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Searching for a More-Than-Human Dialogic Pedagogy in a Teacher Education Classroom: "I Make My Way to the Sun"

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Abstract

In this reflective poetic narrative inquiry, I explore a possibility, or rather a search, for dialogic pedagogy with a focus on more-than-human beings in my teacher education classroom. I am curious to learn from my students' lived experience with my experimental and environmental dialogic activity and ask: What does a dialogue with more-than-human others mean to teacher candidates? My inquiry reveals that these dialogues emerge from the unique, ontological place of being as the poetic and reflective encounter with nature. Yet the concept of nature remains a mystery that resists definitions. More specifically, students' notes reveal two main themes of their experiences and generative meanings: their *new ways of seeing* and *peacefulness*. These new ways of seeing are about their *intentional attention* to the natural world and its diverse communities as more-than-human beings and speaking subjects. In these peaceful encounters, teacher candidates transform their taken-for-granted view or perception of nature as an object to nature as a miracle (Evernden, 1985). Consequently, almost all students experience their encounters as a peaceful and free learning process that enhances their sense of well-being in the classroom.

Keywords: dialogic pedagogy, environmental education, culture of education, poetic pedagogy

Introduction

In this reflective poetic autoethnography, I explore a playful, eco-centric dialogic pedagogy with the focus on more-than- human beings and the possibility of their creative inclusion in a teacher education classroom. I ask: What does a dialogue with more-than-human beings mean to teacher candidates? My inquiry reveals that these dialogues emerge from a unique ontological place of being as the poetic and reflective encounter with nature. In this encounter, teacher candidates transform their taken-for-granted view and perception of nature as an object to nature as a miracle

(Evernden, 1985). Consequently, they experience this encounter as a peaceful, relaxing, and supportive learning process that enhances their well-being and mental health in their education.

Why do teacher educators need to care for environmental education? Why would teacher candidates have to do another activity in addition to their busy and hectic burden of knowledge? Is environmental education just another buzzword in the plethora of progressive opium of educators (Matusov, 2021)? Yes and no; it depends. Currently, many conventional teacher education programs in Canada are deeply immersed in historical anthropocentrism or human supremacy over more-than-human others (Lupinacci, 2016). Public school systems are unsustainable because they perpetuate, transmit, and sustain the dominant nationalistic and militaristic culture of environmental destruction and anthropocentrism (Greenwood, 2010a; 2010b; Gruenewald, 2004; Kahn, 2010; Shugurova, 2019; Stevenson, 2007).

Nonetheless, Canadian teacher education programs function as the sanctuaries of mechanistic bureaucracy and anthropocentrism without commitment to any form of environmental education (Greenwood, 2010a; 2010b). However, environmental education is not a panacea. Interestingly, Matusov points out, "environmental education can be anthropocentric . . . and this is not necessarily a bad thing" (personal communication, 2021). I agree. However, I think anthropocentrism does not always mean humanism; anthropocentrism is about human-centered values for and from human beings. Kopnina et al. (2018) explain that it "is the belief that value is human-centred and that all other beings are means to human ends" (p. 109). Perhaps, anthropocentric environmental education is an oxymoron.

Nevertheless, the most recent report, "Accord on Education for a Sustainable Future," by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (MacDonald & Barwell, 2022) indicates that Faculties of Education in Canada have special responsibilities to ensure that environmental education is included in all aspects of teacher training and professional development. For example, one of the responsibilities is "to ensure that education for a sustainable future is a central and required component of course offerings in our pre-service, in-service and graduate level teacher education curricula, including in experiential learning placements and extra-curricular activities" (p. 11). Yet such set-in-stone responsibilities lack commitment to action and institutional change. One of the strongest assumptions of the report is the idea that environmental education can and should be included in the existing systems and institutions as an add-on to the current practices. The Deans wrote that their responsibility is "to include pedagogy that embraces learning about, on, from and with the world beyond humanity" (MacDonald & Barwell, 2022, p. 11). What does it mean *to include*? In what context? Kool et al. (2021) found that most faculty members in Faculties of Education across the country are trying their best to include environmental education in their courses, but still their students/preservice teachers are "not adequately prepared to address ESE [Environmental Sustainability Education] in the classroom" (p. 14). The additive approach is not enough, even with the rhetorical commitment from the Deans.

Moreover, past reports indicate that 65% of all Canadian teacher education programs do not provide any environmental education to future teachers (Lin, 2002). In some Ontario public

schools, environmental education is often instrumentally added to the existing school curricula as one of the learning outcomes in social studies, geography, and sciences (Inwood & Jagger, 2014). Generally, Canadian public schools tend to consider environmental education as irrelevant or as less relevant than other subjects (Lin, 2002). Pre-service teachers and their cooperative teachers do not usually focus on the significance of environmental education during their mentorship phase of teacher education due to the bureaucratic complexity of teacher education (Greenwood, 2010a; Inwood & Kennedy, 2020; Kool et al., 2021). Specifically, Ormond et al. (2014) explain there are many institutional barriers in teacher education that make environmental education not a priority for preservice teachers and faculty, such as prescribed curriculum; testing; lack of time, resources, and support; and risks for repercussions and power-laden hierarchal mentorship structures (p. 176). Overall, environmental education in Canadian teacher education programs is a challenge to implement and practice in the classroom and institutions (Chubbuck et al., 2001; Elliott et al., 2020; Ormond et al., 2014; Ferreira et al., 2007).

In fact, teacher education programs have never been committed to and focused on environmental education (Greenwood, 2010a). Furthermore, teacher education programs are antithetical to "the aims of environmental and sustainability education" (Greenwood, 2010a, p. 145). Despite this omnipresent institutional neglect of environmental education, many enthusiastic teacher educators across Canada challenge the mechanistic and technocratic bureaucratic structure of teacher education and create counter-spaces of environmental and cultural sustainability in their classrooms (Greenwood, 2010a; Karrow et al., 2016; Shugurova, 2019).

Nonetheless, Howard (2012) argues that environmental education discourses in teacher education are mainly *about* values for education for sustainable development (ESD). These superficial discourses lack a critical analysis and deconstruction of unsustainable schooling practices and conventional educational structures. When educators simply talk *about* the environment, they objectify and subordinate its diverse communities and their own students. In these dualistic discourses, people are perceived as separate from the natural world (Plumwood, 1993). Talking about the environment institutionalizes the very concept of nature in the framework of anthropocentrism and technical bureaucracy (Gruenwald, 2004; Martin, 1996).

Hence, environmental education becomes hijacked by the conventional schooling model; these two models cannot go hand in hand at all (Gruenwald, 2004a). Howard (2012) wrote that "if student teachers are to—in turn—teach for the values of sustainability, they must be encouraged to question whether education, in its current form, may be an obstacle to realizing sustainable communities" (p. 6). These dialogues are risky because many Canadian teacher candidates try to avoid at all costs any potential activism and critical dialogue during their teacher training due to the fear of looming grades and certification (Shugurova, 2019; 2020a). They avoid any backlash even at the expense of their own academic and constitutional freedom (Shugurova, 2020a). That is why many environmentally innovative teacher educators are interested in a progressive question about their students' environmental preparedness for their future teaching career (Karrow et al., 2019) rather than a critical, dialogic, and ontological engagement *with* the natural world in their *present being* of their teacher education. Without this conscious, personal presence, environmental

education becomes another *additive*, *instrumental* layer of and for the oppressive bureaucratic machinery of conventional schooling and its colonizing educational systems.

Having said that, it is important to recognize how teacher practice is often constrained by existing reforms, and school social-cultural context. However, this recognition requires an additional inquiry that is currently beyond the scope of this research and may be the focus of a future study.

What is a dialogic pedagogical position and ontological engagement with the natural world?

A dialogic pedagogical position is not about education or for the future preparedness of students. According to Bakhtin (1984), a *dialogic position* takes place in the present, not in or for some distant and nonexistent future, but *in* the living encounter *with* people as the equal authors of their life. Together, teachers and students can co-create this present despite the institutional oppression and control of the authorship of their own present and its potential relationality (Shugurova, 2020b). Bakhtin (1984) wrote that an authentic dialogic position "affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author, the hero is not 'he' and not 'I' but a fully valid 'thou,' that is, another and other autonomous 'I' ('thou art')" (p. 63). Students are more than the heroes of education, they become the educational authors of their learning experiences through open-ended dialogue without any externally imposed hierarchies and bureaucracies. Teachers' dialogic positions are diverse and multifaceted since they are never predetermined or preplanned; they are contextually situated in students' experiences. Bakhtin (2004) wrote that a dialogic pedagogical position is a teacher's "flexible and careful guidance to facilitate" creative and original individual development through the expressive, living language (p. 24). This language should be personalized and deconstructed from the schoolish clichés and their cold, dry, monologic discourses (Bakhtin, 2004). Thus, a teacher becomes a pedagogical, revelatory artist, rather than an instructional technician (Matusov as cited in Kullenberg, 2021).

Ontological Engagements

A dialogic pedagogical position gives voice and develops a personal language for students' experiences (Shugurova, 2020a; 2021). However, the concept of student experiences is yet another cliché that conventional teachers/technicians use in their monological classrooms and that progressive educators use as well (Matusov, 2021). In these discourses, the meaning of student experience is often dictated by the teacher through imposed lesson plans and authoritarian leadership (Shugurova, 2020a). That is why a dialogic pedagogical positioning inspires and provokes teachers and students to include student-generated dialogues about *their* authentic, lived experiences in the classroom and in the world. These individual and collective experiences are educational; they activate educational meaning-making processes in the classroom (Matusov et al., 2012). More specifically, ontological engagements happen when students follow their intrinsic

motivation and find the purpose of learning in themselves, rather than in externally imposed teacher goals. For example, Matusov et al. (2012) wrote,

> Students' ontological engagement in their education . . . means that when the students are asked why they do what they do in school, "Why are you doing that?" the students find the source of [their engagement] in themselves (e.g., "I like it," "I want to find out . . . ," "I want to learn that . . . ," "it is useful for me because . . .") or in the activity (e.g., "it's fun," "it is interesting"). (p. 42)

This means that students immerse themselves into their learning experiences without separating what they are learning from themselves. Everything feels personal, emotional, embodied, experiential (Matusov et al., 2019). Thus, an ontological design provokes students to ask questions the teacher wants them to ask and answer by personally investing themselves in these topics. In this view, the teacher leads students to enthusiastically develop their interests and to become interested in various educational topics. Thus, a dialogic pedagogical positioning is about personal change because students become active and intentional knowledge creators (Matusov et al., 2012; Wegerif et al., 2019). For example, Wegerif et al. (2019) wrote that ontological "engagement in dialogue is a way to change ourselves and to change our reality" (p. 5). This change is individualized because each person can develop their own understanding of their change on the basis of their experiences (Shugurova, 2020a). Often, students experience identity change from a monologic sense of self toward a more dialogic understanding of self in relations *with* others, or being "open to the other" (Wegerif et al., 2019). However, it is still unclear whether all students develop their ontological engagement at the same time (Rajala as cited in Matusov et al., 2019, p. 147), or whether the very concept of ontological engagement is purely teacher-led and teacher-initiated. Genuine dialogue is at the heart of ontological engagement, and many approaches to ontological engagement exist through dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1973; hooks, 1994; Matusov et al., 2019; Wegerif et al., 2019).

A dialogic framework of ontological engagement is still anthropocentric because it is about students' interests and lives without any explicit recognition of the ecological complexity and richness of life itself (Murphy, 1995). Yet Wegerif et al. (2019) found that ontological engagement does not have to be only about individuals but also about a dialogue with "the Infinite Other" (p. 2). Who or what is the Infinite Other? Nature? Universe? Mystery? Wegerif (2016) wrote that many dialogic scholars refuse to engage in dialogue with other-than-human beings because it is impossible. Drawing on Buber, Wegerif (2016) can speak with a tree because he positions himself dialogically *with* the tree; the tree is no longer *it* but *thou*. Thus, students' ontological engagement gains a broader, ecological sense of self-realization as a part of the Infinite Other. Murphy (1995) eloquently wrote,

> The individual occurs as chronotope within the "story" of human interaction with the physical world, but that narrative is only a historical fiction organized by means of a limited perspective through which beginnings, middles, ends, and motivations are substituted for

> the predominantly non-human, contiguously structured story of the universe that allots us only episodes—the self in and as part of the "other." (p. 151)

Students begin to understand themselves in relationship with the world; they are no longer ontologically focused on their immediate, autonomous, and solipsistic individualism. The concept of personal experience expands beyond the physical boundaries of the self to encompass ecological experiences, such as subtle sensations, feelings, emotions, and a sense or consciousness of place. The dialogic context changes students' position from a human- and ego-centered being to an eco-centric or participatory becoming. Eco-centrism views "the environment as us" (De Vido, 2020, p. 1). In this becoming, anthropocentric hierarchies are consciously changed. Nobody is above anyone else; all species have their intrinsic values of being (Barrett et al., 2017; Kopnina, 2019). For each individual, this change is unique and personal.

To me, this change toward an eco-centric becoming is a dialogic way of *seeing* the natural world and its more-than-human communities. According to Berger (1972), "Seeing comes before words. . . . But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world" (p. 5). Seeing is experiential and embodied. As a sensuous contact between I and Thou, seeing invites a contemplation and conversation with the unknown and the infinite. What is the infinite? I wonder looking at the distant horizon of this finite earth. The eco-centric ways of seeing are artistic and relational. More specifically, the eco-centric way of seeing is the embodied act of participatory consciousness. According to Berman (1981), participatory consciousness is about the identification with the other:" the state of consciousness in which the subject/object dichotomy breaks down and the person feels identified with what he or she is perceiving" (p. 346). It is true that this identification is anthropomorphic to an extent that the human perceives the other as a part of the self. However, this anthropomorphism is not something preplanned or imposed on the other; it is a spontaneous "envelopment of another into oneself" (Fawcett, 1989, p. 17). I become conscious of the tree as Thou.

More-Than-Human Agency: From Nature as an Object to Nature as a Miracle

When students consciously change their ways of seeing nature as Thou rather than it, they experience a perceptual shift toward a broader sense of community (Fawcett, 2005). Nature stops being nature and becomes a community of *more-than-human beings* and their diverse agencies (Abram, 1996; Larsen & Johnson, 2016). This community is eco-centric and encompasses diverse beings, their more-than-human words, and complex realities. Nature stops being an object, for it becomes a multiplicity of speaking subjects, a miracle (Evernden, 1985). What is a miracle? How can nature be a miracle? The very idea of a miracle seems alien in our capitalist, materialist society that is governed by a dualistic falsehood of scientific reason, mechanical rationality, and environmental exploitation (Fawcett, 1989; Plumwood, 1993; Smith, 2001). Magician and environmental philosopher Abram (1996) explained that the idea of miracle and magic is very popular in many indigenous, environmentally conscious societies. He also mentions that American subcultures and alternative cultural pedagogies use the concept of magic to signify an altered state

of consciousness by the human will. However, this anthropocentric notion lacks any meaning and "any reason for altering one's consciousness" (p. 9). In contrast, the indigenous, diverse concept of magic refers to a multiplicity of experiential consciousness and awareness (Abram, 1996). The magician does not enter the consciousness of others; she/he simply changes one's own awareness and experiences a perceptual shift in the awareness "in order to make contact with the other organic forms of sensitivity and awareness" (p. 9).This shift enables the magician to listen to, listen for, hear, and learn from the living symphony, polyphony, and cacophony of life. Hence, magic happens when there is a communication between diverse consciousnesses. Remember *Alice in Wonderland?*

> "O Tiger-lily," said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, "I wish you could talk!"
> "We can talk," said the Tiger-lily: "when there's anybody worth talking to." (Carroll, 1893, p. 37)

But what is this magical communication with plants, animals, places? How does it happen? In language? In thought? Feeling? Imagination? Tiger-lily alludes to communication as a relationship. Alice's ways of seeing are unmediated from her taken-for-granted anthropocentrism and remediated by her new eco-centric way of seeing and speaking with Tiger-lily. Clearly, this relational communication is not based on purely human consciousness and human ontology. This means that it may not be in and through a specific human language at all. Is this communication spiritual? Transcendent? According to Virgo (2017), "spirit does not explain, it explains away" (p. 8). What does this spiritual revelation mean?

Interestingly, many indigenous cultures think of place as the infinite, spiritual consciousness that encompasses all languages and expressions. For example, Swain (1993) wrote that "all life is conscious because it is an extension of the consciousness of place" (p. 33). Place speaks (Larsen & Johnson, 2016). This communication through place requires an eco-centric recognition of "consciousness with equal rights" (Bakhtin, 1984) of all beings. Bakhtin (1984) wrote that this consciousness is not a monological or monolithic unified consciousness; it is not the consciousness of one individual or person. On the contrary, he explained that this ontological concept of consciousness is "a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world, combined but are not merged in the unity of the event" (p. 6). The magician enters this place of consciousness, and there is an infinite plurality of being and becoming. In this intrinsic context of co-being, nature becomes a miracle. As Fawcett (1989) wrote, "I understand *nature as miracle* to refer to the wondrous, the inexplicable and unpredictable in nature" (p. 16, emphasis added). In dialogic pedagogical positioning toward nature as miracle, students can perceive the wondrous place in which they live and which lives through them.

Methodological Context

To answer my research question, I decided to ask my students, who are teacher candidates, in our classroom: What does a dialogue with more-than-human beings mean to you? They seemed puzzled and perplexed. Some of them said, “What do you mean by ‘more-than-human’ others?” I told them I was interested in creating an inclusive classroom but in an eco-centric context *with* more-than-human beings. “But why?” They wondered. I responded, “Why not? Why are we only interested in speaking with other human beings? Why are we not interested in speaking with other-than-human beings?” “Hm . . .” I then proposed an experiential learning activity to ground my question in an experiential context of place. I wanted to let students discover and peek through a curtain of their/our schooled and learned anthropocentrism to find out what this question might mean to them personally and experientially. I wanted to provoke them to develop their ontological engagement with this question as teachers. Clearly, I recognize that I was a bit manipulative in my provocation because, ultimately, I was the author of this question and learning activity. Thus, this ontological engagement is a bit shallow and fake due to the institutional constraints and ethical limitations of teacher education programs and my own. Obviously, I am not a goddess that speaks with spirits and the natural world, nor do I claim to be or to become one. Also, many of my students did not really want to explore my question and engage with it. Yet I persuasively persisted to inspire them and lead them toward this question, toward the unknown, beyond the taken-for-granted dread of being in the material classroom.

That is why I asked them to go on a nature walk and try to be in a moment: just to walk and observe the natural world; try to slow down and pay attention to the life of other species; to witness a moment of co-being with them. I also encouraged them to think poetically and creatively about their encounters with more-than-human beings as well as about their own contemplations. It is important to note that I did not specifically instruct them to use any predetermined poetic structure or form for their communication with nature. Instead, I promoted their spontaneous awareness of being, the unrestricted cognition of being in a moment.

Usually, we go outside for 20 minutes, then back. If students really do not want to engage in this inquiry, then they can stay in the classroom; I respect their freedom of nonparticipation. Usually, all students want to go outside, away from the classroom. When we come back, I invite them to reflect poetically or artistically on their dialogues with the more-than-human and share individually in any way they want as well as share their collective reflections with the classroom. At the end, I ask them to submit their field notes/poetic contemplations and reflections for my reflection, not for any grading purposes. These notes are anonymous, and students can write whatever they want to without any fear of bad grades or any other institutional repercussions. It is important to note that students do not have to submit anything at the end of this activity since it is experimental and nonmandatory. I approach these submissions as the secondary, anonymous data for this inquiry and analysis and represent it through my autoethnography that allows me to focus on our collective and individual epiphanies in hindsight (Ellis et al., 2011).

Why epiphanies? Why autoethnography? Well, the students' responses were epiphanies to me. According to Denzin (2014), epiphanies are the profound moments of people's experiences that are liminal, on the threshold. Students' dialogues with nature are liminal, and they step into the ordinary life outdoors, but they search for new, previously unknown, or unnoticed encounters. Hence, they step through the threshold of their everyday experiences and their extraordinary experiences. Autoethnography is an autobiographical narrative account of cultural experiences with the focus on the living encounters among the researcher, participants, and the world (Geertz, 1973; Ellis et al., 2011). In this view, the narrative does not require a linear structure and a specific plot; autoethnographic narratives "emerge from a range of speaking positions" (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1660). My autoethnographic writing emerges from a particular speaking position as a teacher and researcher. I acknowledge my privilege of taking this position and recognize that my positionality is shaped by the institutional, authoritarian power and its limitations of my individual creative freedom of expression. In this inquiry, I approach power as creatively and freely shared among my students, more-than-human beings, and me. However, this approach can be shaky, fragile, ambiguous, unstructured, and somewhat fake. How can I share the institutional power with more-than-human beings? Can I ever?

Who am I beyond my institutional affiliation? What is my commitment to this project? Beyond the institutional affiliation, I am a poet and artist and environmentalist. My commitment to environmental art is intrinsic and passionate. I graduated with a Master in Environmental and Cultural Studies and a Doctor of Philosophy in Education-Educational Sustainability. To me, the quest for environmentally meaningful education has been about a personal search for creative self-expression and mindfulness.

Nonetheless, my autoethnographic writing becomes a way of knowing and a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). More specifically, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) write that qualitative writing is often boring and dreadful due to its dominant, mechanistic, technical, and instrumental structure of scientific analysis. This structured writing produces a monological voice of science that constrains writers. Instead, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) proposed a playful and living way of writing as a method of inquiry in and of itself, which means that the researcher/author's voice becomes actualized without any preconceived ideas, outlines, and plans. They wrote, "There is no such thing as 'getting it right,' only 'getting it' differently contoured and nuanced" (p. 1415). Thus, autoethnographic writing is personalized and embodied; there are no right and wrong answers in this process.

My autoethnographic process is complex. I begin by writing impressionistically, trying to refresh and remember our learning experiences outdoors in dialogues with more-than-human beings. My impressionistic writing emerges within a free-writing process itself without any specific adherence to verisimilitude. Thompson (1969) explained impressionist writing in contrast to realist writing that the former is about feelings, sensations, and moods of the writer, and the latter is about a precise representation of concrete, material details. However, she highlights that this does not mean one is more objective than the other. The writer's subjective experiences are as objective as the realist photographic representations of objects (p. 3). Impressionist writing invites the reader

into these subjective experiences (Herbert, 1988). Likewise, I write impressionistically by immersing in my feelings, emotions, moods, sensations that emanate from my mind, body, spirit, as well as from the data.

In addition to the students' field notes, I use my daily teaching journal where I write my observations, thoughts, notes, and other pertinent information to the course content. In total, I have 24 poetic handwritten notes that students gave me in the study; additionally, I have two video recordings that a group of students decided to videotape and show in the class. Often, I have 35 students in each of my classes. I conduct this inquiry in almost all my courses; not all students chose to submit and gift their anonymous notes, which is perfectly fine. These 24 notes/data are from my two foundation courses in education from two different semesters, with two different groups of students who never had any experience with this type of learning outdoors with nature and who had never heard of this activity before.

After I wrote my impressionist draft, I immersed myself in the data and rendered the students' voices through their self-authored poetic notes within my impressionist autoethnographic narrative. In doing so, I tried to rupture my authoritative, monologic writing style with the students' multiplicity of voices by paying attention to their epiphanies and evocative emotions. The students' original words and utterances are layered without any specific alterations. I italicized and highlighted each student's voice as a separate poetic stanza in a style in which it was written by each individual student. Drawing on Ellis (2004), I merged my data analysis with my impressionist writing process. The analysis process centers students' voices with my elusive, mysterious, and dialogic search for their self-authored meanings. Learning from Bakhtin (1984), I do not speak *for* students or for nature; rather I speak/write *with* them. As Bakhtin (1984) explains, "And it cannot be otherwise: only a dialogic and participatory orientation takes another person's discourse seriously, and is capable of approaching it both as a semantic position and as another point of view" (pp. 63–64). That is why I did not mechanically code my data to reduce and finalize students' points, producing a cold bureaucratic report of findings or a representational, silenced, subordinated *image of dialogue* (Bakhtin, 1984). Instead, I created a multi-voiced impressionist autoethnography of authentic, multi-voiced poetic epiphanies that were unfinished and in becoming.

More specifically, I immersed in the data to develop descriptive codes that summarized the main meaning of students' poetic excerpts and reflections. As Cooper and Lileya (2021) explained, descriptive codes help to distill the "basic topic or passage of qualitative data" (p. 201). The meanings were somewhat elusive due to the poetic nature of the contemplations. I decided to write poetically not to speak for students or interpret their experiences, but to *learn from* them (Longer & Furman, 2004; Pithouse-Morgane et al., 2017). The act of writing about students' poetic reflections is a poetic act for me. I write to wonder and contemplate emerging meanings, ideas, insights, perplexities, puzzlements, and stories. Leggo (2014) eloquently wrote, "My research is my writing. I search again and again by writing. . . . I know nothing without engaging in the writing" (p. 144). This search is improvisational and organic. On the border between imagination and reality, I write to learn with and from these fragments and moments of being together with the

world. I write impressionistically and lively not to explain but to render the living encounters. My poetic auto-ethnographic writing is more like a dance than rational coding (Heifetz et al., 2009). I search for inspirations not explanations, the inspirations that give rise to possibilities of multiple understandings, meanings, and ways of being and becoming.

Researcher's Context and Limitations

As a sessional instructor and researcher, my context is shaped by a broader institutional structure and teacher education policies. For example, I must teach in a physical classroom on campus and cannot choose to shift to an online or hybrid mode of delivery. In addition, I cannot choose to teach this course outdoors completely. The campus backyard is the only connection with the physical world of nature available within the institutional confines of the classroom. Hence, the short walk around the faculty building may not be significant in and of itself; it is only a moment of presence and a possibility of experience and ontological engagement.

Findings: My Narrative

Tuesday, 9:00 a.m., February, Northern Canada: "Comm'n!" Off we go. Students are running down the hall loudly, lively, eagerly. I am trying to catch up. "Guys, I would like to ask you to talk only to more-than-human beings. This means you should not talk to each other!" They turn toward me to hear my voice and keep running down the stairs. "Guys . . . !" My voice drowns in the hallway of chatter, voices, sounds. I follow the echo. The cold winter air meets my words, envelops my language with freshness, turns them back, inward. I feel like this frozen, snowy space is a pause in meaning, between the human language and the natural world. I breathe in, step outside. My students are walking in different directions; some are in groups, some are alone.

Fresh crisp air
Cold and frosty
A swirl of wind
A still mind
Frozen in time
Helps you connect
With your inner self . . .
A moment in time.

Some students are videotaping, some are writing while walking, some are standing quietly.

I was greeted with the crisp blow of a cold winter breeze . . .
The snow twinkling, reflecting, sparkling
Rainbow from the bright warming sun.
As I glanced up into the sky to see

The almost cloudless day,
I was greeted by an Eagle . . .

Suddenly, they are no longer noisy and chaotic but contemplative and attentive to diverse spaces, places, something unique to them, something I cannot see from my walking point. It turns out to be an eagle; not everyone can see it. One student is drawn to the eagle's flight and starts writing as though following its wings, its flight in the sky. Later in class, a student said she is not really a poet but was inspired by the eagle and the cold air that greeted her "with the crisp blow of a cold winter breeze." The eagle was a poetic encounter, a greeting.

Nature came to me.
An eagle, on the highest breeze,
Moving slowly, very slow,
Floating above, looking down on us below.
I cannot call up to it, but I send my thoughts:
Majesty, true awe, inspiring brilliance, freedom, hope . . .
Can it be that I am
The Eagle?

The still life of cold air feels crispy; my breath turns into ice. The students are walking around, writing the story of the still life of this moment.

A bird, so small, I could barely see
But through the cold wind, the snow
It soared, soared so freely, freely . . .

Some students seem to be speaking with a spruce tree. One of them is looking at it from the side of the road in a very unusual place; this place is off the beaten path toward our building. The path is slippery, icy with branches and stones. The student does not seem to notice the cold temperature or the running-away time; she is standing in silence and in awe, in peacefulness before the spruce tree.

I walked outside and asked nature:
"What can I learn from you today?"
Nature answered: "Do you see anything that reminds you of things
You know about? Or done before?"
Yes, I see . . .
Fir trees and the red berries . . .

"What can you tell classmates about
These two trees?"

Later one of the students said to us, "I never noticed this spruce and how beautiful it is. I always walk by; the tree is just there, just another tree." Another student said, "It is amazing how we go through our busy days without taking the time to acknowledge and appreciate our natural world." The spruce became a subject of their awareness, the speaking subject with their stories.

Although I agree with the idea that there can be multiple interpretations, I cannot accept the conclusion that a poetic act of appreciation and acknowledgement of nature is a form of exploitation. A sense of peacefulness emerges from within and through the poetic encounter. A human being is a part of nature, and to reclaim this part means reimagining what it means to be and become human. Yet this reimagination is based on difference, which essentially means respect of otherness, not the exploitation of sameness. As Plumwood (1993) wrote, "Respect for others involves acknowledging their distinctiveness and difference, and not trying to reduce or assimilate them to the human sphere" (p. 174). To garner a sense of peacefulness from nature ultimately means to garner a sense of difference from busyness of human sphere; it is the disruption of the human-nature dualism of anthropocentrism through the acknowledgement of difference, otherness, and, simultaneously, the mutual existence in the moment of shared being, co-being.

Solidarity, calmness, stillness of the spruce tree
A real sense of peacefulness.

The students look peaceful and calm. Their gazes are drawn to the spruce. I do not want to interrupt this contemplative dialogue with the spruce tree and decide to walk toward the sun, where a group of students are standing in silence. They are trying to look at the sun and speak with it while warming their faces. They are smiling, laughing.

Cold breeze on my lips, nose, cheeks
Sparkling crystals on the ground
Crunch, steps
I make my way to the sun . . .
How can it be so distant, so close?
My face warms, the sun sees me,
I see the sun,
I feel peacefulness

The students seem cold; their field notes are filled with words; their faces are red from the cold air. "Hey, Olga, how long should we stay outside?" some of them ask. "It's up to you, but I am going back to class; it is too cold for me." "Yeah, right!" Laughter, noise. I enter the dark hallway; the students are running up the stairs, loudly, lively, energetically. I am trying to catch up. "Guys, wait for me." The echo brings some of their utterances back to me: "It was fun . . . good times, yeah. . . ." In the classroom, the clock shows 9:20 a.m.

Discussion

New Ways of Seeing

The students' notes reveal two main themes of their experiences and generative meanings: their *new ways of seeing* and *peacefulness*. These new ways of seeing are about their *intentional attention* to the natural world and its diverse communities as more-than-human beings and speaking subjects. Berger (1972) wrote that "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (p. 8). As students wrote in their notes, our brief activity inspired them to look beyond their previous knowledge about the place and to see it. Usually, they walk by the same tree without looking because they do not believe in the importance of seeing it as the speaking more-than-human being. They also do not usually search for a dialogue with an eagle and do not know whether eagles greet them. However, this dialogic invitation and provocation created a possibility for wondering, learning, living *with* the eagle, with the tree, with the little bird. Nature has stopped being a monological, muted object; it has not only gained its own agency of being in students' learning but also its unique infinity, its unique multivoiced beings. Nature is no longer a singular noun without any meaning; it has many unique meanings that are unfinalized and in becoming. Students' dialogues with nature have gained an artistic, imaginative, living sense of place, rather than an instrumental, exploitative space of colonization.

The term *colonization* signifies a complex process through which the dominant culture asserts, imposes, and sustains its authoritarian, hierarchical supremacy over the natural world (Greenwood, 2010a; Plumwood, 1993; 2003). Public school systems and teacher education are implicated in the colonial order that has not ended in some historical past but exists in our very present, in our everyday lives (Greenwood, 2010a). The logic of colonization permeates the cultural fabric of our society and its institutional bureaucracies, including the curriculum. More specifically, Plumwood (1993) found that the logic of colonization is the logic of domination, which guises itself as the objective and progressive rationality of the mastery over nature, emotion, feelings. Furthermore, she wrote that "a culture of rational colonization in relation to those aspects of the world, whether human or nonhuman, that are counted as 'nature' is part of the general cultural inheritance of the west" (Plumwood, 2003, p. 53). For many, if not all, of my students, this colonizing logic is invisible, normalized, and even desired. Colonization is deeply ingrained in the minds, hearts, and souls of the colonizer and the colonized; it is a blind spot that many are not willing to confront and recognize since this would trouble the dominant ways of knowing and seeing. In a way, I am a colonizer of the classroom and the natural world too. The logic of colonization rationalizes students' and teachers' inability to see nature as more-than-human worlds and beings as well as to critically face ourselves in these encounters.

In addition, teacher education programs are deeply colonizing regulatory monological discourses that make it almost impossible "to publicly confront the deep assumptions underlying the teacher education bureaucracy, or to imagine and create an alternative, decolonizing vision" (Greenwood

et al., 2009, para. 1). Hence, the dominant paradigm of conventional schooling not only silences and objectifies trees, eagles, birds but also colonizes their unique ways of being. Nature becomes unseen, invisible in teacher education and in learning. Consequently, students' experiential ways of knowing and seeing are backgrounded, subordinated, and colonized by schooling. However, our dialogues with nature as a miracle of more-than-human voices and ways of being have unearthed this implicit, hidden colonization in the classroom; the students have a possibility for decolonizing their ways of seeing by paying attention to the natural world. In the conventional classroom, their attention is highly regulated and dominated by the institutional confines of the material building and institutional logic of bureaucratic curriculum.

Having said that, it is important to note that the term *decolonized ways of seeing* is contested and ambiguous. What does it mean to decolonize one's ways of seeing? How does one empirically measure decolonization? I do not even try and do not raise these questions because not everything is measurable, especially one's experience of being. I suggest that the walking activity creates a possibility for decolonizing, not a certainty or claim of decolonization. This possibility is ultimately, paradoxically a dialogic possibility (Matusov, 2022). As Matusov explained, this is the new possibility that comes into being through and within the "human encounter with the other, when people are genuinely interested in each other, address each other, and respond to each other taking each other seriously as 'a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event [co-being]'" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6 as cited in Matusov, 2022, p. 4). This co-being and otherness extend to more-than-human beings. A dialogue is in and of itself a possibility of and for seeing others with respect to their alterity and a plurality of consciousness without any claim of possession or dispossession: just being there, being present *with* others, human and more-than-human beings.

Intentional Attention

During their dialogues with nature, the students' ways of seeing were embodied; they described their dialogues through the language of embodied sensations, feelings, emotions, and the physical sense of presence. The cold winter air was one of the main topics of students' field notes. This air forced them to pay attention to space. Their dialogues began with the intentional attention to the air and its touch. However, air is invisible, so intentional attention is a paradox. How can my students pay intentional attention to the invisible air? Precisely the encounter with the cold, unexpected air made them wonder about the paradox of speaking with nature. Abram (1996) wrote that "the air can never be opened for our eyes, never made manifest. Itself invisible, it is the medium through which we see all else in the present terrain" (p. 226). Air, breath, words are some of the embodied aspects of speaking with someone. Through the attention to their embodied encounter with air, students decided to intentionally search for other encounters with different speaking subjects. Here, intention is the embodied act of consciousness; air actualizes this act of being in and with the world.

Furthermore, the intention to search for dialogues with nature inspired students to become attentive to more-than-human beings as having their own unique consciousness. In this new way of seeing, students started to relate to the natural world dialogically (Bakhtin, 1984). The eagle came with greetings; the eagle also became a recipient and imaginative respondent of students' thoughts. The tree became the author of students' attention as well as the participant in the students' dialogues with each other and the tree itself. Bakhtin (1984) wrote that "the consciousness of other people cannot be perceived, analyzed, defined as objects or as things—one can only *relate to them dialogically*. To think about them means t*o talk with them; otherwise they immediately turn to us their objectivized side:* they fall silent, close up, and congeal into finished, objectivized images" (p. 68, emphasis in original). It is true that Bakhtin wrote about the consciousness of people, yet I extend this dialogic relationality to the consciousness of animals, trees, plants, and birds as well. The intention to dialogically relate to more-than-human beings takes place in thinking. For example, students begin to think about them in a new way; these new ways of thinking are imaginative dialogues and dialogic relationships with the natural world.

However, the ethical limitations and boundaries of these thinking dialogues remain contested and problematized as highly anthropomorphic and anthropocentric. Fawcett (1989) explained the environmental, educational, and ethical significance of anthropomorphism; "this is what anthropomorphism is. We know ourselves as human, only insofar as we live in connection with, and experience nonhumans" (p. 18). Through the intentional attention to nature, students may experience these living connections through inescapable anthropomorphism, meaning the students may project their thoughts onto trees and eagles (e.g., *"Can it be that I am the eagle?"*). Fawcett (1989) suggests that these projections are necessary since anthropomorphism "is the fact of being" (p. 19). Through these questionable projections, students learn to relate to each other, themselves, and nature dialogically. Thanks to these critical projections, living connections, and relationships, students may become more humane, more humanistic, more conscious of nature as a miracle. Lastly, what these new ways of seeing and intentional awareness mean remain unfinalized and undetermined.

Peacefulness

When we came back from these dialogues, the collective sense of peacefulness permeated our classroom. Many students seemed to be contemplative, reflective, and quiet. There was no regular chitchat about daily events; everyone seemed immersed in their experiences or in some other aspect of their inner life. Peacefulness emerged as a collective theme of the reflections and field notes. The outdoor dialogues generated peacefulness. More specifically, the trees, the sun, birds, all diverse beings looked peaceful to some students. This outlook led them to feel their inner peacefulness as well. Even though this dialogic activity was brief, the students became more peaceful afterward. The field notes indicate that the sense of peacefulness was associated with many other positive emotions (e.g., freedom, solidarity, hope) and the overall collective sense of well-being. For example, my field notes state, "The students are coming back from the walk discussing something, smiling; they seem more energetic. Even those students who chose not to

participate became interested in these spontaneous discussions and chitchat. In contrast, when they sit for a long time in the classroom, the energy feels stagnant and stiff; there is no chitchat, only sighs and yawns. The walk was a rupture in mood and energy. I too feel more energized." As one student exclaimed, "I think we should do this more often. It's just fun, gives you a mental boost to be able not to do anything at all, just walk and observe nature." Another student, who chose not to go, said, "Yes, sitting here was also good; I get to walk around my farm when I go home." My own notes continue, "I sit down and feel that my internal dialogue about what I should be teaching is in the moment of presence, stillness, and being with the students. Together, we feel a bit of relief from the classroom routine." Nevertheless, I wonder if this collective sense of well-being really took place or if it was a fleeting sensation of being. Perhaps a delusion? As always, there can be and should be multiple interpretations. Without any attempt to simplify or overstate the significance of this moment, I can confidently say that the sense of well-being was experienced by many students who said that it was great, fun, and enjoyable.

Likewise, Passmore and Howell (2014) and Passmore and Holder (2016) found that people's interactions with nature led to a sense of peacefulness and well-being by reducing anxieties. For many students, their schooling is a source of anxiety. More specifically, conventional colonizing pedagogies inflict different forms of anxiety and stress onto students through the imposed curriculum with its competitive, standardized tests, evaluations, and future-centric models of outcomes (Flannery, 2018). In contrast, our dialogues with more-than-human beings revealed a more grounded, place-conscious sense of presence in the world that is not concerned with some superficial, externally imposed anxious future of becoming but is about the intentional way of being in the present. Consequently, these dialogues create a sense of peacefulness in students and in the classroom; conventional lessons induce anxiety and the dreadful state of human suffering (Shugurova, 2019).

Conclusion

The question about a dialogue with more-than-human beings remains to be answered and to be questioned by teacher educators and future teachers. I wonder whether these dialogues can change our teacher education programs, making them more democratic and sustainable, or whether these dialogues are another opium for educators that makes conventional, colonizing education not only tolerable but also desirable (Matusov, 2021). Is nature another religion? Or is foisted, compulsory schooling a new religion? Is teacher education an economic panacea of the colonized world? As Marx said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (as cited in Matusov, 2021, p. 27). Likewise, my search for a dialogic pedagogy with more-than-human worlds in the soulless confines of teacher education may be a symptom of the heartless world of foisted education and compulsory schooling that is unbearable without these moments of being in and with the living world. And if it is unbearable and if these dialogues make it more bearable, then the question becomes why educators should create another layer of sugarcoating over the oppressive system of colonization. Consequently, these dialogues with their new ways of seeing may also reveal some

of the hidden, dehumanizing blind spots of colonization in teacher education, schools, society, and the self. However, Wegerif asked,

> Colonizing of whom by whom? I think that self and other, man and nature, west and rest are all constructs formed out of and after the event of dialogue. All ideas could be described as 'an opium' in that they are more or less useful guiding fictions—the point of dialogue is to return to the underlying (and overarching) reality. This reality has no name—it is not an idea—but it is nourishing and so brings peace! (personal communication, 2021)

Dialogic pedagogy with more-than-human beings has no name and no conclusion; it is an inspirational and visionary attempt to return to the underlying, peaceful reality of being with our beautiful planet.

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