, each participant depicts a learning process involving a critique or "deconstruction" of ways of being within participants' socio-ecological places (p. 9). In all accounts, this deconstruction has led participants to imagine what it would be to live more harmoniously, together with the social and ecological dynamics of place. While a correlation can be found in the learning outcomes described by participants, Greenwood's vision of this pedagogy would likely privilege a process of deconstructing learners' ways of being within the spaces they reside. In other words, the learning would have a greater impact if ways of being could be deconstructed and reestablished locally, versus deriving out of international travel experiences or contingent upon living in a rural setting. That being said, the data offers some insight into how educators may consider socio-ecological place as a powerful learning medium.

Some Additional Implications for Socio-Ecological Justice Education

This section of the study's discussion reflects a more general reading of the data and its implications for socio-ecological justice education. While in the above section, specific examples are highlighted from participants' contributions in order to establish direct links to theory and educational practice, included below are overarching insights that are gleaned from a wider focus on the data as a whole.

Learning as embodied. Notably, but perhaps not surprisingly, nearly all of the significant learning experiences shared by participants occurred outside the spaces and procedures of formal education. Two exceptions to this are Cynthia's study of women and gender studies and Nathan's study of history, which were attributed with providing effective lenses for interpreting the world. Orientations to learning engendered in socio-ecological justice education theory seem to diverge from traditional perspectives in terms of the aim and experience of learning. Indeed, an emphasis on mind/brain/body experiences of the learner, set within diverse and sometimes emotionally novel or difficult "places of pedagogy" (McKenzie, 2008), does not easily conform to the objectives-based pedagogies outlined by current curricular documents. This identifies a significant obstacle to socio-ecological justice education: namely, the dominant structures of pedagogical design are often ineffective for attaining the aims of socio-ecological justice education. Thus, the findings suggest that educational theories consistent with those reviewed in this study are required for designing pedagogy that pushes the experience of learning, empowering the potential for learners to embrace embodied shifts toward socio-ecological justice in their lives learning (e.g. Boler, 1999; Ellsworth, 2005; Hart, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McKenzie, 2008; Wise & Fine, 2003).

Inquiry and expression. A second implication emerging from the findings is an urgent call to provide learners access to spaces and communities of free and open inquiry into the world about them. All three participants emphasized the importance of seeking out and engaging such venues as support systems for their learning toward socio-ecological justice. Adding weight to this impetus are experiences, related by all participants, in which they felt bound via “internal norms and values” (Boler, 1999, p. xiii) to censor or silence their full range of understanding and values associated with socio-ecological concerns: a range that occupies a significant place within an intact version of who they are and who they are becoming. This limitation exposes a second obstacle to educating for socio-ecological justice: as learners are invited and encouraged to take up new ways of “thinking and being in the world” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 16), they are at the same time disciplined into status quo patterns of meaning and value that by definition do not critique the socio-political order.

Narrative and socio-ecological justice. An organizing aim of the study was investigating the pedagogical potential of collectively tracing the memory back through significant learning experiences and reflecting on embodied motions or transitions that have shaped participants’ sense of who they are in the world. The vision and value of this process is recognized in the act of concerning ourselves with how learning works in our lives, and how experiences in learning have influenced meaning and values in relation to socio-ecological justice. This form of “narrative learning” (Goodson et al., 2010) hopes to open spaces for analyzing the origin and validity of generated meanings and values and better connect with what we deem to be just and right.

On several occasions over the course of the data gathering process, participants sought to give voice to and reinforce held beliefs about how they view their lives and actions potentially

contributing to a vision of an improved world. In each case, participants articulated pivotal experiences engaging both the intellect and emotion that had informed current beliefs. For example, Lauren illuminates a complex mind/brain/body landscape as she expresses concurrent desires toward finding a community for belonging; a space for subversive and principled conversations and action; and nutrients for the growth of a sound life-philosophy. These articulations of the self-in-process demonstrate how learning “in” and “through” the stories told about life may occur (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 3). This orientation to learning pushes thinking on socio-ecological justice education beyond the acquisition of knowledge of an outward (objective) reality marked by social and ecological calamity. In contrast, the orientation focuses on engaging learners’ narration of their selves-in-the-world through drawing on learning experiences (past and present), creating a space to envision how socio-ecological justice might be woven into the narrative.

Connecting as learning. Reflecting on a pivotal time in his life when he was forced to take stock of his chosen path, Nathan expressed a viewpoint that it might be unrealistic to conduct meaningful self-investigation on one’s own. That is, the support provided by a community serves to stimulate the efficacy of inquiry into one’s life-course. Nathan restated this view in the space of the focus group, suggesting that in future studies more time be allotted to that form of group dialogue. Both Lauren and Cynthia backed Nathan’s recommendation regarding the collective dialogue, citing an appreciation of a time and space dedicated to listening completely, empowering an understand of the origins of another’s perspective. These statements indicate a final implication for thinking about socio-ecological justice education: namely, that the most fertile context for learning resides within a collaborative, dedicated community of learners. Following Boler (1999), the difficult work of laying bare and examining

“cherished beliefs and assumptions” (pp. 175,176) requires careful consideration. The envisioned community both provokes new avenues for self-inquiry, and provides comfort and solidarity in the process – as was experienced to an extent by participants. These implications create new avenues for discussion on what socio-ecological justice education can and ought to be.

Implications for Future Research

The first and perhaps most obvious implication for future research is to involve a more diverse group of participants in similar research processes in the future. A rich array of data would be achieved by inviting a diversity of individuals – in terms of demographics, political and/or religious association, ideological orientation, etc. – into the community of research. It is significant to note here that participants were all selected from a pool of post-secondary students involved with activism. As it turned out, two of the participants were pursuing a bachelor degree in education, and there was also an overlap as Cynthia and Lauren both had an interest in Women and Gender Studies. In addition to this, all participants identified as middle-class and all but Nathan identified as strictly Caucasian (Nathan identified both as Caucasian and Métis). **Due to the relative privilege experienced by participants, it is important to consider that expressions of agency towards doing justice work may be tied to their privilege within society (e.g., on the grounds of skin colour, cultural background, gender, socioeconomic status, etc). It would be beneficial to involve individuals who experience a greater diversity of relative privilege to gain insight into how existing privilege (or lack thereof) may affect participants’ sense of agency in relation to justice issues (e.g., McKenzie, 2006).** While participants still had dramatically unique histories of previous learning, the likelihood of surfacing conflicting meanings and values was perhaps predictably reduced.

In order to surface and investigate previous learning of a more diverse group and how it relates to socio-ecological justice, the research process would have to be much more strategic and involved – beyond the scope of this work. However, the findings would provide much more insight into how collaborative socio-ecological justice pedagogies might endeavor into the “murky minefield” of deeply held meanings and values “and come out as allies and without severe injury to any part” (Boler, 1999, p. 176). To be successful in this task, the research design would need to be responsive to the group dynamic, skillfully establishing a sense of community in order to invite a culture of openness and acceptance.

An additional avenue for extending and enriching this inquiry focus is to employ the research design in the context of a justice-based educational program. Such a project would provide insight into the potential of collectively surfacing embodied meanings and values – generated from within social, cultural, and ecological contexts – as a means toward empowering the deep forms of learning envisioned in socio-ecological justice programs. This research focus would inquire into how current socio-ecological justice programming could be enhanced through enlisting the will and focus of learners in the active examination of how external norms and values impose upon their sense of who they are in the world. Through empowering learners’ concern for how they are in some way constituted via lived-contexts, openings are created to engage content that brings into question normative social and political arrangements. The model for application could take the form of convening a specific leaning project, or through integrating the participatory method into existing programs.

In concert with the above suggestions for future research, a more comprehensive rendering of participants’ learning would require an extended, longitudinal procedure. The form of learning outcome the research design hopes to evoke is ongoing. That which is gained by

illuminating and collectively narrating significant learning experiences is not a finished product: it is a driver of the self that is always learning – always becoming (Ellsworth, 2005; Goodson et al., 2010). In order for research to take this into account, data must be gathered periodically over time to discover how the process has influenced the learning self.

A more general reading of the study's implications suggests that more empirical research – investigating embodied and intersubjective learning experiences building over time – is needed to enrich and empower socio-ecological justice education. In particular, inquiring into the extent to which learners' past learning serves to limit their ability to accept and embrace dissonant theory and analysis seems warranted, adding empirical weight to theorizing on conceptions of the learning self *in motion* or *in transition* (Ellsworth, 2005). It is necessary to inquire into the nature of this potential limitation, how can it be brought to light, and how it can be overcome. In order for learning to occur such that the outcome reconstitutes the learner to the world, we must also consider how the original constitution will be accounted for in the learning process. These areas of inquiry attend to the complexity and vulnerability inherent in socio-ecological justice learning. If we are unwilling or unable to set aside past meaning and value of who we are in the world to make space for new ones, our efforts will remain solely academic.

Reflecting on the Writing Process

As I progressed through writing this thesis, it became clearer to me what I was hoping to illuminate. In the opening pages, I dedicated a portion of the introduction to relate a process of self-reflection that has inspired this research. Through this exercise in articulating where I was coming from, and through surveying the literature, I was able to identify theorists and conceptions that have helped me to translate a tacit understanding into a theoretical framework. However, over the course of writing, this continued to develop, and while some conceptual

elements came to be reinforced, others diminished. This, I have found, to be an acute challenge to working on a piece such as this over time. While I believe that all conceptions included in this thesis are helpful for thinking about socio-ecological justice learning, there are some notions (for instance that of the heuristic) that tended to lose prominence in the latter portions of the document.

A second development over the course of writing has been a tendency to write myself out of the text. While I began with a personal account of why and to what end I aimed to take up this investigation, before long I came to adopt a less personalized voice. By way of an explanation, I can only say that I was responding to cues from the pieces that I was reading and referencing. It was rare that I would come across a thesis written in a personal tone of voice (although, I recall reading excerpts from one or two). In terms of conducting the study as though I were one of the participants: I have to admit that I found this to be an intimidating prospect. As I was devising a plan for how the research would unfold, it was unclear to me how I might investigate the learning of participants and myself simultaneously. I could perhaps envision conducting two separate inquiries, but the trouble was in bringing the two together into one coherent piece. The thesis defense enabled me to see these limitations, and I am grateful for this opportunity to respond in the body of the thesis document.

Concluding Thoughts and Remarks

There is always more. There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom. (Greene, 1988, p. 129)

Educators, I believe with Greene (1988, 1995), must hold to a vision of things as they could be and set themselves to imagining what it would take to realize this vision. Even a rudimentary recognition and address of current lived-realities of social deprivation and

ecological affliction compels us to ask what we can do. And for educators, this question may be substantially answered in the context of our professional practice. Notably, as Greenwood (2003, 2007, 2010) and others have compellingly demonstrated, the current obsession for targets-based education obscures from more profound questions of how education could contribute to improved socio-ecological conditions. While this trend appears to demonstrate a disinterest in prevalent liberal-democratic narratives, celebrating human rights, equality, shared governance, and sustainability, the complexity of the issue demands a far more nuanced analysis. However, aside from becoming embroiled in education politics (which I feel is also essential), educators may orient their practice to being reflexive to the lives of learners, to learner's previous learning experiences, and to how they wish to actualize themselves in the future. Although asking learners what they believe in and why may seem to be a foreign concept, this simple act is charged with transformative potential.

As I take a step back from this thesis to ponder what it has been about, I can see that it has involved thinking (incredulously) on how we deflect and distract from concerning ourselves with the ills and dangers of our present socio-ecological reality. The difficulty in examining a kind of inertia in thinking and action related to this reality lies in the complexity of individuals engaging novel and perhaps troubling information about the world in which we live. Indeed, socio-ecological justice learning often requires questioning the familiar and taken-for-granted in our day-to-day lives. The way in which each of us opens to or resists information about socio-ecological justice is unique and contextualized against a history of lived-experiences and embodied responses to those experiences. From the outset, the aim of the thesis was to invite a discussion of this amorphous yet perhaps quintessential characteristic of socio-ecological justice learning.

That which is contributed through such an investigation is an opening for focusing our thinking about why, in practice, socio-ecological justice education has not been effective. That is, as outcomes of social and ecological injustice continue to increase in scale and severity, in many educational forums this reality is ignored or downplayed. Thus, the vision behind this effort has been to re-evaluate our point of entry and strategy for intervention; conceiving of learners less as objects of socio-ecological justice learning, and more as agents with vested interests in outcomes of socio-ecological justice.

For my part, I have been fascinated by the manner in which participants in the study articulated accounts of their learning and how they have come to view their selves in the world. Through engaging participants' stories of learning, it has become clearer to me how my own meanings and values are unique to the interpersonal and place-based settings that have embedded my own learning. This, I believe, has strengthened my ability to discern conjecture from sound analysis: that is, to recognize unchecked assumptions that permeate my thinking and are reflected in the commonplaces of my day-to-day life. It is hoped that through engaging the stories offered by participants that readers too will call into focus learning events that have similarly shaped their meanings and values of socio-ecological justice; to gain a sense of their own embeddedness and become open to the possibility of embodying "previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 16).

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Appendix A

Interview/ Focus Group Guide

The framework for organizing the three stages of the study is presented in three descriptions of collaborative heuristic projects, supplemented by guiding questions that will initiate the heuristic process. At the outset of each stage, the aim and impetus of the project will be discussed with participants in order to disclose the overarching vision guiding the heuristic investigation. The following descriptions will be provided to participants in order to disclose the objective of each heuristic project.

Stage 1

In the first stage of the study, we begin by working to articulate and deconstruct the analytical tools that you utilize as you work to form meanings from messages that you encounter. By means of implementing a strategy to facilitate this project, I will present to you one message fitting within each of four general categories; your objective is to focus attention on steps that you take in order to analyze or draw meaning from the message. As you articulate analytical tools that guide your meaning making process, they will serve as landmarks as we seek to flesh out and map a genealogy of how you have come to utilize particular analytical tools. The four categories from which messages will be presented are political/governmental, environmental (place and ecology), interpersonal (identity formation focused inward and projected outward) and, cultural/technological (artifacts and goods for consumption).

General Guiding Questions:

1. As you engage the message provided to you, how would you describe the work you do in negotiating the parts of the message in order to create meaning about the subject?
2. As you reflect on your articulation of the way you work to analyze or form meaning about the message, what influences come to mind that have provoked you to draw meaning from the message in this particular way?
3. Why do you feel that you have privileged these factors as being influential to the way you apply analytical tools to construct meaning in this particular way? or, what values or considerations are embedded in the practice of employing a particular analytical tool that you have identified?

Stage 2

In the second stage of the study, we will return to the map created in stage one to refresh our memories and to add insights you have recorded in your journal since the last interview. The heuristic project engaged in this stage of the study is intended to shed light on the ways in which your practice of forming meaning from messages you encounter through your lived experiences shape the way you see the world; and therefore, shape the way you define your role in it. In order to facilitate this process of self-reflection we will trace back over the descriptions you provided in the previous stage as a reference point from which to move deeper into the question of how meanings, formed through a particular practice, inform your participatory role in the world. Two additional considerations for investigation are implicit in this stage of the study. The first is an inquiry into the extent to which you are aware of how your practice of forming meaning influences your view of your self-in-the-world, and the second seeks to identify the benefits and risks you perceive as you deconstruct your practice against an awareness of its influence in your life.

General Guiding Questions:

1. Upon returning to the map of your analytical landscape, in what ways does your practice of developing meaning from lived experiences influence your perception of your role in the world?
2. To what extent do you feel that you are aware of how the way in which you create meaning from your experiences impacts your participation in the world?
3. What methods do you believe would be effective (as a strategy for self-reflection) in bringing into focus the impact of your meaning-negotiating landscape on the way you are in the world?
4. What effect (if any) do you perceive in attending to your practice of negotiating meaning from the contexts of your lived experience: as an endeavor to create awareness of how this practice informs your self-in-the-world?

Stage 3

The reason for engaging the heuristic project in stage three as a focus group is to facilitate a space in which participants may bear witness to each co-participant's account of their endeavor to articulating their meaning-negotiation landscape and working to discover how their practice of forming meaning informs their participation in the world. Through engaging in the inquiry of one another's experience in the study, each participant will enrich their thinking about their own journey of self-reflection, enabling them to imagine alternative possibilities with which to broaden or re-configure their analytical landscape, and attend to the implication of their practice of forming meaning. As each participant reports on their reflections from stages one and two, the group will collaboratively strive to enable one another to move to a deeper level of questioning as they contemplate their practice. In order to pose helpful questions to co-participants, each will draw from their own experience as a reference to identify questions that have enabled them in their journey.

General Guiding Question:

1. How may we endeavor to reach a deeper level of understanding about the link between our practice of forming meaning in our lives and our view of our self-in-the-world?

Appendix B

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Inquiring into Learning and Action for Social and Ecological Justice: The Role of Meaning Negotiated From and Through Learner's Lived Experiences*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researcher:

- Vince Anderson, Investigator, Master's Student, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 651-2246, vba837@mail.usask.ca
- Dr. Marcia, McKenzie, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 996-7551, marcia.mckenzie@usask.ca

Purpose:

This study follows a collaborative investigation into how participants develop an understanding of themselves in the world through processes of meaning negotiation from within social, cultural, and ecological contexts. The investigation seeks to articulate these processes, engaged by participants, in order to stimulate thinking about how they are influential throughout participants' lives. Additionally, the study intends to examine the possibilities stemming from such a self-investigative endeavour with respect to educating for social and ecological justice.

Study Procedures:

As a participant in this study you will be asked to engage in two 60-90 minute one-on-one interviews with the researcher, and one 90 – 120 minute focus group, involving the researcher and the three participants chosen for the study. As a supplement to the data collected in the interviews, you will be provided a blank notebook and encouraged to record any insights that arise in the time between meetings. Each meeting will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The data you provide will be compiled in order to develop a description of your experience throughout the research process.

Potential Benefits and Risks:

A potential benefit to your engagement in this study is the possibility of self-discovery as you work towards articulating your meaning making practices with respect to social and ecological justice issues. Within this process of discovery there is also the potential for some discomfort as you bring to light meaning making practices that inform your various social and ecological

relationships. However, no deception of any sort will be employed towards this end as openness and transparency are crucial to the research methodology. Furthermore, a relationship of trust and shared openness between participants and the researcher will be deliberately nurtured in order to facilitate a collaborative, participatory research methodology.

Storage of Data:

All data will be stored by Dr. Marcia McKenzie in a locked location for at least five years, upon which time it will be thoroughly destroyed.

Confidentiality:

All efforts will be taken to keep your identity confidential through removal or fictionalization of any identifying references, including the use of pseudonyms. However, full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed: a result of participating in a focus group where responses are shared with individuals other than the researcher. As a condition of participating in this study, and in respect to other participants, by signing this consent form you accept the responsibility to protect the anonymity of co-participants by not sharing any identifying information with anyone outside the research project.

All forms of data collected will be analyzed solely by the researcher conducting the study. Data will be used in the completion of a thesis, and also may be used for publications and conference presentations.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort.

Questions:

If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have any other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board on (date pending). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

