

# **Towards a Pedagogy of Land: The Urban Context**

Sandra Styres

*York University*

Celia Haig-Brown

*York University*

Melissa Blimkie

*York University*

## **Abstract**

This article examines the possibilities around what we have come to call a pedagogy of Land. The authors explore what it means to bring a pedagogy of Land into classrooms and communities within urban settings. The authors consider the ways Land as pedagogy might translate from rural to urban contexts while addressing some of the ways this work moves forward in meaningful and relevant ways. Further, the authors share some aspects that have allowed Land to inform both pedagogy and praxis in teacher education focusing on student success, particularly Aboriginal students within schools and teacher education programs.

## **Précis**

Cet article examine les possibilités autour de ce que nous sommes venus à appeler une pédagogie de la Terre. Les auteurs explorent ce que cela signifie pour apporter une pédagogie de terrain dans les classes et les communautés dans les milieux urbains. Les auteurs considèrent la Terre comme moyens pédagogie pourrait se traduire par des zones rurales vers les contextes urbains tout en abordant quelques-unes des façons ce travail va de l'avant de façon significative et pertinente. En outre, les auteurs partagent certains aspects qui ont permis à terre pour informer la pédagogie et la pratique dans la formation des enseignants en

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mettant l'accent sur la réussite des élèves, notamment les élèves autochtones dans les écoles et les programmes de formation des enseignants.

## **Towards a Pedagogy of Land:**

### **The Urban Context**

*“When we know our own engaging and difficult history as a nation...we can begin to create public places, in all parts of our cities, to mourn and to celebrate who we really are”* (Hayden, 1997, p. 238)

### **Starting from Land**

In this article, we ponder the possibilities when shifting what we have come to call a pedagogy of *Land* from a northern rural context to southern urban contexts. The impetus for the article arises from one of the author’s exploration of a pedagogy of *Land* in a practicum teaching experience in a Bachelor of Education Primary/Junior (Aboriginal) program offered through Brock University in the Northern Nishnawbe Aski Territory. (Styres, 2011). Her work examines “the concepts of storying, journeying, and circle epistemology as a central model for meaning-making; the development of land-centred course content and activities; as well as issues around language use” (p. 717) in relation to the ways pedagogy of *Land* can be embodied and enacted in rural communities and classrooms. Styres asserts that, “land as first teacher can be easily adapted to any geographical space because it is land in all of its abstract and concrete fluidity and shifting realities that informs pedagogy” (p. 728). In this article we explore what it means to bring a pedagogy of *Land* into classrooms and communities in urban settings as well as the various aspects of a pedagogy of *Land* that can translate appropriately from rural to urban contexts. We also examine some approaches/stories that contribute to this work proceeding in meaningful and relevant ways. We also share some of our efforts to allow

*Land* to inform both pedagogy and praxis in teacher education, always with our eyes on success for students, particularly Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> students, in schools.

Let's begin with some terms. For our purposes, *Land* encompasses all water, earth, and air and is seen simultaneously to be an animate and spiritual being constantly in flux. It refers not only to geographic places and our relationships with urban Aboriginal landscapes but also gestures to the ways that discourses within places inform and are informed by our vision, pedagogies, and teaching practices. Discourse, within the context of this work, refers to various conversations, patterns of thought, and meaning-making of individuals who inhabit those spaces. Building on the work of Zinga and Styres (2012), we capitalize and italicize *Land* to emphasize the complexity of our use of the concept. A pedagogy of *Land* draws on “the interconnectedness and interdependency of relationships, an understanding of cultural positioning, as well as subjectivities that extend beyond the borderlands of traditional mainstream conceptualizations of pedagogy” (Styres, 2011, p. 722). These relationships are not limited to rural spaces when they are called to consciousness; rather through giving our attention to the land wherever our work is done, they inform all of what we do in the name of education. Drawing upon that understanding we briefly address some distinctions between our pedagogy of *Land* and what is generally understood to be place-based education.

### **Not Just a Pedagogy of Place**

We want to be clear that, in our work, we are not talking simply about a pedagogy of place or place-based education. While we take seriously the materiality of land, a pedagogy of *Land* refers also to the spiritual, emotional and intellectual aspects of *Land*. *Land* as sentient. Its existence now and since time immemorial. Its history. *Land* is a

living thing. A river is a living thing. The air is alive.

While dominant Western<sup>ii</sup> understandings of place-based education focus in on local contexts, it has not historically had a specific connection to Indigenous knowledge or necessarily to the material geography, i.e. land (without italics), in which the education is taking place. Its focus is on problems arising in a community or neighbourhood or town which may or may not involve the “natural” environment and often does not recognize or acknowledge the relationships Indigenous peoples have to their lands since time immemorial, nor does it take into account Land as a living fundamental being. However, place-based education (in any context) has been extremely useful in bringing students back to a focus on local issues rather than concentrating solely on global or “other” people’s issues. David Sobel, one of the developers of place-based education, includes enhancing students’ appreciation of the “natural” world as one possible outcome of place-based education. He writes that place-based education:

is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. (n.p.)

David Greenwood (2009) acknowledges a distinction between place and land in his self-description “as a White, educated class, land- and place-attached American male.” (p.1).

That being said, inspired by Native-American artist LisaNa Redbear, he goes on to look to a more meaningful grounding for what he calls **critical** place-based education.

At its deepest level, critical place-based education is not merely about making school more meaningful or contributing to community life. It is about remembering a deeper and wider narrative of living and learning in connection with others and with the land. It is about resisting the colonizing erasures and enclosures of schooling that make such remembering seem impractical and unnecessary (p. 5).

If there is a connection between our work and place-based work, it lies in a focus on de-colonizing and indigenizing education which serves to disrupt business-as-usual.

Indigenizing education refers to the ways education can become more ideologically aligned with Indigenous thought, locally accountable to Indigenous people and communities, as well as the ways it might be infused institutionally and in praxis. For our purposes, the use of the word *place* always includes an explicit awareness of *Land* on which place exists.

### **All the World is Natural**

We strive to lead our students to re-cognize, in the full sense of coming to know again, that constructed cityscapes within urban contexts are also natural landscapes in that we are all part of “the natural.” They exist in a relationship with *Land* that was originally occupied and continues to be occupied within Aboriginal peoples’ traditional territories. *Land* in cities speaks to us too— whether we choose to listen or not. Learning to listen to the lessons *Land* has is essential for us and for the seven generations that

follow. Seven generational thinking is a particular form of Indigenous thought that suggests each generation is responsible for ensuring that decisions are made with a view to the implications seven generations into the future.

Indigenizing education conjures up principles which focus on the learner from a holistic perspective taking into account spiritual, emotive, cognitive, and physical elements of human interaction. These elements are never isolated one from the other but exist in constant and ever-changing relationship. In the city, the learner enters into learning experiences as a culturally and geographically located individual (related to, but often exceeding, a community of origin or home community)<sup>iii</sup> whose reality is and has been informed and influenced by *Land*—in the city and perhaps elsewhere—by all his/her familial and community relationships. Further the person is influenced by sources and domains of knowledge that include: language, traditions and ceremonies, place as part of natural and constructed environments, ancestors, clans, nation, and other nations (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Taking seriously a pedagogy of *Land* in the urban context opens up possibilities for educators and students themselves to consider how each learner is grounded, shaped, and informed by the *Land* and how pedagogical practices based in deepening understandings of *Land* can be (re)claimed, (re)constructed, and (re)enacted within the cultural and linguistic diversity inside and outside urban classrooms, informal learning environments, and communities. A pedagogy of *Land* focuses on the ways *Land* can explicitly inform teaching and learning through curriculum including course content, instruction, activities, and assessments. For us, a pedagogy of *Land* starts from the notion of *Land* as first teacher and as an embodiment of self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998). Understandings of self-in-relation are based on “very old pedagogies”<sup>iv</sup> (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2008, p. 248) grounded in *Land* in the

form of stories that “cannot be separated from geographical locations, from actual physical places within the land...you cannot live in that land without asking or looking at or noticing a boulder or rock...there’s always a story” (Silko, 1977, p. 69). We argue that the stories persist even within urban contexts—for example, by a river, on a hill, in a laneway or city square. At the same time, we acknowledge that newer stories can also inform each of us as we come to know relationships to *Land*.

### **Current Context for our Work**

One might ask, why a pedagogy of *Land* at this juncture? We respond in two ways. First a focus on *Land* as a foundational aspect of Indigenous thought provides Aboriginal students (and others) in schools long overdue recognition of its significance. Second, too many people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) have come to believe that as city dwellers, they are somehow immune to their relationship with *Land*. While this denial persists even as people check the weather signs, ponder climate change, and flock to parks to touch the land, the time is ripe for renewing an understanding that we all exist in relationship with *Land* broadly defined, all the time.

Let’s begin with the story of the needs and current contexts of urban Aboriginal students. The Urban Aboriginal Peoples’ Study as reported by the Environics Institute (2010) noted that, according to Canada’s 2006 Census data, “half of the Aboriginal population in Canada live in urban centres (including large cities or census metropolitan areas and smaller urban centres)” (p. 6). The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Ontario Ministry of Education – Aboriginal Education Office, 2007) states that according to the 2001 Census data, 61% of the Ontario Aboriginal population reside in urban centres. Further, the Aboriginal population is



growing at a rate that is 1.5 times higher than the national Canadian average (one third of the Aboriginal population is aged 14 or under) (Helin, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education – Aboriginal Education Office, 2007). According to the 2006 Census data there are approximately 242,490 Aboriginal people residing in the province of Ontario. The 2006 Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) data indicates the Urban Aboriginal Identity populations for four cities in Ontario are around: Barrie – 3,390; Brantford – 3,865; Hamilton – 8,890; and Toronto – 26,575 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Since Census data is subject to the self-identification of Aboriginal peoples, which remains a contentious and hotly debated topic and a site of resistance, the data may seriously underestimate numbers. In Canada (and across North America generally) identity is often tangled within the web of colonial relations. What all of this information does indicate is that there is a growing trend of Aboriginal people moving into urban centres leading to first, second, and third generation urban Aboriginal populations. One may extrapolate that this trend leads to an increase of Aboriginal students within mainstream city schools, which in turn informs the pedagogical issues we are exploring. Since a relationship with *Land* is fundamental to Indigenous thought, making it explicit in urban schools returns us to one of the standards of Eber Hampton's (1995) model of First Nations education and provides a connection point for students in those classrooms (p. 39-40) – connections to land.

Turning to the situation of city dwellers more generally, Dolores Hayden (1997) situates her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes*, in a particular American community. While it includes only a brief reference to an Aboriginal perspective, many parallels to the current urban context can be drawn from her representation of the diversity and complexity of urban experiences. According to Hayden, urban identity (similar to the ways identity is constructed within any culture-sharing group) is

interconnected with personal and collective or social memories and, as such, the “urban landscapes [become] storehouses for these social memories” (p. 9). How we extricate those memories within our pedagogy to make explicit the *Land* that informs them forms the foundation for one of the ways this work might proceed in a good way, particularly regarding the tangled web of colonial relations. For our purposes, we add that *Land*, in the urban context, “encompasses shared time in the form of shared territory” (p. 9) as well as efforts to develop shared meaning-making, always in relation to those territories. While for Hayden, shared meaning-making assumes that everyone who occupies *shared places* will interpret the landscape with a similar world-view, we recognize that interpretations will also include divergences. That being said, one of the most important commonalities we strive for is a shared acknowledgement and recognition of the primacy of *Land* in all our relations (animate and inanimate), for Aboriginal peoples who have occupied and continue to occupy this land and for all those people who now dwell in urban Aboriginal territories whether compromised by treaties or unceded.

Hayden (1997) acknowledges the intricacies and complexities of defining the term place. Interestingly, using a travel metaphor that conjures up images of immigrants and settlers, she describes the notion of place as a suitcase “so overfilled one can never shut the lid” (p. 15). For her, place includes cultural location, location within the urban centre, as well as the ways space is designated and arranged. In this way “cultural identity, social history and urban design are intertwined” (p. 15). While this may be true, Hayden does not address the deeper American context. That is to say within the Americas, and indeed in any colonized lands, everyone’s *suitcase* in any fulsome recognition or acknowledgement of whatever places they live and occupy (rural or urban), exists on *Land* in relation to Indigenous peoples’ territories – legally, spiritually,

emotionally, and historically. For Indigenous peoples, we might argue, no suitcase is necessary since they have dwelt on this *Land* since time immemorial. Rather birthright, reciprocity, respect and responsibility characterize their traditional attachment to *Land*. Reminding all students of this heritage and educating them in Indigenous thought within urban contexts bodes well for transformative education that includes respectfully acknowledging and caring for *Land*. In this way newer stories are created that build upon and become part of the stories that have existed and continue to persist on Land since time before time.

### **Situating the City: Layered and Storied<sup>v</sup> Shapes of Time**

“Storytelling with the shapes of time uses the forms of the city...to connect residents with the urban landscape history and foster a stronger sense of belonging” (Hayden, 1997, p. 227).

The urban landscape’s (hi)story begins with Aboriginal people and stories.<sup>vi</sup> According to Basso (1996), Feld (1996), Momaday (1997), Silko (1977), Tafoya (1995), and Wilson (2008), these stories are circular and organic in nature. They form a complex, layered, and inextricable relationship grounded in place. Placed stories, Basso says, are contextualized around events and traditional teachings (and we add based in *Land* per se), as well as historical and contemporary sagas, and, as such, are not situated within linear time frames. Rather, time is viewed as layered and iterative with each layer building upon the stories of the previous; it is an organic web of intersections forming past, present and future. Feld and Basso (1996) state that “place is the most fundamental form of

embodied experience—the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time” (p. 9).

According to Feld (1996), space is an empty generality; however, place is particular, it is mythic (or as we prefer, storied). Places according to Basso (1996), “animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed” (p. 107). Basso and Silko situate their articulation of placed stories within very specific culture-sharing groups that are grounded in their ancestral lands.

We want to argue for the importance of grounding contemporary stories and pedagogies in the *Land* of urban contexts, long used and occupied by Aboriginal peoples, where increasingly divergent groups of people have come to co-exist. When we speak of layers of stories and relationships, we often imagine an X-ray allowing us to peer down through the layers of earth to see the footprints of all those who preceded us on this land. Our footprints join those of the first Indigenous person who walked here and all those who followed. Our stories are layered on theirs just as the footprints are layered on one another. All our stories.

### **Digging and Naming: “Other” Stories of a Place**

Hayden’s (1997) notion of storytelling with shapes of time, took us on a journey to consider some of these storied connections to place within urban contexts. In this context storytelling with shapes of time refers to the ways Land (including natural and built landscapes) shift, change, and transform through time. Modern urban landscapes often appear to be an attempt to erase history and deny our interdependence with Land. But, the stories remain, carried forward from beneath the concrete to inform urban landscapes for those who take the time to explore and listen.

This consideration of urban landscapes in relation to traditional concepts of storying led us to consider some stories that were formed and reformed within urban contexts. In turn, this focus begged the question of the ways urban landscapes are connected to and constructed over the traditional lands that the original people have occupied since time immemorial and that they continue to occupy to this day. Haig-Brown (2009) writes that “long before it was disrupted by cities and sprawling suburbs, this land was and continues to be a gathering place of Indigenous peoples with *complex histories of dwelling and travelling*” (p. 5 – emphasis in original). As such urban landscapes exist within complex historical and contemporary relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Western thought also produces stories of land distinct from Indigenous traditions: some of these stories come to us from archaeologists. We turn to examples of the ways these stories also teach us about *Land*. Archaeological Assessments<sup>vii</sup> for the Hamilton, Barrie, and Toronto regions give one form of historical account of the People of the Great Lakes. These together with some articles around the nearby Brantford and Caledonia land claims issues provide a form of *grounding* (literally) for our storied relationships to place (Bacher & Beaton, 2004; Dearlove, 2011; Swayze, 2011; Vanevery, 2012). Each archaeological report reveals an intimate connection with First Nations ancestors who were born, lived, travelled, and died on the various sites that are now urban landscapes. Their stories lie beneath mounds of concrete, debris and layers of colonial tracks; nevertheless, their lives are painstakingly and inextricably recorded in the rocks, earth, and waterways, as are those of related plant and animal life. For example, the controversial Red Hill Creek Valley in Hamilton has always been a place of great significance to the Aboriginal people in Southern Ontario. It is not possible, in the scope

of this article, to address all of the deep and complex historical connections of the various Aboriginal peoples who have and continue to reside in Southern Ontario. However, with apologies to the Elders past and present for any errors or inconsistencies, a few of the nations who have storied connections to the lands in Southern Ontario are the Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, Mississaugas, and Wyendot, Aboriginal people occupied the Red Hill Creek Valley site since time immemorial as evidenced by artefacts, burial grounds, and ancient longhouses that have been recovered mere feet below the surface soil in both registered (22) and unregistered (1,000) archaeological sites (Bacher & Beaton, 2004, p. 16). Despite the protests and resistance from the Haudenosaunee nations in Southern Ontario, the Red Hill Valley expressway now covers these sites. Even within this new burial, this urban landscape yields a story for those archaeologists who chose to listen and for those of us who choose to read and perhaps even visit the site.

In another story, north of Toronto, the Wellington Development Corporation of Barrie in Simcoe County contracted an archaeological assessment of a previously excavated Dykstra Site (BGw-5). This site, considered to be middle Iroquoian, is approximately 0.5 hectares and is located within the Holly Secondary Planning Area. Originally established in 1985 by a doctoral student conducting research, subsequent assessments of the site were conducted in 1992 and again in 1994 in which no further artefacts were found. The site was buffered to allow for development around the archaeological site. In 1999 another archaeological assessment was conducted a mere five metres south of the original site where a longhouse was uncovered and 6,132 artefacts were recovered (12,000 total from both sites). The assessment concluded that this had not been a permanent village. Extensive archaeological surveys across southern Simcoe County have revealed clusters of middle Iroquoian sites. The assessments concluded that

the Barrie sites served as shared meeting places where negotiations were held with the Algonquin people prior to the migration of an entire Iroquoian community from the north shore of Lake Ontario. For Aboriginal peoples across the Americas, these sites are filled with memory, history, and ancestors. The father of scholar Shawn Wilson (Cree) gives a version of his understanding of such sites in another context:

As I was walking through the spaces between the clumps of willow and trees all of a sudden I realized in mid-stride that if our ancestors have been living here for centuries it is likely that some may have died even on the very spot I was going to step. If that were the case then *everywhere I go on this continent is also likely the case*. Everywhere their remains would have gone back into the land that became enriched by them. They would supply nutrition for the grass I was walking on, the worm that feeds on the grass, and the bird that feeds on the worm and so on. We two-legged Beings eventually find nutrition from those same sources! Thus our ancestors ARE part of us in that way. We are all connected! Now I truly understood the term “and all our relations.” We are only a part of that circle. (As quoted in Wilson, 2008, p. 96. Our emphasis added.)

While Wilson is walking on rural land, we argue his observations apply equally to urban contexts.

Many archaeological assessments are written by non-Aboriginal peoples, whose own historical storied roots lie in another land. And yet, they present *for* Aboriginal peoples, indeed for all individuals currently residing in those places, the original inhabitants of this land; how they lived or died; whether or not a site was permanent,

shared, or sacred; and the archaeologist's view of whether a site is worth preserving or obliterating in the name of *progress*. We also come to know that only rarely is there consultation with Elders and other Knowledge Keepers, who could contribute deeper understandings of the significance of the places. These studies most often are conducted without taking into account any detailed understanding of historical and contemporary interconnected relationships between *Land* and Aboriginal peoples. However, what they do show is that within *Land* there are clear indicators of the stories of those who have lived here since time before memory. Anzaldúa (1999) profoundly articulates, "My stories are acts encapsulated in time, *enacted* every time they are spoken aloud or read silently" (p. 89) in text or on *Land*.

As noted by Basso (1996) and Feld (1996) place names themselves signal stories arising from *Land*. For example, there are several stories and some debate over the naming of Toronto. Hotinonsho:ni architect and founder of the Beacon to the Ancestors Foundation, William Woodworth (2011), states the city is named for a great white pine tree "fallen in the primordial forest...[which] still lives in the spirit and name of this place" (n.p.). Others have claimed that Toronto comes from a word meaning a meeting place. Anthropologist John Steckley says that the term *Toronto* is derived from the name of an area now called "the Narrows where Lake Simcoe empties into Lake Couchiching in Orillia." (English, 2007, p. A8) For thousands of years, he says, the Aboriginal people who occupied that place stuck poles in the water in order to trap fish – and some of those poles are still standing. The name subsequently migrated southward by way of colonial relationships, changed its spelling, and became the name of a fort located at the mouth of the Humber River. According to the Official City Plan for Toronto, there are over "3,000 lost historic sites along the waterfront alone. Our history dates back over 10,000 years to



include Aboriginal villages, campsites, middens and burials” (City of Toronto, 2010, n.p.). Regardless of the “truth” of this naming, the various stories keep the evidence in front of us that, as Woodworth tells us:

The modern city of Toronto is built on the remains of Aboriginal peoples of the  
Hotinonsho:ni [people who build longhouses] Nations—namely Huron, Neutral,  
and Seneca. Following a period of desecration, the Anishinabec peoples migrated  
down from the north and it was their people who greeted the first British settlers.  
(n.p.)

For the most part and for too many people, these sites have been *lost* and/or deliberately covered over because they were deemed unimportant in the face of 21<sup>st</sup> century progress. Yet placed stories remain inextricably intertwined in our lives in a complex web of colonial relationships that, as demonstrated by Haig-Brown (2009), continue to be anything but simple. The lessons contained within these place names and debates bring to the fore the origins and persisting realities of our cities. They are significant lessons for all our children.

Clearly, these placed stories have shaped the form and function of urban landscapes whether we are aware of them or not. Place stories are “spatially anchored at points on the land” (Basso, 1996, p. 47). Moreover, while landscapes have changed over time and have become layered over with concrete and glass, in moments and spaces when people listen, placed stories reclaim their power. They do and will find ways to speak to our present and future generations. We—all of us who dwell here today—can activate this process through education and the process of determining what and how we teach

children—all our children—about their relationships to the lands on which our cities are built.

### **Self-in-relation to Land.**

[W]hen you create something from an Indigenous perspective, you are creating it from that environment, from that land that it sits in. Indigenous peoples...are shaped by the environment, the land, their relationship; their spiritual, emotional and physical relationship to that land. (Wilson, 2008, p. 88)

We all live in constant and ever-changing relationship with *Land*. Haig-Brown and Dannenmann (2008) and Haig-Brown and Hodson (2009) assert that Aboriginal education (including pedagogy, curriculum, epistemology, ontology and discourses) exists within a complex set of relationships where “the world of spirit is interconnected with the world we see and interact with on a daily basis.... The land...is a complex being – a spiritual and material place from which all life springs” (Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009, p. 168). *Land* is more than a fixed geographical space; it is also a spiritually dynamic and relational place.

What we call the landscape is generally considered to be something ‘out there.’ But, while some aspects of the landscape are clearly external to both our bodies and our minds, what each of us actually experiences is selected, shaped, and colored by what we know. (Bernie Greenbie as quoted in Basso, 1996, p. 71)

Kulchyski (2005), grasping for an articulation of its complexity, posits land as “meaningfully organized and on the very point of speech, a kind of articulated thinking that fails to reach the ultimate translation in proposition or concepts, in messages” (p. 189). Kulchyski was referring to the ways Land communicates to us and the complexities and challenges of articulating the experiences of self-in-relation to Land. Recognizing the impossibility of any final declaration of meaning, a pedagogy of *Land* is grounded in organic and dynamic relationships that are constantly shifting and changing contextually. *Land* informs pedagogy through storied relationships. These stories are etched into the essence of every animal, rock, tree, seed, pathway becoming roadway and then city street, and every waterway – whether flowing free or trapped in a culvert somewhere under the city— in relation to the Aboriginal people who have existed on the land for generations. Kulchyski writes that “one can [learn to] read the stories inscribed in the landscape with as much care as one reads the narratives of classical history” (p. 18). If a pedagogy of *Land* “draws on very old pedagogies by never losing sight of the land as the first teacher...and promises new ways to think about participatory community-based education” (Haig-Brown, 2005, p. 89), our recurring question focuses on what a land-centred pedagogy might look like in an urban context? How do we activate Kulchyski’s challenge to learn to read the stories inscribed in every landscape?

Basso (1996) points out that the western Apache—and we add many Indigenous peoples—create sense from *Land* by making it “intelligible...they take steps to constitute it in relation to themselves” (p. 40). This sentiment is not unlike Hayden’s (1997) commitment to “coming to terms with the urban landscape as it exists and has existed, connecting the history of struggle over urban space with the poetics of occupying

particular places” (p. 11-12). Land as pedagogy in relation to an urban context becomes “fashioned from new and different materials and points in fresh directions” (Basso, 1996, p. 147). Alfred (2008) articulates the same notion when he states that survival of Aboriginal people in the twenty-first century depends on “finding new ways to love the land” (p. 10), in essence finding different ways to construct and express identity and meaning-making in our connections to urban landscapes.

### **Pedagogy of Land in the Urban Context**

We return to our initial questions as one way to think about “new ways to love the land”: What could it mean to bring a pedagogy of *Land* into classrooms and communities in urban settings? What aspects of a pedagogy of *Land* applicable in rural settings translate appropriately into urban contexts? What are some approaches/stories that will contribute to this work proceeding in a good way? In what follows we offer two examples of the work we have done in our efforts to address these questions in teacher education at one university. The first focuses on a course within an infusion program in one teacher education site, off-campus, but still urban. The other is an elective offered on campus to students in a major urban centre.

Beginning in the 2008/2009 academic year, Aboriginal content and pedagogies have been infused into each of the required education courses and teaching placements for the mainstream Bachelor of Education program at York University’s Faculty of Education site in Barrie, Ontario. Five First Nation communities and a significant number of Métis people live in the areas in and around the city of about 145,000 people. The teacher education program has approximately 45 teacher candidates, the majority of whom are non-Aboriginal. Aboriginal content and pedagogies are infused through

academic readings, class activities, films, assignments, field trips, and talks given by guest speakers. Our goal is that curriculum, pedagogy and Indigenous thought are inter-related to the point of being indistinguishable from one another. We believe that to be well-informed teachers in Canadian schools requires an understanding of Canada's contemporary and historical relations with Aboriginal people. Such understanding is fundamental to creating respectful relations that may lead to enhanced student success for all students. Site director Judy Blaney, together with local Aboriginal educators, school boards, and community members, identified the need for Indigenous education in mainstream teacher education and initiated the process of formally developing and implementing the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Infusion (the Infusion) at the Barrie site. Throughout the development and implementation of the Infusion, Aboriginal partners shared their knowledge and experience, providing ongoing guidance, feedback, and support. The goal is not for teacher candidates to become *experts* in Aboriginal education, but rather to create a space for them to develop their understanding of Aboriginal histories, knowledges, cultures, and contemporary issues as well as develop respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and communities. It is hoped that teacher candidates will use their infusion learning as a basis to teach in culturally respectful and meaningful ways, to respond to the specific needs and interests of Aboriginal students and communities, and to facilitate respectful and meaningful learning for all students.

At the Barrie site, *Land* in urban contexts has informed the content and pedagogy of the required Teaching for Inclusive Classrooms course through the topic of sustainability. With regard to teachings on sustainability, author and scholar Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) (1998) states:

All my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher...It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings - to its language - and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generations... (p. 178)

Despite such insights, historical and contemporary colonial relations have had a destructive impact on *Land* and people's understanding of *Land* through portraying occupied territories as terra nullius (Taylor, 2000) and promoting control and exploitation of *Land* for profit (Loomba, 2005; Smith, 1999). For many years, the rich history and teachings of *Land* and Indigenous people have been omitted from mainstream schooling and curriculum (Greenwood, 2009). The Infusion at Barrie is a first step in re-awakening respectful and meaningful relationships with *Land* and Indigenous peoples for all students.

In *Teaching for Inclusive Classrooms*, one of the authors of the article introduced sustainability to the teacher candidates in relation to European colonization and capitalism in the territory now known as Canada. Teacher candidates learned about *Land* by reading and discussing Indigenous people's work on sustainability: Chief Seattle's (Suquamish) 1850 teaching on sustainability; Winona LaDuke's (Ojibwe) (1997) article, *Voices from white earth: Gaawaabaabiganikaag*, on sustaining Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities; and a Métis guest speaker sharing her experiences of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal activist alliances in response to threats to local waters. Teacher candidates also spent time outdoors experiencing *Land* in the urban setting.

For one class, 40 teacher candidates, course instructors including one of the authors of this article, and a local Métis community member embarked on an urban walk to the Spirit Catcher, a 20 tonne corten steel sculpture that stands 22 metres tall and 24 metres wide in downtown Barrie on the shores of Kempenfelt Bay of Lake Simcoe. West coast First Nation Thunderbird teachings influenced sculptor Ron Baird as he created the Spirit Catcher for Expo 86 in Vancouver, British Columbia (MAC, n.d.). In June 1987, the Spirit Catcher was moved to its present location in downtown Barrie. During the dedication ceremony in September 1987, the burning of sweetgrass and drumming by the Rama Native Drum Group of Mnjikaing First Nation provided a fitting welcome to the sculpture (MAC, n.d.).

Thousands of years ago, the first peoples of the land now known as Simcoe County, rested on the shores of Kempenfelt Bay, prior to embarking on a portage route on their journey to Lake Huron. Being outdoors and experiencing *Land* at the Spirit Catcher, teacher candidates spent time watching, listening, sharing and engaging in stories, poems, songs, drumming, and journaling. They began the process of uncovering the many layers upon layers of relationships with *Land* in this urban context (Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009). Through intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually peeling back the layers, they, whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, were in a position to begin to see *Land*, First peoples, and their persisting relationships with them, as well as the connections between colonialism, capitalism, and sustainability in the Canadian context.

At the Spirit Catcher, some teacher candidates made explicit their prior ecological knowledge and experiences of *Land* in the urban environment. On the steps of the Spirit Catcher (perhaps a place where first peoples had gathered), on that sunny afternoon in April 2010, we listened to the drumming and singing of one of our Métis program

partners. People walking by took notice. A young boy joined us, while his mother listened nearby. A man approached the Spirit Catcher, listened for a moment and then walked away only to return a few moments later with a friend. We learned that he was Cree from Alberta. It was as if the drum were calling to them. On that day, we began to understand that the drum is calling for us all to see our relationship to *Land* and its first peoples in urban and rural contexts and to (re)generate respectful relationships.

Experiencing *Land* in this local context, teacher candidates also began to deconstruct the nature/city dichotomy and to understand their place in built and natural environments as dynamic and relational rather than dichotomous. As noted earlier, the nature/city dichotomy sets the two contexts oppositionally and serves to create sharply compartmentalized and disconnected notions of *Land*. Deconstructing that dichotomy allows students to consider ways pedagogy of *Land* in both rural and urban landscapes is characterized by interconnected and storied relationships that are in a state of constant flux - shifting, changing, and progressing. Students saw that travel outside of the city was not necessary to experience *Land*. They learned from it and from Aboriginal people residing in the downtown area of the city who happened upon the class and offered their gifts in the form of story and song.

On the York University campus in Toronto, Pedagogy of the *Land* was offered for the first time in the 2011 as part of the Faculty of Education's newly launched Indigenous Teacher Education Program. The course adds to those included in the Cross-Disciplinary Certificate in Aboriginal Studies administered by the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. It was also opened to all teacher education students as an elective. Pedagogy of *Land*, taught by one of the authors of this article, explores Indigenous understandings of *Land* as first teacher and the implications of such understandings for



all especially as we find ourselves in relation to one another in urban contexts.

Participants, all undergraduate university students, are asked to experience and analyze the significance of the specific spaces where teaching and learning take place with the understanding that the epistemology of Indigenous knowledges is centred on relationships that make us all inextricably part of the world we experience. The course, designed for teacher candidates, utilizes a decolonizing approach to (re)visioning *Land* by responding to and engaging in a discourse around the query “Whose traditional land are you on?” (Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 5). The course begins outside and returns regularly to the world beyond the walls of the classroom. Students engage the question of *Land* through (re)membered experiences and placed stories; (re)claiming Indigenous knowledge through interactions by way of land-centred activities such as smudging and story telling; re-membering their childhood connections to land; learning to resist and (re)vision the conventional dichotomy often applied to land (i.e. the natural world versus the built world); as well as (re)cognizing and (re)constructing those very old pedagogies around different, innovative perspectives that help students find new ways to interact with *Land* in their own teaching. Creating soundscapes outdoors provides one way to connect with the world there. Aboriginal academics, poets and a singer-songwriter, a focus on digital and other artistic group projects with a goal of advocating for the *Land* with people beyond our classroom, and engaging with readings involving global Indigenous thought are just a few of the innovative ways to encourage considerations of the worldwide significance of Indigenous knowledge. A pre- and post-questionnaire allows the professor to assess the teacher candidates’ perceptions of the contributions the course makes toward their feeling better prepared to make *Land* a part of their curriculum, to interact with Aboriginal students in their classrooms, to support student

success, and to explore the practical ways they might include Indigenous course content and teaching practices in their own classrooms for the benefit of all students.

### **Praxis: Reflection/Action**

Learning on and about *Land* has been an integral part of courses at the Barrie site and the focus of a course offering at the main campus. They serve as two small examples of our commitment to developing teacher candidates' knowledges and experiences of pedagogy of *Land* and *Land* as first teacher. Freire's (1970/2007) conceptualization of praxis guides our work. For him, "action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (p. 66) and that "reflection – true reflection – leads to action" (p. 65). Reflecting on these experiences of infusing learning on and about *Land* in education renews for us the importance of such knowledges as a way to interrupt notions of control and conquest in settlers' visions of land. We concur with Stewart (2004) when he says "I am fearful that our colonial history has produced a blind-spot in how we seek to relate to 'nature,' for 'nature' is again subjected to our desire for 'mastery' in our attempt to 'connect' to it." (n.p.). Simpson (Mississauga) (2004) writes:

After centuries of benefiting from the promotion of European colonialism and the denial of Indigenous Knowledge as a legitimate knowledge system, the Western academy is now becoming interested in certain aspects of Indigenous Knowledge, particularly those aspects that directly relate to the Western conceptualizations of ecology and environment. (p. 373)

Consequently, meaningful discussion with teacher candidates on contemporary colonialism of Indigenous ecological knowledges by non-Indigenous people and respectful ways and appropriate protocol to develop *Land*-centred classroom teaching is essential to positive engagement with the ideas expressed in this paper. The experiences and thoughts we present inform our thinking and teaching, as we continue to explore the best ways to bring a pedagogy of *Land* in urban contexts to teacher education programs and courses.

We acknowledge that to know *Land*, to learn its language, takes a long time, “longer than a lesson plan or a unit, a reporting period or a semester; longer than scope and sequence cycle or budget year...longer than forty years.” (Chambers, 2008, p. 116). The purpose of infusing learning on and about Land in the urban context in education curriculum for teacher candidates is to *begin* that journey, to develop respectful and meaningful relationships with *Land* and Indigenous peoples who have lived and travelled this land since time immemorial and to open the possibilities for continuing this journey together. These relationships involve working towards (re)balancing life-sustaining and life-destroying actions, relationships that recognize multiple ways of knowing and being in the world, relationships that we will continue to build in our classrooms and schools long after the completion of the Teaching for Inclusive Classrooms and Pedagogy of *Land* courses.

As indicated earlier there is a growing population of Aboriginal students in urban schools. To be successful these students need to see themselves and their worldviews represented in the instructional strategies, curricula, and stories of place and *Land*. For all students, important lessons lie beneath our feet, in the air around us, and in the waters of our lakes and rivers. Our goal is that at least some of the outcomes of the courses

described will enable teacher candidates to begin to take these lessons seriously: to interact with the environment respectful of traditional ways and stories of place and *Land*; to build understandings of learners as culturally located and grounded in the living foundations of *Land* as sources and domains of knowledge; to develop the abilities, skills, and knowledge necessary to incorporate Indigenous teachings based on *Land* as first teacher into their curricula appropriately, meaningfully, and respectfully, always observing local protocols. Perhaps we may even inspire others on their own journeys to a pedagogy of *Land*.

*“We are a part of everything that is beneath us, above us, and around us. Our past is our present, our present is our tomorrow, and our tomorrows are the seven generations past and present.”* Hodenosaunee Oral Teaching

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The use of the term Aboriginal is a sensitive one and is not intended to cause offense nor does it point to Aboriginal people as a homogenous culture-sharing group. It is not intended to erase differences between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. In this context it is used in the broadest sense to refer to the original or first people of a country and is used interchangeably with Indigenous in order to differentiate between Aboriginal people within Canada (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and Indigenous populations within a global context. The word itself is derived from an ancient language Latin: specifically *a/ab* means out of or from and *origine* means the beginning. So literally the word means “from the beginning” which captures our understandings of Aboriginal. Within quotations, we have maintained authors’ choice of wording.

<sup>ii</sup> The term dominant Western refers to a particular Eurocentric ideology that privileges dominant Eurocentred cultural values and beliefs.

<sup>iii</sup> “For many, the city is home. And yet many urban Aboriginal peoples retain a strong sense of connection to their ancestral communities or places of origin. The links are integral to strong family and social ties, and to traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture. Notwithstanding these links, majorities of First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit consider their current city of residence *home* and do not necessarily have ties to a community beyond, including those who are the first generation of their family to live in the city, and also those who most strongly identify as First Nations people, Métis and Inuit.” (Environics Institute, 2010, p. 8)

<sup>iv</sup> Pedagogy is generally understood to refer to the art and science of teaching and is not limited to teaching practices. In this context the term “very old pedagogies” is an acknowledgement and an honouring of the art and science embedded in and woven through traditional teaching practices.

<sup>v</sup> “Storytelling is the art of telling a story that takes into account narratives including body gestures, use of visualizations (seeing the images being portrayed), acting, oral interpretation, and vocal inflections; whereas **storying** refers to how we describe in story our experiences through personal, community, national, and global narratives.” (Styres, 2008, p. 75)

<sup>vi</sup> We recognize that many of these stories actually arise from a time beyond history, time immemorial.

<sup>vii</sup> See the following Archaeological Assessment Reports: Ministry of Transportation Ontario draft Report F (Part 1): Working Paper – Environmental Conditions and Constraints (July 2007) regarding the Highway 7 & 8 Transportation Corridor; Archaeologix Inc Report (August 2008) regarding the St. Mary’s Flamborough Quarry Haul Route Study for the City of Hamilton; Archaeological Services Inc. Report (October 2006) regarding the Rymaal Road Planning Area; Archaeologix Inc. Report (May 2007) regarding the North Quarry Extension for the City of Hamilton; Archaeological Services Inc. Report (August 2003) regarding the Victoria Road Improvements; New Directions Archaeology Ltd. Report (February 2007) regarding the 427 Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment; Archaeological Services Inc. Revised Report (March 2007); for further information.