

**Experiencing Connectedness to Place through Self-Reflective Learning:
A Participatory Phenomenological Study Involving Students on UVic Campus**

by

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

University students often come to live on or near the university campus for the duration of their studies. The University of Victoria (UVic) is located in an area with a variety of natural places students frequently spend time in and may feel connected to. Student connectedness to place is often not integrated into course curricula. However, with the increasing urgency of environmental and climate change issues, awareness of oneself in place is prioritized in universities' action plans for sustainable development and decolonization. This dissertation describes my research that involved ten UVic students and ten outdoor locations on or near campus. In a phenomenological study I explored student experiences with connectedness to place, while they engaged in various self-reflective activities, ranging from active, arts-based reflection to simply visiting and being in place. The research is grounded in a perspective of relationality, nonlinearity and self-awareness, inspired by the writings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and North American Indigenous scholars such as Gregory Cajete, Sean Wilson, Umeek (Richard Atleo) and Margaret Kovach. Mark Vagle's post-intentional approach matches this perspective where both self and place are non-static and learning happens through interaction between theory, data and self-reflections. In this process, I used dance and painting as self-reflection tools, which led to a description of connectedness to place that is experienced through memory as awareness in the moment, beauty as awareness of what is, and time as being in relationship. Based on student experiences in this research, the following suggestions were discussed as elements of what I call "place-based self-reflection": being physically present; intentional observation; inviting different perspectives; connecting and layering experiences; learning with others; receiving prompts and questions; connecting our creative self; choosing our tools; and considering right timing. The research contributes to discussions of place-based education, slow pedagogy and reflection in higher education. Continuing questions inspire further thinking for exploring connectedness to place through self-reflection that can be applied in different study disciplines, levels of education and our personal lives.

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I am extremely grateful to the students who participated in my research: Aurora, Davey, Guoliang Li, Kikila, Lindsay, Mahya, Mona, Robyn and Sarah. They each added a different perspective to the study that enriched the outcomes and supported my learning. Without them, this dissertation would not have become what it is. I will always remember them by the places we met and the connections we talked about in depth. Some of them have become dear friends, and I wish them all the very best on their journeys ahead.

From the very start of this project and throughout my writing, my thinking and my search has been influenced by educators and friends I have met during my travels in India and North America. I wish to express my gratitude to the educators, staff, students and visitors I met at the Valley School in Bangalore, who introduced me to the works of J. Krishnamurti. I especially wish to thank Shoba Gopalan for continuously supporting me through dialogue and friendship. I am extremely grateful to the many Indigenous people I met when I visited New Mexico, Montana, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, who welcomed me into their homes and/or classrooms and gifted me with stories. My sincere gratitude goes to Dene Elder and friend Doris Camsell, for sharing her teachings and support when I was living far from home. Mahsi Cho!

My deepest gratitude goes to all my family members who always supported and believed in me: Hilly, Gert, Else, Wouter, Eva, Gillian and Joe. My work would not have been possible without the

continued support, encouragement, and loving company of Jennifer and Finn. Thank you for having been there with me all the way! I look forward to seeing where our shared journey will take us next.

I also wish to thank my colleagues at UVic, whom I met during my work at the Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) office: Rhianna, Rosa, Garry-Grace, and others who joined us during various projects. Memories of shared moments, our dedication to arts-based reflection, and CELebration events will always stay with me. I am also extremely grateful to educator and art therapist Heather Korlak, who introduced us to arts-based reflection and inspired myself, my research participants and other UVic students and staff, to explore our connectedness to place through art and collaborative experiences.

Finally, my work and words have been created for my love for the land. I wish to honour the lands I have lived in and visited and am grateful for having had the opportunity to share, to know, and to be known.

Dedication

Voor mijn ouders, Hilly en Gert.

Introduction

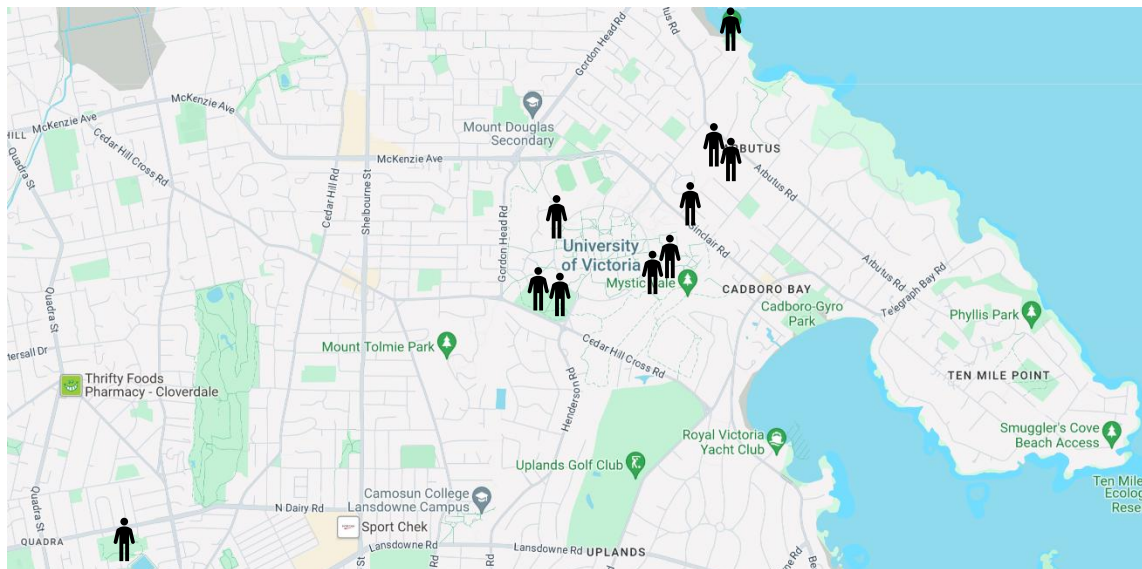
In current times of ecological crisis, the importance of environmental awareness cannot be denied. With growing interests in action for sustainability, creating awareness of environmental problems is one of the objectives that educational institutions are promoting. The University of Victoria (UVic) initiated a Climate and Sustainability Action Plan aiming to involve staff, students and the local community in developing and executing sustainability solutions (University of Victoria, n.d.). My research connects with this aim as it involves UVic students by exploring their connectedness to the local environment on and around campus. Connectedness to place has a positive influence on environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviours (Scannell & Gifford, 2013) and can be seen as a contributing factor in actions for sustainability. A part of UVic's Climate and Sustainability Action Plan is to centre local Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is grounded in place and Indigenous scholars specifically highlight the importance of an awareness of our relationship with the natural world (see, for instance: Atleo, 2011; Cajete, 2000; Williams & Snively, 2016b; Turner, et al., 2022; Wilson, 2008). Awareness of one's connectedness to place is the focus of the research in which students engaged in self-reflective activities in connection to the local environment.

UVic is located on the traditional territory of the ɫə́kʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples and closely connected to the ɫə́kʷəŋən and ƱSÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. Many students who study here come from different towns, provinces or countries and only live here during the time of their studies. However, most students will be influenced by the surroundings of the university as they walk around campus, live in campus housing, spend holidays at the nearby beach or go for walks in the local forest. Whether unconscious or fully aware, students connect with the land, leave their footprints and bring with them the memories of moments shared with the land. In this research I explored how students from different backgrounds and study areas experienced being on this land, as they engaged in self-reflective activities to learn more about

themselves, the land and the connection between the two. Ten students were involved in the research that took place in locations they selected. Figure 1 shows an overview of these locations, indicated by the human figures on the map. The locations and students are introduced in chapter four of this dissertation.

Figure 1

Research locations on and near UVic campus



Note. Image created with Google Maps, 2024.

Research questions and focus

Students who participated in the research indicated that they felt connected to one or more locations on or near campus. With this expressed connection as a starting point, the study was guided by the following main research question: How do UVic students experience connectedness to place as they engage in self-reflective learning in connection to the local environment on and around campus? This question, focusing on students' experiences, indicates a phenomenological approach to the research. According to Van Manen (2014) phenomenology begins with wonder about a phenomenon, as it appears. In this research, the phenomenon is connectedness to place. The concept of connectedness to place is further explored in the theoretical framework, but a key understanding for this research is

that connectedness to place is viewed as being in relationship with place. Exploring one's connectedness to place therefore involves not only asking "What do I know about this place?" and "What does this place mean to me?" but also, "What does this place know about me?" and "What do I mean to this place?" Questions such as these stimulate awareness of place and the personal connection between self and place. Through self-reflective learning this connectedness was explored, guided by the following sub-question: What self-reflection methods or approaches do students prefer to engage in when deepening their connectedness to the local environment, and why? Self-reflection, in this research, focuses on awareness of oneself in connection to the environment, and stimulates being in the moment rather than thinking with the aim to reach conclusions and create suggestions.

The challenge

The importance of connectedness to place, and specifically connectedness to nature, has become a focus of interest for many educators and researchers based on the shared belief that there is a growing disconnect between people and their environment. With the increasing frequency of natural disasters such as the recent wildfires in Canada, river floods in western Europe, and Pacific islands land loss due to rising sea levels, discussions of the climate crisis are intensified and made urgent. Creating awareness of environmental problems is one of the main objectives that educational institutions, such as the University of Victoria, are promoting. Personal connectedness to place has a positive influence on this awareness: "A sense of connectedness to place has broad implications; local ties are relevant to engagement with climate change issues, and thus, individuals with strong place attachment may serve as a promising group to whom adaptation and mitigation strategies could be promoted" (Scannell & Gifford, 2013, p. 78-79).

In many levels of education there are attempts to improve student connectedness to and awareness of the local environment. For instance, forest schools, such as the Victoria Nature School, offer outdoor education programs for young children (Victoria Nature School, n.d.); the B.C. curriculum

prioritizes a place-based approach in K-12 education (Government of British Columbia, 2024); and Victoria's Parks and Recreation offers recreational programs to bring people of all ages in contact with the local, natural environment (City of Victoria, 2024). Environmental and sustainability education continue to be developed and implemented to increase student knowledge, skills, and pro-environmental behaviours. Place-based education connects with this, adding a strong focus on community engagement (Smith & Sobel, 2010). Outdoor learning is encouraged with the aim to bring students in direct contact with the environment; this became more popular recently due to the COVID-19 pandemic as educators were encouraged to teach their classes outside. There are many approaches to and definitions of environmental (Krasny, 2020), outdoor (Wattchow & Brown), sustainability (Jickling & Sterling, 2017; Kopnina, 2012), place-based education (Demarest, 2015; Gruenewald & Smith, 2010; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2004). However, I often notice a strong focus on science and action, critical reflection to improve learning, and anthropocentric perspectives. Below I will challenge these themes and offer a complementary, alternative approach.

First, educational institutions such as UVic, prioritize building scientific knowledge and raising awareness of human responsibilities towards the environment. Various UVic campaigns and activities initiated by members of the UVic community during the last eight years, include nature restoration projects, recycling initiatives, alternative waste and energy solutions, fairtrade and local food productions, and environmental and sustainability action speaker series (UVic Campus Planning and Sustainability, n.d.). My research connects with the importance of these actions. However, I argue that scientific knowledge and externally initiated moral judgment regarding environmental concerns alone do not guarantee future generations of responsible and responsive citizens. Without paying attention to self-awareness through self-reflection, a connection to place may never develop beyond the level of personal needs in a rationalized, scientific understanding. Instead, I believe that a deeper level of

connection can be expected to come from an intrinsic motivation to care for places based on the awareness of one's own position as a part of the environment.

Second, reflective practice is a common theme in higher education. Beauchamp (2015) summarizes several serious critiques that are raised in literature showing, for instance, that authentic reflection is not always possible due to power relation issues, program requirements, and a structured approach to reflection as an intellectual exercise. Student reflection that is mandatory and shared with educators for assessment can create disinterest in students, resulting in discontinued use of learned reflection techniques as a lifelong skill. Dohn (2011) stresses the concern that reflective writing and discussion activities do not necessarily lead to practical knowledge in the sense of "being able to" (p. 687) act in practice. Such critical comments indicate the importance of researching approaches to reflection that give students choices in when and how to engage in reflective activities, and reconsider reflection as just writing and speaking exercises.

Third, there is a debate around the apparent shift from environmental education towards education for sustainable development (Fallon, et al. 2017; Kopnina, 2012). Educational institutions often refer to the sustainable development goals created by the United Nations in 2015 with the aim to address world problems such as poverty, inequality, exclusion and climate change (United Nations, n.d.). Kopnina (2012) warns that moving away from environmental concerns toward sustainability goals is problematic in the context of environmental ethics. She argues that focusing strongly on social and economical issues leads to an anthropocentric approach to environmental problems. An anthropocentric view, she explains, stresses the welfare and rights of human beings, whereas an ecocentric view "favours interests of non-human species independent of their value to humans" (p. 8). In agreement with Kopnina, I argue that education needs to promote an ecocentric view of places. Therefore, my research highlights relationality as a key understanding in the inquiry of place connectedness. Relationality refers to the suggestion that everything is interrelated in a complex web of

connections. This understanding matches with Indigenous perspectives on knowledge and research (see, for instance: Atleo, 2011; Cajete, 2000; Wilson, 2008). A perspective of relationality leads to a research approach that includes the land as a participant instead of an object of study (Hughes & Barlo, 2020), and does not aim to gain knowledge for sustainability action but focuses on learning how to restore and keep relationships (Whyte et al., 2016).

The importance of connectedness to place

The question about the importance of connectedness to place was discussed with my research participants to gain insight into their knowledge and perspectives and to allow student voices to be included as co-researchers expressing the significance of the research. There are four main reasons why student participants felt that deepening our connectedness to place is important. These reasons also indicate the students' motivation to participate in the research, and can be summarized as action-oriented reasons, personal health reasons, personal development reasons, and relationship building. In this section I will briefly describe how students expressed these reasons based on their experiences. The names mentioned below refer the student participants. They will be introduced in chapter four where their stories are shared in connection to their chosen research locations.

First, several students described action-oriented reasons for stimulating connectedness to place. Robyn, mentions that when people feel disconnected from the environment "it becomes easier to partake in these endeavors that could be harmful to us all." Guoliang Li, mentions the importance of the preservation of a UVic forest area: "This place is extremely important for not only the local residents but also for the temporary residents like us and we should try to preserve this area" and Davey expresses that awareness of place connectedness helps, but also that "then there needs to be action to actually happen."

Second, literature shows that connectedness to natural places has benefits for health and wellbeing (e.g. Slater et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). Many students indicated benefits for personal

health based on their own experiences. Mahya explains how going outside helps her when she is not feeling well and Guoliang Li deeply stresses how being connected to place helps him to gain strength:

It's so important. Because especially when I was feeling depressed and disappointed and especially when I was frustrated, when I was down, it made me feel relaxed and calm. And it seems that I can gain some strength or gain some power from this place. ...This place made me feel more energetic and have the power to move forward.

Other students indicated that place helps them "feel grounded" and is important for "overall well being and mental health". Sarah shares her experience of being able to destress in place after an exam period:

I had finished a 20-page paper and I was very proud of myself. And I came here, just with my camera, not with any work and I was like: "I'm just going to have a little half an hour to myself to unwind and do something sort of different". It was a reason not to be looking at my laptop, which was really nice. Because particularly in exam season that's needed. It's really necessary.

Third, many of the comments made by students show that connectedness to place is important for personal development reasons, such as helping them "concentrate", "not being attached to things", "grow as a person", "see things from a larger perspective" and "learn how to take care of place and self". Kikila explains how he found that connecting to place is an active effort:

I find that coming to place, stopping myself and forming that connection consciously, is really important, because of the slowness of my relationship to a place like this, where it is more about bringing myself consciously into that connection. ... It's maybe important for me to take some of the human stuff out of it and just get to place's speed. ... And I can't do it every time ... If I don't have time to do that then that's okay. ... But if I want to connect with that place then I need stop and put myself in it.

Fourth, connectedness to place helps form relationships with place and “the more people form a relationship with place, the more we can start to have conversations about decolonization” (Kikila).

The need for relationship is also expressed by Lindsay who talks about the need to belong:

Being in a place and not being super connected to it is fine, like being a visitor, or being a guest or a stranger is okay. ... But to always be a visitor or a guest or a stranger to the place is going to be exhausting. And so, it’s important to have some places where I belong.

Mona confirms the importance of feeling connected to something and adds that connectedness to place can be experienced through the shared similarities between places she has visited:

All places are part of the same thing, underlyingly, forms of a large continuum of ‘space’, but with different manifests. And even in the natural landscape and connecting that to the different landscapes that I’ve seen in different parts of the world, [there are] similarities and differences. ... But all the shared and common features, like life and movement, give view of their similarities, and I feel connection to that connectivity and larger picture or larger continuum of ‘place’. And ultimately, the common source, or god. I have found incredible significance to that, because it’s connection to something larger.

Overview of the dissertation

Following this introduction chapter, I begin this dissertation with a personal narrative to clarify my motivation and intentions for this research, based on my own history and experiences. Some of my research was inspired by the work of Wattchow and Brown (2011) who write about place pedagogy in outdoor education. In their book, they begin with personal narratives and state:

Our intent here is to inform readers about our personal histories in outdoor education so that they may have a sense of our preferences, our biases and the types of outdoor places and programs where we have worked and developed our ideas. ... It signals to the reader that context, situation and story matter. (p. xxii)

Other authors whose work have influenced my thinking, such as Wilson (2008), and Hughes and Barlo (2021) also begin with sharing personal background information to support readers in understanding the context of their work. This perspective matches my research paradigm, which I will describe in the next chapter.

In chapter two I discuss the theoretical framework. This includes a description of the research paradigm, concept definitions, and an overview of literature regarding relevant educational theories. This is followed by an outline of the research design in chapter three. The research design includes a description of methodological choices, data collection methods, and analysis methods. To introduce the research participants, in chapter four I describe the research locations based on their ecological characteristics, such as forest areas, garden spaces, and places outside buildings. The student participants are introduced within these sections, describing both their backgrounds and their interest in these specific locations on or near campus.

The results of the research are shared in chapters five and six. In the research design chapter I explain how two different analysis approaches led to two different types of results that both add to the meaning of the study. Chapter five explores three themes in detail, using creative analysis forms to gain new insights based on a merging of data, theory and self-reflections. Chapter six specifically focuses on the research questions as it describes student experiences of connectedness to place and self-reflective learning. This chapter ends with suggestions that could be applied in practice. Finally, in chapter seven I summarize the outcomes and explore how the research contributes to educational theory, practice and personal learning.

Chapter one: Personal narrative

I was born in the Netherlands and grew up in an average size town in the northern part of the country. My ancestors have lived mostly in western and northern areas of the country, in the provinces Noord-Holland and Friesland. Though I grew up in the north, I always felt like being from the west, as both my parents had been born and raised there. We often traveled to visit relatives. My memories are filled with landscape scenes as we traveled, or occasionally stayed in holiday parks with grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. My memories of place include seas, rivers, fields, forests, birds, towns and lively city centres. Going on bike rides was a common holiday activity, exploring forest paths of the natural region The Veluwe and riding in the dunes on our favorite island Schiermonnikoog.

Two influences strengthened my interest in learning about connectedness to place. First, in secondary school geography class I was inspired by lessons about the earth and different climate zones. My imagination took me to different locations and the people, whose cultures are influenced by the land. My interest in place was born. Second, sometimes when I traveled to other countries such as India, I was reminded of the grey and wet climate in the Netherlands when the airplane slowly sank through a blanket of clouds as I returned home. I did not like the colourless environment, until I watched the documentary *Dutch Light* (De Kroon, 2003) and realized that beauty exists in the playful interactions between sun and water. However, when friends in India asked me to share traditional songs and stories from my culture, I often found myself at a loss. Cultural traditions were not a part of my life, at least not that I was able to detect, as I did not know any rich and colourful stories or songs that represented my connection to place. This deepened my questioning further.

Growing up, I lived with my parents, one older sister and one younger brother. My father worked in an Information Technology department at a hospital for many years. He was part of a team of innovative developers who pioneered in automatizing medical systems in the country. My mother took care of my siblings and me, while she worked actively for a women's organisation. Having been an

elementary school teacher before she married, she was very creative in engaging us in learning, and became a role model for me and my interest in education.

My mother was not the only educator in my family. In fact, two of my great-grandfathers were school principals, one great-aunt was a respected teacher in a small northern town, one grandfather taught in vocational education and one uncle worked as an elementary school teacher. Perhaps that is why I chose to become a teacher as well, because it was one profession that I knew and was easily available to me. However, I soon realized that my main interest was not in teaching, but in learning, the process of learning and learning spaces. Though these are areas any teacher facilitates when providing education, in my early experience as a child and student I did not realize that processes of education can be challenged. As a young student in the early nineties, I thought – because I was told – I was going to study how to be a teacher by learning how to fit the prescribed profile. It was not until I traveled to India that I came to understand that there are different perspectives on teaching and learning.

Though I never struggled academically and socially while I was a child in school, modernist forms of education gradually instilled the belief in me that worth is determined by comparison and is decided by others. In my case, this strongly decreased my self-confidence and my efforts to express myself creatively. When I was a third-year student of teacher education in the Netherlands, I arranged for myself an opportunity to gain teaching experience in India. With the help of an employee at the embassy of India, I was invited to visit The Valley School in Bangalore, where I was introduced to Krishnamurti's ideas. In my experience, education in a Krishnamurti school revolves around the learning of the educators and stimulating an awareness of one's own mind, allowing children the space to explore who they are in an environment that prioritizes nature and art, as well as academic curiosity. I ended up going back to this school two more times, one year as an intern during my master's and one year as a volunteer, spending a total of over two years in India. My interest in learning about alternative forms of education began to grow.

My learning about different forms of education was further enhanced by visiting various Indigenous schools in North America. I traveled to New Mexico, Montana and British Columbia where I was welcomed as a visitor, meeting children and their educators and the different landscapes to which their learning was tied. Then I spent five years in the Northwest Territories where I worked with Dene educators, assisting them in the classroom and creating learning materials they requested. I learned how Dene Kede, the Indigenous language and culture curriculum, introduces each educational theme with an authentic, key cultural experience and how learning activities revolve around the building of relationships: “The learning expectations are broadly categorized into four areas and relate to the students' relationships with: the spiritual world, the land, other people, themselves” (Dene Kede, 1993, p. 4). Here I found a clear example of an educational approach that did not only focus on connectedness to place, but also on learning about oneself and one’s relationship with place.

In the Netherlands I worked as an educator in elementary and higher education. In higher education I met international students who had a history of traveling and studying in different international schools. From their stories I learned that there was not often a connection between the school curriculum and the local environment. My experiences with Krishnamurti education in India and Indigenous education in Canada showed me a different approach to teaching and learning. In both cases I observed a strong focus on connecting with the local environment and an emphasis on inner learning. This made me wonder if an approach where self-reflection is specifically connected to environmental awareness could make a difference in students’ experience and awareness of self in place.

I came to the University of Victoria to change my educational path to match my interests and purpose. I found myself supported by available scholarship and shared priorities in both environmental and Indigenous approaches to learning. My personal reason for conducting this research is a first step in bringing together my questions, experiences, and the gifts of knowledge I received from scholars and people I have met, into a creation that may inspire my own and other people’s work. To the field of

education, I hope to bring ideas for learning spaces that stress the value of diversity while showing shared needs, understandings and possibilities; that include awareness of the land in research and educational practices; and that prioritize a combination of self-awareness and connectedness to place. I personally believe this is highly important in our struggles with climate change, decolonization, and the future of life our planet.

Chapter two: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research includes a description of the research paradigm, concept analysis and relevant educational theories. Integrated in this overview is a description of relevant literature. This framework will clarify the perspectives, scope, assumptions and limitations that are the starting point to understanding the intentions and explorations in this work. The theoretical framework can be summarized as a relational perspective, informed by the philosophy of J. Krishnamurti, and the work of Indigenous and poststructural scholars. Concepts are defined through the lens of relationality, self-awareness and nonlinearity. This means that my assumptions are that everything is interrelated, learning happens inwardly and is nonlinear, where the idea of nonlinearity leads to the importance of focusing on the present. The paradigm, concepts and relevant sources of literature will continue to be referred to in the coming chapters.

Research paradigm

The research paradigm for this study can be described as a relational paradigm and derives from my personal experiences with the philosophies of Krishnamurti and Indigenous education, and my readings of phenomenology and poststructural scholars' work. Within current discourse of sustainability research, a relational paradigm is described as a paradigm that "is grounded in a relational ontology, emphasizes the need for understanding human and non-human nature as mutually constitutive, and values more-than-human relations" (Walsh et al., 2021, p. 80).

To further detail the description of my research paradigm, I begin with a philosophical query into what learning is, based on my own curriculum theorizing. My ontological and epistemological perspectives can be summarized as the belief that everything exists in relationship, is constantly shifting into being as it is in the moment, and that learning happens inwardly, but is continuously influenced by one's being in place. To illustrate this perspective, I created the metaphor of "curriculum as an ecological map of learning". The metaphor of a map is often used when referring to anything that

requires an overview and offers direction. As a verb, the term mapping is used by educators and researchers in environmental or place-based research. For instance, Jagger (2013) describes how a community mapping project encouraged students to connect with their environments. Hurren (2014) uses mapwork as an arts-based approach to research when studying connections between place and identity. She explains:

Mapwork is informed by poststructural perspectives that recognize the constitutive role of text regarding our notions of the world and our notions of our selves. Poststructurally, neither place nor identity is seen as a static entity. Each is always in a process of becoming: places change over time (who inhabits them, how they are used), and identity changes over time (often as a result of the particular places we inhabit or frequent). These changes are also a direct result of the particular discursive structures, such as maps and atlases, that we employ in our attempts to make sense of places and selves. (p. 534)

The suggestion of curriculum as a map of learning should not be confused with the general term “learning map” that is frequently used in education and refers to the organizing of learning content in an overview that supports teachers in their planning and can support students in their learning. Knight (2013), expert in professional learning and instructional coaching, describes a learning map as “a graphic organizer that highlights the knowledge, skills, and big ideas that students should get from a lesson, unit, or course.” (p. 89). Where the term learning map refers to a tool for educators, an ecological map of learning can be described as a curriculum theory, and more specifically, a curriculum theory that highlights ecological relationships as essential elements for learning. Next, I will discuss how curriculum as an ecological map of learning includes relationality, self-awareness and nonlinearity as key concepts. Though the three concepts are discussed separately below, they connect and overlap, resulting in one paradigm description.

Relationality

When travelers need guidance in finding direction, they can make use of maps. A map shows an overview of features that exist in a certain place, and how they are connected by roads and trails. An ecological map of learning can be seen as an overview of elements that affect a student in their learning journey. It also shows that the student, as a traveler, does not exist and learn in isolation, but is connected to the environment in which they travel. Learning about these relationships is central to learning how to navigate the roads of life. With the belief that everything is connected comes the understanding that to learn about something requires learning about its relationships.

Relationality is a key principle in Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021; Williams, 2019; Wilson, 2008). Tewa scholar Cajete (2000) states that “Indigenous people celebrate relationships to the plant and animal world by effectively becoming one with their spirits or their world. Humans are not separated from their environments nor from the other creatures inhabiting those environments” (p. 104). Atleo (2011) explains that in the Nuu-chah-nulth worldview “all questions of existence, being, and knowing, regardless of seeming contradictions, are considered to be *tsawalk* – one and inseparable. They are interrelated and interconnected” (p. ix).

The fact of being in relationship is also mentioned by Krishnamurti. He states: “To be is to be related and without relationship there is no existence” (Krishnamurti, 1954/2001, p. 160). However, he also mentions the importance of understanding oneself in relationship with another and that “to know ourselves means to know our relationship with the world – not only with the world of ideas and people, but also with nature, with the things we possess. That is our life – life being relationship to the whole” (p. 78).

Certain research approaches have been developed to embrace the perspective of relationality. Somerville (2007, 2010, 2013), who writes from a poststructural, feminist perspective, works closely with Indigenous people in Australia. To accommodate students whose work could not fit into existing research methodologies, she developed a methodology called “postmodern emergence”:

In postmodern emergence I emphasize the importance of a stance of unknowing, and the irrational, messy, embodied, and unfolding nature of our participation as bodies in the “flesh of the world.”

This necessarily involves us in a reciprocal relationship with objects and landscapes, weather, rocks and trees, sand, mud and water, animals, and plants. In this ontology, subjectivities are dynamic, always forming in relation to each other, and in relation to the inanimate materials and technologies such as stone, wood and clay, pencils, crayons, brushes, paints, computers, words, and paper that we use to create meaning. (p. 14-15)

Reciprocal relationships exist between students and all other elements of the places they find themselves in, and all these relationships play a part in the learning of the student.

Self-awareness

When using a map, the first thing travelers need to do is determine their location. For an ecological map of learning this means that students need to know where they are on their journey of learning, which requires knowledge of self and self-awareness. Indigenous scholars have highlighted the importance of self-awareness in Indigenous education. Ermine (1995), for instance, speaks very clearly of the importance of inward focused learning in Indigenous cultures:

Ultimately it was in the self that Aboriginal people discovered great resources for coming to grips with life’s mysteries. It was in the self that the richest source of information could be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge. Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self. (p. 108)

In a relational paradigm, self-awareness includes awareness of how one is connected to the environment. The importance of this connection to others is also expressed by Krishnamurti (1954/2001) as he states: “relationship has very little significance when we are merely seeking mutual gratification but becomes extraordinarily significant when it is a means of self-revelation and self-knowledge” (p. 162) and “what is important is to understand oneself in relationship with another. Then

relationship becomes not a process of isolation but a movement in which you discover your own motives, your own thoughts, your own pursuits” (p. 91).

The second thing travelers need is to understand how to navigate the map. Greene (1971/2017) uses the metaphor of a map that is created by a cartographer and describes how a newcomer in town may struggle because the cartographer did not consider the newcomer’s background and perspectives and therefore their difficulties in using the map without knowing the specific meaning of the signs and customs in the town. It is like “asking a newcomer in search of direction to recapitulate the complex processes by which the cartographer made his map” (p. 152). The best intentions of the cartographer, willing to share detailed knowledge to help travelers, match Andreotti’s (2014) metaphors of modernity. She explains how modernity is able to mask its own dark side, (i.e., colonizing actions), by using a grammar of universality and progression. Unless educators acknowledge that curriculum is a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2011) and a counterpointed composition (Ng-A-Fook, 2014) that needs to be responsive to multiple epistemologies, curriculum remains a general map of learning in which students may not be able to locate themselves. For an ecological map of learning this means it is essential for students to be able to recognize themselves, their history and their directions in the map.

Nonlinearity

Maps are often used to move from one location to another. However, it is not necessary to use a map only for finding the shortest direction to reach a certain destination. In fact, it is possible to travel in any direction and to move back and forth on different paths. An ecological map of learning is a personal image of someone’s learning path that includes influences from the past, present and future. In this map, the past is clearly shown. Since the future is only known by indicating a direction, certain parts of the map may yet be unclear. However, the time of viewing a map is always in the present. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005) says that “what is past or future for me is present in the world” (p. 367). He speaks

about how moments from the past are relived in the present, but also that past memories only come to us when something in the present compels us:

A preserved fragment of the lived-through past can be at the most no more than an occasion for thinking of the past, but it is not the past which is compelling recognition; recognition, when we try to derive it from any content whatever, always precedes itself" (p. 368)

Therefore, we are experiencing everything in the present and through the present, and the present continuously changes, based on new experiences. This shows that the map is not a fixed image with a past set in stone and a future moulded into dreams and objectives. The path of learning is characterized by nonlinearity. With the belief that learning happens nonlinearly comes the understanding that learning does not only happen through preplanned structures. It allows for the use of creative and spontaneous insights.

Certain research approaches embrace the use of creative means and unexpected insights. For instance, Vagle (2018) suggests thinking "broadly and creatively" (p. 151) when deciding on types of research data to gather. His approach to phenomenology is inspired by poststructuralist ideas as he stimulates looking for "how things connect" rather than "what things are" (p. 129) and adds that connections are flexible and changeable and therefore not linear.

An Indigenous perspective on the cyclic nature of learning is expressed by Wilson (2008) who writes about Indigenous research methods in a nonlinear style. When the foreword is also the conclusion and the stories shared are interrelated because the author and researcher is the storyteller, it becomes clear that learning happens in a nonlinear manner. As a reader I am inspired by certain aspects, flip back through the book to look things up, have forgotten parts I did not connect with, and link what I am learning to what I have experienced and learned from others before. In a modernist view of education, learning is considered from a linear perspective, leading to the formulation of objectives and a clear path to reach them. If learning happens nonlinearly, then learning is not considered

“improvement”, but simply “movement”. Nonlinearity includes the notion that everything is in constant flux due to the complexity of multiple relationships and movement. As a person constantly moves in connection to their environment, knowledge of self connects with knowledge of environment.

Atleo (2011) discusses how the Nuu-chah-nulth language shows the importance of balancing past, present and future by focusing on the present. Krishnamurti (1954/2001) also discusses how understanding can come from awareness in the moment, as he explains: “It is only when we understand the truth of daily existence that we can go far. ... As we understand the near, we shall find the distance between the near and the far is not. There is no distance – the beginning and the end are one” (p. 159).

Concept analysis

To clarify my use of the main terminology in the research, I will provide descriptions of the concepts “place”, “connectedness”, “self-reflection” and “experience”. I describe the concepts through the lens of the research paradigm, supported by relevant literature and participant voices. As will be explained in the next chapter, in the interviews with the student participants the concepts “place” and “connectedness to place” have been discussed. In this way, participants helped shape some of the concept definitions, which aligns with the participatory nature of the research. Matching with a nonlinear paradigm, part of the research data is included here in the theoretical framework.

Place

The English word place originates from the Latin word platea and the Greek word plateia and refers to an “open space” or “broad way” (Hoad, 1996, p. 574). The *Oxford Dictionary of English* gives a more elaborate definition of place by including examples ranging from a specific location, to a place on a waiting list, to being placed in a certain situation (Stevenson, 2010). The last example shows that place can be used as a verb as well as a noun. In my research I will refer to place as a geographical location.

Scholars of human geography and environmental or outdoor education have written extensively about place. Before the 1970s writing about place in human geography was not explicit but was

approached from a spatial science perspective (Cresswell, 2009; Murton, 2010). A rational view on place was used and focus was on the study of space. When interest in using the word place arose, the relationship between the concepts place and space became a focus of debate (Murton, 2010). Tuan (1977) describes the difference between the two as follows: “Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” (p. 136). In this view, place comes into being by cultural construction (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Tuan (1977) describes how space can be seen as empty, free, but meaningless, and writes: “Enclosed and humanized space is place” (p. 54). This view is shared by Relph (1976), who then continues to further describe how humans can become detached from places, creating an experience of placelessness.

The view of humans as the constructors of place is shared by many scholars who, according to Murton (2010), hold a “building perspective” on the concept. Murton further explains how other scholars share a “dwelling perspective” by focusing on place as a home where people and places both influence each other. Wattchow and Brown (2011) give a similar analysis of perspectives on place in their book on outdoor education. They mention how some scholars see place as being built from human experiences in a certain setting, where others see place as already having meaning, or spirit, which may be experienced by humans. Wattchow and Brown explain how the second perspective is shared by many Indigenous scholars. For instance, Cajete (2000) writes about “that place that [Indigenous] people talk about” (p. 186), in which he refers to not only a physical area but to a place of deep meaning with which people have profound relationships.

Two participants in the research have added their thoughts that help shape the definition of place in this research. Kikila mentioned: “Not only is it a location and a relationship, but it’s art. It’s emotion. It’s language. It’s a cognition. It’s all of these things. And I almost can’t describe it. It’s spirit. It’s my ancestors. It’s other people’s ancestors.” Seeing place in the broader sense, where it includes other life, history, emotion, and thought, shows a relational perspective of place. Mona shared that she

explored her connection to place without focusing on one specific place. Instead, she finds a connection to what places have in common, which she considers to be “the source of it all and the source of all life.” This perspective also shows a relational view in a broader sense, where even different places are considered to be connected to each other. To summarize, in my research, place is defined as a geographical location, in which all the elements that dwell in it exist in a web of relationships that extends even beyond the specific location.

Connectedness

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, connectedness means either “the state of being joined or linked” or “a feeling of belonging to or having affinity with a particular person or group” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 945). In my research I focus on the second definition, where connectedness is experienced as a feeling. However, where the Oxford definition speaks about connectedness to other people, I include everything else that a person can feel connected to, which could include, for instance, nature, a town, one’s culture, a habit, or a theory.

It is important to realize that the term connectedness does not imply a positive or negative connection. However, in daily language many people think of positive connections when they express feeling connected to something. Perhaps that is because this type of connection is often more desirable, whereas a negative connection is something people usually wish to move away from. In psychological terms this may be more complex, since one may feel connected to one’s home or country, and yet have negative feelings about it. In this research I am not looking at deeper psychological meanings of the term connectedness and include only connectedness as it is experienced by participants, focusing specifically on the outdoor campus places they selected as feeling connected to. Therefore, my use of the term connectedness is specifically about connectedness to place.

Understanding the value of connectedness between people and place is vital to understanding the foundation of this research. As mentioned earlier, research shows that connectedness to nature

benefits people's health and wellbeing (e.g. Slater, et al., 2020; White, et al., 2019). Spending time in nature supports health in the form of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social wellbeing (Krasny, 2020). Krasny mentions the importance of psychological wellbeing in environmental education, which can contribute to feelings of happiness and finding meaning in life. With an increase in discussions of climate change, we see a growing interest in research on climate anxiety or eco-anxiety (Pihkala, 2020). Pihkala suggests that eco-anxiety is approached from a practical rather than a disorder point of view. Practical eco-anxiety "leads people to re-evaluate the situation, search for better information, and to make changes in individual and collective behavior" (p. 14). Similarly, Krasny (2020) mentions that good health and wellbeing lead to environmental behaviours because it induces happiness, hope and coping skills.

The relationship between people, place and wellbeing is mentioned by Tsuji, et al. (2023), who researched perspectives on wellbeing from Indigenous people across Canada. They found that "typical measures of wellbeing, such as economic wealth and housing, were described as secondary to land, language, and culture from a First Nations' perspective" (p. 9). Their study also emphasized an interconnection between people and the larger community in discussions of wellbeing:

Indigenous perspectives from across Canada also emphasized wellbeing at the familial, community, national, and world scales. This scaling of wellbeing represents a collectivist perspective, not only of the animate but also the inanimate, a commonly held Indigenous belief worldwide. This is why wellbeing was often referred to in the context of interconnectedness, honouring inherent obligations, maintaining (or re-establishing) balance, and harmonious relationships with everything in Creation (p. 25)

W̱SÁNEĆ School Board and Swallow (2018) point out that people's relationships with the land have changed over time. For instance, people are less dependent on their food from fishing and harvesting. However, they write, "this reality does not suggest that these relationships are no longer important in today's world. Indeed, W̱SÁNEĆ People tell me that the meanings behind these traditional

relationships are absolutely essential for cultural survival and sustainability” (W̱SÁNEĆ School Board & Swallow, 2018, p. 191). Similarly, W̱SÁNEĆ knowledge keeper, Tiffany Joseph, expresses the connection between W̱SÁNEĆ People and a local plant named camas: “We wouldn’t have camas without W̱SÁNEĆ People. If camas is wiped out, we’re wiped out. We might exist as human beings, but we’re no longer who we would be with camas in the world, because it’s our food staple from the land” (Corntassel, 2024b, p. 31).

Explored through the lens of relationality there always is an already existing connectedness between elements of an environment. One participant in the research highlighted that as people we are innately connected to place: “I think that that’s the language, that we’re together. That we are still much a part of environment and the elements, that we cannot help but be materially connected. We’re born of this earth and this place” (Robyn). However, she further mentions that despite being innately connected, “we still can have the capacity to forget what that feels like.” Lindsay adds the following: “I think the potential for them, the connections, is always there, but sometimes we cut it off.” Including these suggestions in my use of the term connectedness means that awareness plays a role in the experience of connectedness, which also corresponds with the lens of self-awareness as a main tool for learning.

Self-reflection

To explore the concept of self-reflection I will first discuss the terms “reflection” and “reflective practice” as these are commonly used in literature of higher education. Many reflection theories consider reflection a form of thinking, referring to the work of Dewey (1910/1997). The aim of reflective thinking is to learn from experience and create plans for improvement. Other theorists attempt to move away from what they call a technical-rational perspective and refer to the work of Donald Schön. Schön (1983/2016) focuses on the kind of reflection that is applied in practice by professionals in the field, who often do not have time to engage in cycles of thinking but need to make decisions in the moment, in a

form of “reflection-in-action” (p. 49). However, Hébert (2015) suggests that even in Schön’s work, the focus is still on problem-solving and thinking, and “both Dewey and Schön bifurcate knowledge and experience, privileging the former at the expense of the latter” (p. 362). In recent literature, a critical-emancipatory approach to reflection is preferred over a technical-rational one (Van Beveren et al., 2018). Most reflection models and frameworks include social-critical questions in different stages of reflection. For instance, in Johns’ (2022) reflection model, students are encouraged to dialogue with their own story, different theories, and field experts while asking social-critical questions. He adds that “criticality reflects the depth of inquiry into the background that frames experience” (p. 7).

Hébert (2015) suggests considering reflection theories that are less commonly used, such as Bleakley’s “reflection-as-action”, which he describes as “a play of sensitivity within a habitat, based on immediacy, ... not open to formulation as a taught skill. It is rather a mode of being grounded in passion and body rather than cognition and mind” (Bleakley, 1999, p. 324). Bleakley stresses the importance of reflection that is not inward focused but rather includes a holistic and ethical aim, which he names “holistic reflexivity”. Hébert (2015) also points to Van Manen’s theory of tacit knowing and explains that it is “a form of embodied knowing, wherein the focus is not placed on reflecting on one’s intuitive knowledge in Schön’s sense of reflection-in-action, but rather, bringing awareness to the corporeal self” (Hébert, 2015, p. 367-368). Van Manen (1995), who writes from a phenomenological perspective about pedagogy and teaching, suggests that reflection does not always need to be a technique or be social-critical. Rather, “we should also include knowledge forms and reflective practices that can address the tact of teaching that inheres in the embodied and existential qualities and virtues of being a teacher” (p. 13).

Within the lens of my research paradigm, my use of the term reflection connects with theories that highlight reflection as an embodied way of being in the world. The word reflection originates from the Latin word *reflectere*, which means “to bend back” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 3880). Seeing reflection in

this original definition, we can imagine looking at our reflections in the water or a mirror, which means that we are observing what *is*, in the moment. And if reflection is to bring into awareness that which is in the moment, then reflective thinking is to think about what has come into awareness.

With the focus on self-awareness in my research paradigm comes the importance of adding “self” to “reflection”. Because according to the research paradigm the self already exists in relationship with the environment, self-reflection includes observing the environment, and the interaction between them. From the perspective of nonlinearity, learning is considered a complex process that happens in a constantly moving and changing environment. Self-reflection aimed at stimulating self-awareness prioritizes the present moment as the time when learning takes place. To summarize, in my research, self-reflection is defined as the act of creating an awareness of self in the moment, which includes one’s relationships to the environment.

Reflection versus reflexivity

The above description of self-reflection overlaps with the concept of reflexivity, which is now commonly used in social sciences. Though many scholars agree that both concepts reflection and reflexivity are often not well defined in educational literature, one basic understanding seems to be that reflection refers to a subject-object relation, whereas reflexivity creates a turning back onto itself in a subject-object-subject relation (Alexander, 2017; Hofer, 2017). Some authors describe reflexivity as reflection which is turned into action (Feucht et al., 2017). Bolton (2010) mentions that reflexivity has a critical focus, which is not easy and requires “internal dialogue, and the support of others” (p. 14).

Alexander (2017) critiques the addition of reflexivity as a new educational term, pointing to the fact that both reflection and reflexivity come from the same original Latin root word. She further questions why many assume that reflection cannot lead to action. In agreement, I decide to use the term reflection, which is more commonly used in educational practice, and include the suggestion that there are different levels of being reflective, from everyday action and incidental reflection in daily life,

to systematic reflection aiming to develop understanding and critical insights, and reflecting on how we reflect (Van Manen, 1991/2016). Another issue I see with the discussion of reflection versus reflexivity is that distinguishing them using the terms subject and object does not fit with a perspective of relationality. In a relational perspective one simply cannot observe from without oneself. However, we can watch ourselves and develop an awareness of ourselves in our environment. Therefore, I choose to use the term self-reflection.

Experience

Through the lens of relationality, self-awareness and nonlinearity, experience is considered from a holistic and personal perspective, and does not necessarily follow steps of time. In this sense, experiences are best expressed as personal stories, which is why, in this research, the term experience is considered from a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience. “Doing phenomenology means to start with lived experience, with how something appears or gives itself to us” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 32). Van Manen explains how many experiences we have in daily life are experiences we do not keep in our awareness: “These are our taken-for-granted experiences as we live through them in the natural attitude, without ever bringing them to reflective awareness” (p. 34). Phenomenological research allows us to create an awareness of experiences, by asking a person, for instance, how it was for them to meet a friend for coffee:

You describe experientially the scenario and events of your afternoon on the sidewalk café. And this may open the space for a phenomenological question: “What is it like to sip coffee?” “What is it like to daydream?” “What is the nature of a conversation?” “How do we experience a memory from our youth?” “What is it like to share looking at water from a bridge?” It is remarkable how much lived experience there is that one can bring to reflective awareness. (Van Manen, 2014, p. 35)

In my research I follow the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the study of lived experiences, which Van Manen (2014) describes as “embodiment phenomenology” (p. 127). The

experience which is studied in this form of phenomenology is experience in its most original form, or “our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2005, p. vii). Van Manen (2014) speaks of prereflective experience, which is the experience before language, before thought. It is how the body experiences with all its senses. Prereflection is similar to how I described self-reflection as being aware in the moment. In this context, students’ experience refers to their awareness of being in a specific place on or near UVic campus, as it is perceived by them, using multiple senses.

Relevant educational theories

Several educational approaches prioritize connectedness to place, self-reflective learning, or both. Theoretical foundations, research findings, and pedagogical practices from these fields offer knowledge, insights and tools that support my research. Below I will discuss relevant aspects from literature about place-based education, slow pedagogy, mindfulness education, arts-based education, Indigenous education, and Krishnamurti education.

Place-based education

There are many educational approaches that aim to connect student academic learning with their local community and environment. Some examples are service learning, experiential learning, environmental education, community-engaged learning, and place-based education. Though the names highlight different focus areas, there is much overlap between the approaches. I focus here on place-based education as it is an approach that is widely used in North America. Both Chambers (2003) and Ng-A-Fook (2014) mention the appropriateness of place-based approaches in Canadian education due to the diversity of cultures and environments in this vast country. Place-based education includes a cross-disciplinary approach and community involvement (Smith & Sobel, 2010) and is further characterized by learning activities that are authentic, experiential and inquiry-based (Demarest, 2015; Sobel, 2004).

While the focus is on local learning, global knowledge emerges from learning that is context specific (Greenwood, 2013), which further leads to an understanding of the connectedness between local places and the larger environment.

Though place-based curricula are often created for elementary and secondary education levels, various authors promote the use of place-based learning in higher education. Institutions of higher education are “typically institutions that transient students filter in and out of, while moving on to live out their lives elsewhere” (Shannon & Galle, 2017, p. 6). However, place-based learning is important in, for instance, discussions of decolonization as “an emphasis on the local can empower groupings to take responsibility for their surrounding environment and the relations of domination within them” (Shannon & Galle, 2017, p. 7). Hooykaas (2021) discusses how geography departments are in an excellent position to introduce place-based learning in higher education courses: “Intentional place-based education offers geography educators the opportunity to achieve ethical, social, and environmental engagement, thereby connecting the pedagogy with the geographic content itself” (p. 110). However, place itself is a broad concept and therefore invites “a focus for inquiry across a variety of disciplines, from architecture, ecology, geography, and anthropology, to philosophy, sociology, literary theory, psychology, and cultural studies (Gruenewald, 2003a).

Though practices of place-based education include both natural and cultural environments, Gruenewald (2010) mentions that “somehow the natural environment or even the physical environment, in which the culture environment is *always* embedded, continues to be neglected in most cultural and educational theory” (p. 144). In discussing the shift from environmental education to sustainability education, Kopnina (2012) warns that focusing strongly on social and economical issues leads to an anthropocentric approach to environmental problems. An anthropocentric view, she explains, stresses the welfare and rights of human beings, whereas an ecocentric view “favours interests of non-human species independent of their value to humans” (p. 8). Aiming to limit the human versus

non-human binary in my research, I choose to use Abram's (1996) term "more-than-human" to describe the focus of ecocentric thinking. In a more-than-human view, the environment is more than just about what humans need, however, humans do exist in it, interact with it, influence it, and depend on it for survival. Cameron (2003) introduces the term place-responsive education, which adds the perspective that place invites us to respond or to act (as cited in Watchow & Brown, 2011). Cameron (2010), who developed and taught many place-based courses in Australia, mentions the importance of realizing that our place narratives may be more about us than about place and points to the value of exploring ourselves as "the means by which [our] chosen place discloses itself" (p. 293).

Slow pedagogy

Slow pedagogy is an approach that originates in the Slow movements, which began with the Slow Food movement in Italy by people who protested the coming of fast-food chains (Gearhart & Chambers, 2019). In education, the movement spread to discussions of slow teaching and slow pedagogy. Slow pedagogy is an approach that stimulates personal reflection by allowing time and personal space. In discussing slow pedagogy in environmental education, Payne and Wattchow (2009) suggest giving students time to "subjectively capture embodied experiences as quickly as possible after each experience and before other social constructions or events wash-over the sensory, perceptual bases of the experience" (p. 26). Wattchow and Brown (2011) stress the importance of being present in and with a place, as they state:

Experiencing being present, or even working on being present, does not necessarily involve activities such as drawing, reading, writing, or photographing. It does not involve trying to record or represent the experience in any way. These things come later. It simply involves making the effort to attend to what is meaningful in our immediate surrounds and to increase our levels of awareness (p. 185).

Literature also shows discussions of slow pedagogy in the academic world. Hartman and Darab (2012) promote "slow scholarship" and point to the importance of "freedom and time to engage in

thinking, to immerse oneself in experiential encounters, to synthesize information and reflect upon it—this is how new ways of knowing are formed” (p. 59). In their book called *The Slow Professor*, Berg and Seeber (2016) explain from personal experience how faculty can implement suggestions from the Slow movement to release stress, while navigating the fast-paced environment of academia. For instance, to create a sense of timelessness, they recommend the following: Having time offline to prevent continuous interruptions; doing less as “we all have a maximum capacity for productive work and sustained thinking” (p. 30); having more sessions of timeless time, which includes time for creativity; allowing time to do nothing and rest; and changing the way we talk about time, as there are many statements in our daily language that point to restrictions in time.

Rayzberg and Smith (2019), on the other hand, warn that the idea of a slow professor is unrealistic, especially for early career scholars who do not have much choice but adapt to the high demands of the academic world. They suggest a queer approach that questions the whole aspect of time, stimulating scholars to see their work as part of larger scholarly practice and community, rather than being stressed over personal career development. Shaw et al. (2013) point out that one of the greatest fears for instructors is the fear of not covering all the curriculum. They suggest the implementation of approaches such as cooperative and project-based learning as these prioritize “quality over quantity; ... deeper processing of smaller amounts of material; [and] making multiple connections among new concepts, fresh data, the real world, and the individual learner” (Shaw et al., 2013, p. 321).

Mindfulness education

Mindfulness is an approach that is becoming more known and implemented in education, though there are many different definitions and methods to practice mindfulness (Ergas, 2019). Both Ergas and Hadar (2019) and McCaw (2020) have researched the implementation of mindfulness in different levels of education in recent years. Where Ergas and Hadar distinguish between mindfulness

“in” and “as” education, McCaw describes a similar distinction which he labels “thin” and “thick” mindfulness. Both research studies found that the first type, mindfulness “in” education or “thin” mindfulness, is more commonly practiced in education. To reach more people, this form of mindfulness is detached from the original, Buddhist roots of mindfulness practice, and aims to specifically help with mental health issues. In schools, the implementation of mindfulness is often aimed at reducing stress, improving learning, and lowering costs related to sick leave (Ergas, 2019).

Payne (2016) explains how mindfulness in Western American context is implemented as a self-improvement method, and that this strengthens the idea of self being a separate entity, which is opposed to original approaches to mindfulness in Buddhist beliefs. Ergas (2019) describes how mindfulness “as” education does not isolate the self, but rather has a focus on kindness and compassion. McCaw mentions that an implementation of “thick” mindfulness does not need to include Buddhist religion. He refers to Solloway (2000) who shows a rare example of “thick” mindfulness in education that is not rooted in Buddhism. Solloway speaks about presence as a practice. While being present or mindful in the moment, the “other” can be observed before any judgment takes place. “This transitional space-in-between, is a pause, a momentary immersion in the chaos that exists before the naming, labeling, classifying aspects of language act to tame the world, to make it known, and less threatening.” (p. 32). According to McCaw (2019) and Ergas and Hadar (2019) these forms of mindfulness are currently rare in educational settings. However, they match a paradigm of relationality and nonlinearity. A form of mindfulness that is not aimed at self-improvement, focuses on being present in the moment, including awareness of the other, connects with my research paradigm and definition of self-reflection.

Arts-based education

As with many educational approaches, arts-based education is defined and implemented in multiple ways. It is important to distinguish between art education with the purpose of teaching art skills and using arts-based methods in non-artistic disciplines. The latter is used in my research, as it

applies to all university students, and art is used as a tool for learning instead of a technique to create products to be evaluated or sold. This connects with what Meltzer & Schwencke (2019) mention, when they state: “the purpose of arts-based learning approaches is not to create art nor to educate new artists. It is to renew academic subjects and develop the competencies needed in education and working life” (p. 3). As Chemi (2018) explains: “The arts/learning partnerships bring about a specific approach to learning, which is embodied, sensory, aesthetic and makes use of metaphors, mediation, meaning-making and sense-making” (p. 20).

An arts-based approach to learning is suitable when researching lived experiences in the moment because it broadens the exploration of the experience to not only include cognitive elements but also embodied, multi-sensory elements. In addition, it allows students to express themselves in multiple ways. Wattchow and Brown (2011) add that when students create representations of their learning through various art forms, the creation of the art should be seen as a part of the learning experience: “We are already interpreting and reflecting on meaning when we are experiencing. We may continue to reflect later, after the active experience, but reflection on experience is an experience in its own right” (p. 195).

Theory shows that using arts-based methods for reflection is beneficial as it stimulates learning from different and multiple perspectives (Clarke & Bautista, 2017; Gardner, 2012), which can enhance students’ ability and desire to act (Møller-Skau & Lindstøl, 2012). McKay and Barton (2018) add that arts-based reflection helps identify and express thoughts, feelings and actions. Arts-based reflection also stimulates emotional learning (Møller-Skau & Lindstøl, 2012) where emotion is not seen as a burden but a tool for learning (Moffatt, 2019), and can enhance students’ resilience and well being (McKay, 2021).

Literature provides suggestions for using arts-based reflection with students. First, the reason why art is being used should be clearly communicated (Burge et al., 2016). Students need to understand that their art products will not be assessed, and that art is used to stimulate different levels of

reflection. Second, the fear of not being good at art must be understood and respected (Burge et al., 2016). Peer support and having the educator join in the art activities can help lower fear (Sanders, 2022). Allowing students to choose from a range of modes of expression (McKay & Barton, 2018) may also help students feel more comfortable in exploring arts-based reflections. Third, engaging in whole body learning (Grittner, 2021) and pointing to multiple sensory stimuli (Van Coller-Peter & Olinger, 2022) are suggestions to help stimulate arts-based reflection. Finally, McKay and Barton (2018) mention that reflection needs to happen over a period of time. Therefore, it is recommendable to implement arts-based reflection in multiple sessions, rather than limiting it to one class time.

Indigenous education

Various authors mention the importance of including Indigenous knowledge in place-based learning (e.g. Claxton, 2015; Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019; Gruenewald, 2003b; Harrison, 2017; Swallow, 2005; Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Williams & Snively, 2016a, 2018). In his frequently cited article, Gruenewald (2003b) suggests a combination of place-based and critical pedagogy by introducing a critical pedagogy of place. This form of place-based education includes critical perspectives on the history and future of places by focusing on “reinhabitation and decolonization” (p. 9). Many authors agree that in the process of decolonization, Indigenous voices and knowledge must be included in education. For instance, Aldern and Goode (2014) show how awareness of local Indigenous narratives and listening to the land can restore the relationship between people and their environments.

Harrison (2017) suggests that learning about Indigenous concepts must include Indigenous approaches to learning, such as learning from the land itself. Instead of merely learning about the land, “the sounds of country, the rhythms and repetitions, the smells, the senses all teach in excess of explanation” (p. 276). Learning from the land is a pedagogy that is applied in land-based education, which is rooted in Indigenous pedagogy (Harris, 2021). Williams and Snively (2016b) describe Indigenous pedagogy by mentioning the following components of an Indigenous science education model: Elders

are keepers of knowledge; learning is a community activity; learning is holistic; learning is relational; learning is carried in language; learning is rooted in home place; learning is experiential; and learning is ecological.

To those who engage in land-based education or research in the Victoria region, local Elder Dr. Butch Dick suggests: “The most important thing you can do is learn everything you can about Ləkʷəŋən People, because this is their land” (Hirtle, 2019). In B.C., educators in K-12 schools are required to integrate First Peoples Principles of Learning into their teaching (see Chrona, 2014; First Nations Education Steering Committee, n.d.). Despite the intentions of the provincial curriculum, The W̱SÁNEĆ School Board and Swallow (2018) suggest curriculum change is made at local levels. In the curriculum they developed through a community-based action research project, a sense of place was explored by visiting local places, learning traditional place names and histories, asking questions about the relationships that exist within the place, and discussing questions of sustainability. Other examples of local land-based education include restoration activities offered by the PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation (n.d), and community-based participatory research that reintroduced the traditional practice of reef net fishing (Claxton, 2015; Claxton & Rodriguez de France, 2018).

Teacher resources are available for elementary and secondary educators (see, for instance: Indigenous Education Department, n.d.; SD61 District Educational Services, 2022). Educators and researchers in higher education can make use of these resources, but other supporting tools are also available, such as protocols for engagement described by the PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation (n.d.). These protocols include: a commitment to self-reflect on your intentions; practice cultural safety; acknowledge working relationships; and demonstrate accountability and responsibility. When researching connectedness to place on land that has historical and ongoing relationships with Indigenous people, it is important to include learning about these relationships and an epistemology that matches local Indigenous perspectives (Harrison, 2017), in this case Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ perspectives. Both

researcher and participants can do this by acknowledging their history and presence on the land, expressing gratitude, and by allowing time to listen to the land. In this way, the land is considered a participant in the research (Hughes & Barlo, 2020) rather than a background or merely a source of research data. In chapter four I will introduce the research locations as participants in my research.

Krishnamurti education

Krishnamurti schools show another example of how self-reflection can be fully integrated in a form of education that is closely connected with the environment. In describing the intent of the schools Krishnamurti (1984/2020) states that:

A school is a place where one learns about the totality, the wholeness of life. Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the taught explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their own behaviour. (Intent of Krishnamurti Schools)

Beside the importance placed on inward learning, education in Krishnamurti schools is also closely connected to the natural environment: “Nature is the meadows, the groves, the rivers, all the marvelous earth, the trees, and the beauty of the earth. If we have no relationship with that, we shall have no relationship with each other” (Krishnamurti, 2000, p. 2).

Thapan (2018) shows how, inspired by Krishnamurti’s teachings, certain educational approaches are implemented in Krishnamurti schools. For instance, different Krishnamurti schools offer multigrade programs, inclusive education, support to rural communities, a strong focus on environmental awareness, and an open curriculum that does not rely on textbooks. An open curriculum acknowledges the different experiences of individual students and educators and suggests that a “curriculum evolves and emerges out of the interaction of different subjectivities” (Chakravarty, 2018). Though Krishnamurti schools offer elementary and secondary education, certain practices are applicable to higher education. For instance, an educational environment in which students and educators explore knowledge and

thought together matches a participatory approach to learning and research, and an open curriculum matches the suggestion of authentic learning in place-based and experiential education.

Chapter three: Research design

In this chapter I will describe design of the research, including ethical and quality considerations. I am using a bricolage approach throughout the research by combining different methodologies, theories, data collection and analysis methods, and creative ways to explore and express participants' experiences. This approach allows me to combine philosophies, perspectives and methods that I see fitting with the paradigm. Bricolage gives me, as a researcher, the ability to creatively use the resources available to me and to combine them for the purpose of this research (see, for instance: Baker & Nelson, 2005; Ben-Asher, 2022; Pratt, et al., 2022).

The research has both a participatory and phenomenological approach. The phenomenon of this study is connectedness to place, and the focus is on student experiences with the phenomenon as they engage in self-reflection activities. In a relational paradigm, I aim to acknowledge the integrated connections between research questions, participants, and data collection methods. The research involved ten students who were invited to be involved in the research design by deciding self-reflection activities that allowed them to explore their connectedness to place. I use recommendations from phenomenologists Van Manen (2014) and Vagle (2018) to collect data and analyse the interviews I held with the student participants. As a qualitative research project, within a relational paradigm, I specifically discuss research quality and ethical considerations that consider all relationships that exist within this work.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this research can be described as participatory phenomenology with a post-intentional focus. In this section I will describe the orientations to participatory and phenomenological research that I applied and justify why this methodology is most suitable for this research. I will also include actions and decisions I made regarding specific quality considerations within these approaches.

Participatory research

In participatory research, the research is carried out in collaboration with participants, where participants do not merely act as data informants but as co-creators of knowledge. Participation can range from “inform” and “consult”, whereby participants are involved by being informed and giving feedback, to “collaborate” and “empower”, whereby participants share in the decision making regarding research methods, tools and processes (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). Participation levels may also vary between different stages of the research. For instance, participants may be more involved in the design and planning of the research and less involved in the analysis stage or the reporting stage. In my research, student participants were involved in the design of the research, as they could individually decide the activities they would engage in as part of the research. Participants also helped in shaping some of the concept definitions. During the reporting stage of the research, participants were offered opportunities to give feedback or suggest corrections if they felt I had misinterpreted information taken from their transcripts.

Participatory research is often placed within a social-critical paradigm as the origins of the approach are rooted in the work of activist such as Paulo Freire. Freire was a Brazilian educator in the 1970s, who fought against oppression by promoting literacy and social awareness among the working-class people in impoverished areas of the country. In his approach, “through the window of literacy, rural workers would become conscious of their own realities and equipped to exercise their fundamental rights” (Campos & Anderson, 2021, p. 42-43). Early participatory researchers were “challenging traditional (positivist and neo-positivist) research epistemologies and methods, ... by counter-proposing basic assumptions about the nature and role of knowledge creation in changing power relations to support social change” (Ospina, 2021, p. 37). Some current researchers combine the participatory approach with phenomenological research. For instance, Bush, et al. (2019) combined

phenomenology with community-based participatory research and explain that the overlapping focus of both research approaches is the exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences.

A participatory approach matches the paradigm of relationality because it values knowledges of everyone involved in the research. In my research, participants include not only students, but also the land, and the researcher. I aimed to include the land as a participant by stimulating students to listen to the land. Land as participant is commonly discussed in literature of Indigenous research methodologies. In using storytelling as an Indigenous research method, Datta (2018a) shows that in his research involving Indigenous people's land-based stories, "land and water were not only sites of learning but also actively involved in the process of research" (p. 42).

Learning to listen to the land can provide researchers with meaningful information during their studies. This active involvement of the natural environment as a research participant is also discussed by Hughes and Barlo (2020). As they explain, being in conversation with the land, which they refer to as "Country", requires deep listening and responsibility with the intention to do no harm. If Country is approached as a sentient and equal participant "we end up with a method of engagement that we haven't seen before, because we'd be engaging with Country at a totally different level, and a depth. I don't think we understand— I certainly don't—what that will mean ultimately" (p. 7). Such a relationship is something that needs to be developed over time.

The participatory nature of the research was extended to me being a participant who learns and shares alongside other participants. As a researcher my role was to organise, record and document the knowledge that was shared by the students during the research. As a participant I engaged in my own self-reflection in connection to a place on campus and kept a record of my experiences in the form of written and creative expressions. Research in which a researcher purposefully belongs to or enters the world of the research participants is referred to as insider research. This is opposed to outsider research, in which a researcher remains an outside observer. Insider research is commonly used in, for instance,

ethnography (Taylor, 2011), feminist research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013), work-integrated learning research (Flemming, 2018) and Indigenous research (Datta, 2018b). It is less common in phenomenological research, though Bush, et al. (2019) show an example of combining phenomenology with community-based participatory research when a community's lived experience was explored around a central theme or phenomenon.

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013) discuss four types of insider research, ranging from "minimizing" the inclusion of one's own experience to "maximizing" them by studying oneself. Between these is the example of a "utilizing insider" who uses personal experiences strategically to reach other participants. In my research I acted as an "incorporating insider", where I was considered an equal participant. I did not need to utilize my role as a fellow student, because the invitation to participate was open to all UVic students and I did not seek a specific population within this group.

My dual position as a researcher and participant fits within the paradigm of relationality and self-awareness and created both advantages and challenges. A challenge is that it is not always clear when and how to switch between roles. For instance, when I acted as a participant, I was already thinking as a researcher and my research objectives may have affected my experience. When I acted as a researcher, my own experience as a participant may have interfered with understanding other participant's voices. Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013) warn that this may cause the researcher's voice to overpower participants' perspectives. To limit this interference, I spoke to other student participants before I engaged in my own self-reflections as a participant.

I also experienced certain advantages to my dual role as participant and researcher. First, as I did not know if my recruitment of participants would be successful, I was sure to have at least one participant, myself. Second, as I am deeply interested in the topic and was a student living on campus, it made sense to me that I would explore my own experiences. Exploring the research questions by myself as a participant, helped me understand what I would be asking of others. Third, being a participant

myself created a sense of camaraderie and empathy (Gair, 2012) with other participants as we spoke to each other at equal levels, being fellow students who seek connections with places on campus.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is often described as both a philosophy and a research approach (Vagle, 2018).

Van Manen (2014) writes:

There is something about phenomenology that distinguishes it from most other qualitative methods in that the motivational intent of its method is deeply philosophical. At the heart of phenomenology is a philosophically consuming fascination with the question of the origin, sources, and meaning of meaning and meaningfulness. (p. 74)

Phenomenology as a philosophical discipline originates from the work of Husserl in the early twentieth century, who attempted to dispute the body-mind split formulated by Descartes, and instead believed that “the mind was always in relationship with the “object” of its consciousness” (Vagle, 2018, p. 7). Harrison (2017) mentions that because phenomenology tends to focus on the I-perspective it regards the environment as an object without stories and messages of its own. In a similar critique Chang (2020) refers to phenomenology as a European philosophy that “implies that the investigation of a quality of experience stands apart from questions of being, knowledge, and value” (p. 11). However, phenomenology is a broad field with many variations in philosophy as well as methodology. Van Manen (2014) gives a detailed overview of different orientations to phenomenology stating that each contributes to the search for meaning in our daily lives.

Certain approaches to phenomenology specifically attend to inseparability. For instance, Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) offer a contemporary approach to phenomenology that builds on original descriptive and interpretive phenomenological theories. According to them, many authors claim that descriptive and interpretive phenomenology are opposites, and one needs to make a choice to follow one or the other. Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology is often criticized, as it “allegedly implies that the

researcher's preunderstanding must be "put aside," which transforms the researcher into "a detached observer" (p. 459). However, Dahlberg and Dahlberg suggest focusing on the commonalities between the different theories and highlight the idea of inseparability. Inseparability means that an experience "neither springs from the subject as a single creator nor does it arise out of an objective world. It results from a subjective involvement in a world that is already meaningful" (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020, p. 460).

One approach to phenomenology that fits with my paradigm of relationality and self-awareness is Merleau-Ponty's (1962/2005) embodiment phenomenology. Van Manen (2014) describes this as follows:

For Merleau-Ponty the original human relation to the world is a relation of perception. But this perception takes place at a primal, corporeal, and preconscious level. The body-subject is already interlaced with the flesh of the world before having reflective knowledge of it. Or, to say it differently, our knowledge of the world – of others and things – is corporeal, rather than intellectual. We know the world bodily and through our embodied actions. (p. 128)

Embodiment phenomenology matches my descriptions of reflection and experience as awareness in the moment. Reflection as awareness in the moment differs from reflective thinking that is used to plan for improvement and includes embodied knowing rather than rationalization. Merleau-Ponty writes: "We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology" (p. viii), and as he describes Merleau-Ponty's perspectives, Van Manen (2014) adds: "Reflection is only possible because our existence is first of all and always prereflectively entwined into the world" (p. 129).

Vagle (2018) mentions the importance of matching philosophical orientations with research methodology and methods. Phenomenology as a research approach matches my research question, as I aim to explore people's lived experiences rather than measure a generalizable trend, test an improved situation, or provide critical analysis. According to Van Manen (2014), "phenomenology is primarily a

philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions” (p. 29).

Post-intentional phenomenology

Vagle (2018) brings together phenomenology and post-structural ideas that focus on fluidity and changeability in subjects and within relationships. In crafting post-intentional phenomenological research, the researcher does not ask about the essence of a phenomenon, as in more traditional approaches to phenomenology, but is interested in how might “take shape, how it is produced in time and space, and how it is entangled and provoked” (p. 150). Post-intentional phenomenology matches my research paradigm, though I have included philosophical perspectives of Krishnamurti and Merleau-Ponty, whereas Vagle draws on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to explore a philosophical orientation that leads to methodological decisions.

Instead of researching a fixed phenomenon, Vagle suggests that the focus is on “how things connect” (p. 129). He further adds that connections are flexible and changeable and therefore not linear. These suggestions match with a phenomenological inquiry into connectedness to place and a research paradigm of relationality and nonlinearity. According to Vagle, post-intentional phenomenology focuses on being and embodiment that happens in social relations. In my research I broaden the concept of social relations to include the environment. Another component of post-intentional phenomenology is post-reflexivity, which, according to Vagle, asks that researchers do not attempt to free themselves of judgment but explore their own assumptions, background, and ideas as they develop. Based on my earlier discussion about reflection versus reflexivity, I use the term self-reflection instead of reflexivity in my work. During all stages of the research, I kept track of my thoughts in a self-reflection journal. Vagle and Hofsess (2016) show how openness about bias and becoming aware of binaries in our own thinking can deepen our experiences and understanding.

Recruitment

To recruit student participants for my research, I sent a short invitation email to forty-one department secretaries across the university, requesting it to be shared with students who opted to receive departmental emails. One art instructor sent me a list of department secretary emails. Others, I found on the university website. Students who were interested, were asked to reply, and then received a second invitation email with more details about participation, including expectations, rights, and benefits. Both the invitation emails are shown in Appendix A.

Seventeen students from different departments responded to the first email. After the second email, nine students were interested in participating and indicated that they regularly visited campus. Besides having access to campus, being interested in the research topic was the main criterion for participation. Though I had intended to work with six participants, I decided to include the nine students in the research. As Vagle (2018) explains, in phenomenological research there is no ideal number of participants as each phenomenon of study is different, and “the phenomenon calls for how it is to be studied” (p. 82). In regards of numbers of participants, Dahlberg et al. (2008) suggest that “the more complex a phenomenon, the larger the group of informants (p. 175, also cited in Vagle, 2018). Connectedness to place is a phenomenon that can include many different types of experiences. Therefore, including more participants helps broaden the examination of the research topic.

Data collection methods

In gathering phenomenological material, Vagle (2018) stimulates researchers to think broadly and creatively. Vagle mentions that the most common methods of data collection in phenomenological research are interviews, observations, and written anecdotes. However, he also stimulates the inclusion of arts-based methods. In my research, the main data collection method was the interview. I interviewed ten students in ten locations on or near campus, between February and July 2022. Except for two students who had limited availability, all students were interviewed twice. Between the interviews, students were encouraged to explore their connectedness to place by visiting their chosen

location and, if they wished, using any art form to process their experiences. Students were also encouraged to participate in workshops or events that they deemed relevant to their exploration of connectedness to place. I summarize these self-reflection activities as “arts-based learning”, “learning circle” and “listening to the land”. It is important to note that the activities were not meant as interventions aiming to influence student experiences, as would be the intention in experimental research. However, they were an integral part of the research design. In a relational perspective, art, moments of learning, and place itself, offer knowledge that can be gathered and shared. Therefore, I consider these activities to be indirect data collection methods. All data collection methods will be explained below.

Interview as dialogue

Two interviews with the student participants were carried out between February and July 2022. By interviewing the students twice, the first interview included time to get to know each other and the research topic. Meeting more than once also increased the opportunity for participants to engage with the research as co-creators of knowledge, as they had time to process and experiment with the topic. The first interviews took place in February and March and the second interviews started in April and ended in July. The dates varied due to student availability. For the second interview, students indicated when they felt ready to meet. The interviews took place outside, and were recorded with permission, using a digital voice recorder. I brought two camping stools in case there was no comfortable place to sit. In two locations these were used and in other places there were benches or rocks available to sit on.

Van Manen (2014) explains that to gather lived experience descriptions in a phenomenological interview, it is important to avoid asking for opinions, perspectives and interpretations. Instead, participants should be encouraged to focus on an experience and can be stimulated by explaining details of how and when an experience occurred. The interview questions, shown in Appendix B, indicate that not all the questions were phenomenological. Some questions were meant to get to know the

participant. The phenomenological questions specifically focus on students' experience in place. For instance, the question "How do you know that you feel connected?", was important in deepening the conversation towards understanding participants' experiences. Other questions, such as: "Do you feel it is important for people to deepen their connectedness to place?", and "Do you believe one can learn about themselves while being aware of their environment?" did not inquire about experiences, but focused on students' perspectives and insights as co-researchers. This way I was able to include participants' views that helped highlight the significance of the research and define the research concepts. The lines between researcher/participants, and experience/perspective are blurred, to allow for an open conversation and for unexpected insights and provocations (Vagle, 2018) to occur. However, in the analysis phase it was possible to distinguish between participants' experiences and perspectives.

Vagle's (2018) suggestions for phenomenological interviews offered further guidelines for my planning. For instance, even though the phenomenological interview is unstructured, it is important to have "a clear sense of the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 87). Vagle suggests spending time re-orienting oneself with the phenomenon before the interview takes place. My walk to the locations were already helpful in preparing my mind to discuss connectedness to place. Most of the locations were familiar to me, as I had already spent much time walking around campus with my family. Especially during the COVID-19 lockdown, I became aware of the environment as there were fewer people and we were advised to keep our distance from others. My connectedness to the different areas around campus had grown personally, and preparing for the interviews during my walks reminded me of these experiences.

Because the research is participatory in nature, allowing all participants to be co-creators of knowledge, the interviews took place as conversations or dialogue. "Research as conversation is characterized as an open-ended interview with opportunity for both sides to engage in talk rather than only one party doing most of the talking" (Archibald, 2008, p. 47). My use of "interview as dialogue" is

inspired by Krishnamurti's approach to dialogue. Baniwal (2018) explains that for Krishnamurti, dialogue is not aimed at sharing perspectives, convincing others with arguments, but to inquire together. In this, both speakers aim to "be with others without any mediation, to go beyond oneself, to truly inquire, to listen without judgment and with pure attention" (p. 134) in "an inquiry in which everything is questioned, including one's own assumptions, beliefs, philosophy, ideology, and even one's idea of one's self is not left out of scrutiny" (p. 134). This form of dialogue stresses the importance of listening, not only to the other, but also to one's own thoughts. Baniwal further explains: "Listening becomes essential to have a dialogue with others, but the kind of listening that Krishnamurti speaks of, is not only in the silence of speech, but also in the silence of the mind" (p. 136). Even though it is extremely challenging to silence our minds, Baniwal mentions how it can help us become aware of the images our minds create of others and instead, allow us to be fully attentive to the other's being and context. In the dialogues with students, I aimed to reach for this by allowing space and time for both of us to observe the environment, be comfortable with silence and ask clarifying questions before continuing discussing other topics.

Arts-based methods

Student participants were informed that they could explore and express their experiences in creative forms. It was also made clear that this was optional, and that students could decide which creative form they would use. This resulted in a range of artistic explorations, including painting, pencil sketching, music, photography, sculpture, poetry, and design. In the time between the two interviews, students engaged in the creative activities, often while visiting the location, or sometimes in their own homes. Students were informed that they did not need to consider themselves to be "artists", that creative products would not be evaluated in any way, and that they had choices in whether or not they would share the product, an image or recording with me. Those who shared, had the option of discussing the creative process and providing the product as data for the research, but this was not a

requirement for research participation. Five participants were art or art education students, already involved with arts-based learning projects and experienced in art making. The other five participants, including myself, were not regularly engaging in art activities themselves, but were interested in attempting it in the exploration of connectedness to place. Appendix C shows participants' work in an assemblage of arts-based reflections.

The benefits of arts-based learning have been discussed in the previous chapter. I have four reasons for including arts-based methods in my research. First, engaging in art activities and creative thinking activates different parts of the brain, as is shown by, for instance, the work of psychiatrist, neuroscience researcher, philosopher and literary scholar Ian McGilchrist. McGilchrist (2019) explains that the right hemisphere of the brain is significant for our experiences of creativity and art, and deals with experiences holistically, before the left hemisphere separates and analyses them. Arts-based activities may therefore lead to explorations and insights that would not occur when thinking and talking about connectedness to place only. Second, in communicating their experiences, arts-based methods allow students to use different forms of expression. Some experiences are simply impossible to put into words. Third, viewing their own artwork may inspire students to bring up things in the discussion they had not otherwise considered. Therefore, arts-based methods are not only useful for broadening forms of expression, but also for encouraging self-reflection. Wattchow and Brown (2011) mention how “notes, working sketches, photographs and so on can be taken home and become the basis for continued exploration of the experience” (p. 195). This way the arts-based method becomes a multilayered phenomenological experience (Vagle, 2018).

The fourth reason to include arts-based methods in my research is that arts-based methods are specifically suitable for researching the topic of connectedness, as the experience of connectedness involves embodied and affective elements. Muhr (2020), for instance, specifically recommends using arts-based methods for researching connectedness to nature. Where many studies on human

connectedness to nature use quantitative and language-based forms of measurement, arts-based methods have been shown to be better able to include emotional influences and explore deeper levels of connection. In an arts-based research project that included theatre and drawing exercises, Muhr found that “both the theater exercise and the drawings included notions of concealment and emotional security in nature that had not surfaced during the interviews” (p. 252).

Arts-based methods can also prove beneficial for, for instance, international students. Watson and Barton (2020) worked with international students and found that arts-based methods helped them gain deeper understanding of their experiences and offered a safe space to acknowledge and discuss challenges. In their research “arts-based activities encouraged communication that exposed ideas, emotions and feelings that previously might not have been expressed” (p. 111). In my research, half of the participants were international students.

Listening to the land

Wattchow and Brown (2011) stress the importance of observing and listening to place in outdoor education and according to them educators can aim to achieve this by including aspects of the local culture, allowing embodied and affective experiences, not forcing a connection but being aware of both place and students, and teaching without preplanned activities. In my research, I suggested to students that they could learn about the history of place, connections that others have or had with the place, historical and contemporary local Indigenous relations with the place, and scientific knowledge about the environment. However, because these suggestions focus more on learning *about* place, I also and specifically recommended to student participants that they visit and spend time in their places whenever they were able to, and explore “listening to the land”, including how the land may experience them.

The concept of land as teacher is explored by various authors and is common in land-based and Indigenous education. Styres (2011) describes a course curriculum that includes “land as first teacher”

(p. 717), in which students are encouraged to explore how the land teaches and influences them through frequent land-centred activities and outdoor reflective moments. A similar approach is used in Krishnamurti schools where students are encouraged to learn from observing nature and reflect on their own thinking. As an example, one of the schools, the Valley School in Bengaluru, puts environmental science at the heart of the curriculum: “Unlike conventional schools where the study of nature is relegated to fixed biology classes or within the confines of a laboratory, in the Valley School, the curriculum envisages the entire environment outside the classroom space as a laboratory for making keen observations” (Chakravarty, 2018, p. 108).

One of the challenges in my research is including the land as a research participant. The land is already a participant in a relational perspective, when studying connectedness to place, however, the land is not a usual participant that can be interviewed and express itself using human language. Baniwal (2018) mentions how Krishnamurti speaks about the value of being together in silence and that a genuine dialogue is one where listening and learning is encouraged through silence and attention. Listening to the land can take place in such way, by being with the land in silence. As a researcher and participant, I focused on listening to the land when I visited the students’ research places and my own. I especially attempted this when I revisited the locations on my own, after all the interviews had been completed. “Listening to the land” as a research method does not produce data that can be translated through analysis. However, the voice of the land shines through the experiences of the student participants and my writings. Therefore, I believe it is important to acknowledge the land as a participant and “listening” as a data collection method. Readers of this work may not be able to visit places mentioned in the research but may translate this knowledge by listening to places in the locations they are living and working.

Initially I wrote this method as “listening to and observing the land”. However, as Hughes and Barlo (2020) express, in a relational and participatory perspective being an observer does not make

sense, as we are already, always part of the land and one cannot merely observe as if standing on the outside. Hughes and Barlo also mention that listening to the land includes noticing how the land responds to us and that listening means listening with our whole bodies. This connects with how I described self-reflection as being in the moment. However, Hughes and Barlo point out that this kind of listening does not come easy, especially if one has not grown up with such practices.

Learning circles

Learning circles were optional workshops or events that specifically focused on connectedness to place and/or self-reflective learning. These learning opportunities were meant to support students in their exploration of connectedness to place and self-reflection activities. Two workshops were organized by myself, with support from UVic's Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) office, where I worked as a research assistant at the time. Three of the student participants attended a Krishnamurti philosopher's café and four students participated in an arts-based reflection workshop. All other students were given written descriptions of the workshops afterwards, so they were able to choose if they wanted to include any of the suggestions in their personal reflection activities. Three students, including myself, attended other workshop events that inspired them for this research, which they spoke about in the second interviews.

The Krishnamurti philosopher's café was open to any student, staff or faculty member who was interested, and was advertised through UVic's local course information and registration central. Four UVic students and two facilitators, including myself, were present. In this one-hour meeting we watched a fifteen-minute video in which Krishnamurti speaks about the difference between observing and thinking about oneself (Krishnamurti Foundation Trust and Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 2019). After this, we engaged in a free dialogue, commenting on the video and responding to thoughts that came up in the group. The results of the dialogue were not summarized, as it was up to each individual

to take from the meeting what they could and wanted. Student research participants who were not present, were given a link to the video.

The arts-based reflection workshop was prepared and facilitated by Heather Korlak, an educator, visual artist and expressive arts therapist from Vancouver. It was offered specifically to students in this research and to students who were part of a university-wide community-engaged learning project called “Climate Change and Sustainability Initiative”. About thirty-five students participated in this workshop. We started in a circle by the entrance of the Finnerty Gardens, with a territorial acknowledgement, followed by our own introductions to the group. After that we spent twenty minutes walking around the gardens individually, observing and making notes. The following two prompts were given to support reflection: first, note how you are observed by the environment, starting a sentence with: “I am seen by...”, “I am heard by...” and “I am felt by...”; second, finish the sentence: “I wonder...”. Heather asked us to collect ten items from the environment that had fallen on the ground, such as a leaf, rock, or pinecone. After this we moved to a classroom and used water colours to paint freely, inspired by the objects we had collected.

In the next activity we wrote ten words about our painting (e.g. leaf, blue, peace), circled five of those words and created a short poem with them. For the last ten minutes of the workshop, we walked around the room to observe all the paintings, and some students volunteered to read their poems to the group. Finally, we made a community art display with all our collected materials before these objects were returned outside. The main idea behind these activities was to use multiple formats (quiet observation, awareness of self in the environment, visual art, poetry, group art) to explore one's connectedness to place. Heather mentioned the possibility to continue this process, for instance by making a new image based on the poem we had made.

During the semester, one participant, Mahya, joined a Vipassana course near Duncan, on Vancouver Island. This course is a ten-day meditation course and offers different levels of individual and

group meditation. It also includes strict guidelines, such as not being allowed to speak during the ten days, and following timelines for waking, meditation, eating, break times, and rest times. In her experience, this course helped Mahya to be more aware of her own body and how it reacts to the environment. For instance, she mentions how she was aware of the mosquitoes biting her during our second dialogue, whereas in the past she may not have realized this until she would have noticed the mosquito bites much later.

Another participant, Kikila, participated in a week-long field workshop that took place in Clearwater, B.C., which is Secwépemc territory. This workshop was led by various artists and educators from UVic and Thompson Rivers University and focused on different ways to learn about place. Activities included poetry sessions, walks, discussions, and painting. Kikila mentioned how the workshop helped him learn how to self-reflect in new ways, such as combining writing with painting, and working on this together with others, forming a community.

I attended a UVic field journaling workshop which was led by artist, researcher and educator Maleea Acker. This workshop took place in the Finnerty Gardens. Maleea introduced us to different journaling activities, such as drawing details of an object without looking at the paper, sketching something in a short time, making a sound map, and adding writing to the images. The suggestions were inspired by Baldwin (2015) and helped me find new ways to express myself and my observations of place. It also helped me realize that engaging in such activities can increase my awareness of and connectedness to place.

Learning that happened in these experiences were individually processed and not directly measured. Therefore, similar to “listening to the land”, the “learning circle” as a research method does not produce data to be translated through analysis. However, the workshops influenced student learning in relation to the research and was included in the expressions in our dialogues and creative work. In a research paradigm of relationality, self-awareness and nonlinearity, methods and moments of

data collection are blurred. The learning circles are not meant as an intervention that should produce a difference in data before and after, even if it might do so. But rather, they are moments of learning in a whole of knowledge production that is research.

Analysis methods

To make sense of the research data, a combination of analysis methods was used. I specifically processed the research data in two different ways, shared in two separate chapters. First, in keeping in line with the paradigm of nonlinearity, self-awareness and interconnectedness, I followed Vagle's (2018) suggestion to allow data, theory and self-reflections to interact in a process of playfulness with the unexpected. This led me to a deeper exploration of a few concepts through a process of interactive and creative inquiry. These results are shared in chapter five. Second, I was also interested in analysing student experiences to gain practical recommendations for curriculum development. I followed Van Manen's (2014) suggestions for "seeing meaning in texts" (p. 219), by engaging in three rounds of reading: holistic, selective and detailed reading. This led to a description of different forms of awareness, interactions between self and place and considerations for self-reflection in connection with place. In chapter six I share these results. What follows below is a detailed description of the different stages in my analysis process.

Transcribing and holistic reading

Interviews, or dialogues were conducted with ten student participants. One student, myself, responded to the interview questions in written form. Nine students participated in dialogues that were audio recorded. For one participant, the first dialogue was spread over two sessions. Seven students participated in the second dialogue. This led to seventeen recorded dialogues in total, which I transcribed manually. The duration of the dialogues ranged from 30 minutes in a few cases, to 90 minutes in one case. Most dialogues were around 45 to 60 minutes. In the transcripts I also noted

sounds that were heard, such as birds, cars, wind and leaf blowers. This is one way in which I attempted to include the places as research participants.

The usefulness of transcripts is obvious as it provides a direct overview of the dialogues and allows for fast selecting of quotes and determining relevant themes. When a researcher transcribes their own interviews, it also supports a deepening of personal relationship, not only with the participants, but also with the topics and ideas in the conversation, as well as the physical environment, especially when sounds of place are audible. Both Van Manen (2014) and Vagle (2018) recommend beginning phenomenological research analysis with a round of holistic reading to “spend some time getting reacquainted with the phenomenological material” (Vagle, 2018, p. 110). For me, transcribing each dialogue manually allowed me to spend this time reconnecting with the materials and deepening my relationships.

Listening to the recordings and note taking

Vagle (2018) suggests taking a few notes during the interviews and pay attention to how our own body responds to these words and phrases, to be able to return to them during the interview. During my first dialogue, I attempted to take brief notes, but I soon felt that it was not possible to be fully present in the conversation while I worried about what key words to write down. I put my note pad away and attempted to ask clarifying and deepening questions, if needed, following the flow of the conversation. After the transcripts were completed, I did another round of listening to all the recordings. At this time, while reliving the conversations through audio, I made brief notes with pen on paper. This allowed me to capture my own thoughts in the moment, and list ideas for further exploration. The notes also included environmental sounds that created the atmosphere of being in the places and were part of the experience. My memories of the conversations with each participant are strengthened by remembering the matching environmental sounds and sights.

Selective reading

During this stage I read through each dialogue while highlighting relevant excerpts in different colours. The choice of selections was guided by the research and interview questions, and included the following: personal background information; connectedness to the place of the participant's origin; connectedness to the chosen UVic place; descriptions of how participants know that they feel connected; participant views on the importance of connectedness to place; experiences with awareness of self in the environment; methods of self-reflection in place; description of self-reflection activities; take-away from workshops or other experiences; and exploration of the concept "connectedness".

Post-intentional phenomenological data analysis

Vagle (2018) suggests one round of line-by-line reading, instead of the common whole-part-whole strategy that is usual in phenomenology research. This initial, careful reading of each sentence in the transcripts, allows for an early cyclic exploration, combining interview data with theory and self-reflections. Both Vagle (2018) and Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) describe the importance of delaying in-depth theory study until after the first exploration of phenomenological data, as it allows the "soft" voices of the research participants to not drown under the "hard" voices of theory (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020).

After one line-by-line reading of interview transcripts, "the task is to bring one's careful reading of these phenomenological materials in dynamic and playful dialogue" (Vagle, 2018, p. 157) with the chosen theories and self-reflections, which Vagle refers to as post-reflexions. Based on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophies, Vagle (2018) suggests two active ways of working with knowledge in this phase. The first is to "actively look for ways that knowledge "takes off"" (p. 157) or leads to unexpected directions. This includes, for instance, noticing our physical and emotional responses to the material and following these as leads to further dialogue between knowledges. The second suggestion is to "distinguish lines of flight from other lines operating on us and the phenomenon" (p. 158). When we are reading, our minds make constant decisions and conclusions, which, when explored, may offer new

openings for insight. For instance, noticing our own binary thinking or our tendency to skip something we are not sure of, can bring us to revisit this knowledge and explore new ways of thinking.

Another suggestion given by Vagle is “thinking with theory”, a concept created by Jackson and Mazzei (2013). They describe how data and theory can be brought together in an analysis approach that may lead to unexpected and new knowledge. Rather than seeing theory as a framework for analysing data, both data and theory are actively used to produce knowledge by “plugging” them into each other. Jackson and Mazzei found that this process leads to different knowledge that may not have been created during a traditional coding process. They state:

Coding takes us back to what is known, not only to the experience of our participants but also to our own experience as well; it also disallows a repetition that results in the production of the new, a production of different knowledge. (p. 267)

While highlighting quotes in the interview transcripts, I added notes to the sideline when unexpected or unusual information was offered. These notes, in combination with the notes I took while relistening to the recordings, became a source of selecting concepts for further analysis. Two concepts, “memory” and “beauty” were mentioned frequently by most of the participants and therefore seemed important for further exploration, or “production” (Vagle, 2018). The concept “time” was experienced as a “provocation” (Vagle, 2018) during one of my dialogues and I was interested in exploring it further. A fourth concept, “body” was a major topic in both the experiences, theory and self-reflections. Therefore, I chose to use embodied learning as a creative form of exploration during my analysis of the other chosen concepts. These results are discussed in chapter five.

Detailed reading and cycles of coding

For the second analysis process, I collected the highlighted transcript quotes in a table. I then read the quotes in detail, asking “what may this sentence or sentence cluster be seen to reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 320). While reading the

selected sentences, I entered into a first cycle of coding. “First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). I summarized each sentence or sentence cluster, leading to an overview of student experiences in the following topics: experiences with connectedness to place; experiences with self-awareness in place; and experiences with methods of self-reflection in connection to place. For each of these topics I then entered into a second cycle of coding, looking for patterns. “Pattern coding as a Second Cycle method, is a way of grouping those summaries into smaller number of categories, themes of constructs” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). To give an example, in the section of experiences with connectedness to place, I created the categories: “reaching deep thought”, “mind is free to go somewhere good”, and “mind is not racing”. These categories were then clustered to “cognitive awareness”. Another example: the initial categories, “stretching the body” and “smelling” were grouped under “embodied experience”. These results are discussed in chapter six. During the analysis I also selected quotes that were not phenomenologically oriented, such as students’ views on definitions and significance. These quotes and their summaries were integrated into the introduction and theoretical framework, as discussed earlier.

Working with creative products

The artwork that was created and shared by participants is shown in appendix C. Because the intention of the creative activities was to deepen students’ own reflections, and because the art activities and forms were optional, I decided not to analyse the artwork itself. Definitions of arts-based research vary greatly. Scholar, novelist and arts-based research expert Leavy (2015) states that arts-based research practices “are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (p. 4). Muhr (2020) mentions examples of research where art was used to elicit other types of information from participants, and not as a form of data itself. In my research, participant’s art was also not used as a source of data. However, during the analysis process, I engaged in artmaking that

resulted in the production of knowledge described in chapter five. Savin-Baden & Wimpenny (2014) mention that for arts-related research the “relationships between the data, the arts-related researcher, ... research participants, the audience, theory, and the cultural, economic and political settings are all components of the analytic process” (p. 65), showing how analysis of art in arts-related research is a creative and integrated process in itself. They further state:

The researcher is required to make uncertain moves above and beyond documented practices, which are challenging but necessary conditions for analytical work that is ‘on the move’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011). Jackson and Mazzei suggest that in the analytical process, the researcher and the researched are both subject to change, as is the audience or viewer, so that as the research data become transformed and offer something else, something new is made available.” (p. 65-66).

Ethical and quality considerations

With any form of research, ethical considerations are essential to be respectful of relational aspects during all stages of the research. In my relational research paradigm, this includes not only relationships with human participants, but also with more-than-human participants, other elements that are influenced by the research or have influenced the participants, and even theories that flow through the minds of researcher and participants. Similarly, in discussing Indigenous research methods, Wilson (2008) describes relationality as including relations with people, the environment/land, the cosmos, and ideas. He further goes on explaining how awareness of relationships must then lead to relational accountability in research:

The research must accurately reflect and build upon the relationships between the ideas and participants. The analysis must be true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by researcher and participants alike” (p. 101).

Before I met students for the first interview, they signed the consent form, shown in Appendix D. The consent form included detailed information about voluntary participation, rights to withdraw,

required time investments, ongoing consent, and choices in remaining anonymous. All students chose to be named by their real names and gave permission to include an image of any artwork they wished to share for the research. Students were not offered any gifts or compensations, which helped in recruiting students who were personally interested in the research. However, relational accountability includes asking yourself: “What am I contributing or giving back to the relationships? Is the sharing, growth and learning that is taking place reciprocal?” (Wilson, 2008, p. 77). After the interviews I kept in contact with the participants. I shared excerpts of my writing for them to review, and offered a small thank you gift. As several of the students were also conducting their own research, discussing the research as a peer student was beneficial for both myself and the participants, at multiple levels.

Some important ethical considerations for participatory research are pointed out by Bergold and Thomas (2012), such as “the need for a safe space” (p. 196). Certain research design elements supported the creation of a safe space. For instance, the interviews took place at a location the participants felt connected to, and because we met as peer students, power differences were minimal. Another consideration mentioned by Bergold and Thomas is the question of who gets to participate. Student groups who are not represented in my research may have been uninterested because they feared the research would not represent their needs or would not be beneficial to them personally. In my recruitment process I aimed to include students from different departments, age groups, and cultural backgrounds. Specific minority identifiers were not relevant for the research, and thus not inquired about in the recruitment process. By reaching out to many department secretaries, I aimed to be as inclusive as possible.

Including the places as participants in the research requires ethical relationship with the land. This includes showing humility, gratitude, doing no harm (Hughes and Barlo, 2020), acknowledging the land’s history, and respecting people who already have a connection to this land (Korteweg & Oakley, 2014). Timing was not in my favour when trying to connect with local Indigenous knowledge keepers,

due to COVID-19 restrictions and institutional processes. At the same time, during my work engagement with UVic's Community-Engaged Learning office, my non-Indigenous colleagues and I discussed that decolonization begins as an inner process. This invited me to consider my own history, relationships with places I've lived in and visited, and my personal connection to the research locations. After the interviews, I revisited the research places to spend a moment in gratitude and offer a token of thanks. Certain websites and published events provided opportunities for cultural learning, such as the Songhees Nation's website (Songhees Nation, 2023) and UVic's Living Lands and Indigenous Climate Solutions project (Corntassel, 2021). Before each interview, I began with a personal land acknowledgement, and allowed time to observe and pay respect to the place we were in.

To further discuss quality considerations for this research, I use O'Leary's (2014) "indicators of research integrity" (p. 62). She first describes indicators that are commonly used in positivist research, including objectivity, validity, reliability, generalizability, and reproducibility. She then compares them with indicators for a post-positivist research paradigm, which are: neutrality or subjectivity with transparency, authenticity, dependability, transferability, and auditability. In my research, subjective and context rich experiences are sought and valued. The post-positive indicators offer a suitable guideline for quality considerations that fit within my research paradigm, and these will be discussed below.

Some phenomenologists claim that objectivity is required in all research. Dahlberg et al. (2008) argue that all scientific research, including phenomenology, must be objective and that objectivity allows us to see what we did not know or misunderstood about a phenomenon and invites a willingness to be surprised. In my view, in a relational paradigm, objectivity is difficult or even impossible to achieve, which matches with Wilson's (2008) discussion about relational accountability in Indigenous research. He refers to Hampton (1995) when he states: "it is not possible to be accountable to your relationships if you are pretending to be objective" (p. 101). However, subjectivity with transparency does not mean there can be no openness and willingness to be surprised, an attitude that is also promoted in post-

intentional phenomenology. Vagle (2018) suggests that subjectivity statements from the researcher are revisited throughout the research process, as they may change with new experiences. For instance, each interview with a student participant influenced my thinking, my experience, and my views on the topic in some way. By keeping a reflection journal, I recorded these thoughts, views and questions. These personal reflections were integrated with the analysis of the research data.

A phenomenological study requires a representation of people's authentic experiences. Though people's storied experiences are captured in the moment and may be different each time they are told, they do represent the experiences from a personal perspective. Meeting with students twice and offering my writings back to them for review helped increase the authenticity of the participants' stories. Vagle (2018) suggests taking a few notes during the interviews, in the form of phrases or words. This would allow the researcher to ask deepening questions when certain words or phrases seemed important or unclear, and support authenticity. In my first dialogue with a student, I held a notebook and wrote a few words. However, I found that I could listen better without the distraction of holding a pen and paper. When I listened to the recordings again in the analysis phase, I made notes of key points that I may have missed during the interviews, but because the interviews were already over, this did not give me the chance to ask for further details, if needed. If time had permitted, a third round of interviews could have been beneficial. However, the time between the two interviews, and the relaxed atmosphere that was experienced by being in meaningful, outdoor places, gave participants and myself the opportunity for deep thought and inspiration, which became clear in the second interviews.

O'Leary (2014) describes dependability as attesting that methods are "designed and developed in ways that are consistent, logical, systematic, well documented, and designed to account for research subjectivities" (p. 58). Although the dialogues with participants were open interviews, the guiding questions supported consistency in the topics that were discussed. All participants responded to each question and their responses were analysed systematically through colour coding, as explained earlier.

The experiences of the participants in this research are unique and context specific, and therefore not generalizable. However, certain outcomes of the research are transferable and chapter six includes practical suggestions that can be applied in different locations and at different times. Finally, the auditability of the research refers to clarity on how the research findings were generated (O’Leary, 2017). The process of post-intentional phenomenology allows self-reflections to be integrated into the analysis phase and the writing of productions and provocations that describe the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). In my writing I included self-reflections to share the flow of my thinking, aiming for transparency and clarity.

Being an insider in this research helped me to understand and value participants’ stories and share them back with participants and with a broader audience. Gair (2012) discusses how this is an example of empathy being an advantage of insider research. However, she also describes how empathy is sometimes seen as a disadvantage, for instance when a researcher makes presumptions about participants’ experiences. Gair points out that empathy does not mean sharing the same lived experience. Indeed, broadening the definition of empathy to not include “sameness” helps engage researchers in deeper listening and more accurately representing other people’s stories. While I shared being a UVic student with other participants, the many differences in our backgrounds, experiences and study areas supported me in listening rather than focusing on our similarities.

Chapter four: Participants

There are messages in the landscape here; oral histories, surviving traditional place names, and the soil itself are all ancient stories waiting to be told.

— Songhees Nation, 2023

This chapter introduces the participants who are the co-creators of this work. Because the research locations are central to this project and because the research paradigm requires me to continuously consider the interrelatedness of all things, I attempt to include the places as participants in the research. Though places cannot speak in words, we can learn much about and from places when we open ourselves to observe and listen. Place as a research participant can only speak directly to those who connect or have connected with it. Indirectly, we can learn about the places through what student participants have shared about them. Matching the paradigm of relationality and the importance of self-awareness in the moment, before continuing, I invite readers to think about the following questions adapted from Hughes and Barlo (2020): Consider, in your own your life, how you relate to the place you're sitting right now reading this text? How can you learn from and with this place? What do you feel and hear and how might you cultivate your own receptivity?

The University of Victoria has been in its current location in Gordon Head, a suburban district on the north-east side of Victoria, since the 1960s and is situated on the traditional territory of the Ləkʷəŋən People, today known as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations (Songhees Nation, 2023). “The Ləkʷəŋən People have hunted and gathered here for thousands of years. This area, with its temperate climate, natural harbours, and rich resources, was a trading centre for a diversity of First Peoples” (Songhees Nation, 2023, The Signs of Ləkʷəŋən). Songhees Nation member and knowledge keeper Cheryl Bryce mentions: “Where UVic is now is one of the places where trade historically took place. And it was celebrated, camas was celebrated, and it was traded” (Corntassel, 2024a).

After forced displacement of the Songhees People, the land was sold to farmers. One of them, Michael Finnerty, is known to have felled many giant trees (Mgonigle & Starke, 2009). To this day, one of the trees from his apple orchard remains standing in the centre of the university space. Before the university was built on this land, it also held an airfield for a flying club in 1931 and an army training camp between 1940 and 1943, known as the Officer's Training Centre of Western Canada (Lovell & Turner, 1999). In 1959 the Council of Victoria College bought the army camp to expand and educate a growing number of students. "In 1963, the University of Victoria was born with a new charter, new campus lands, and an active building program" (Lovell & Turner, 1999, Introduction, para. 5).

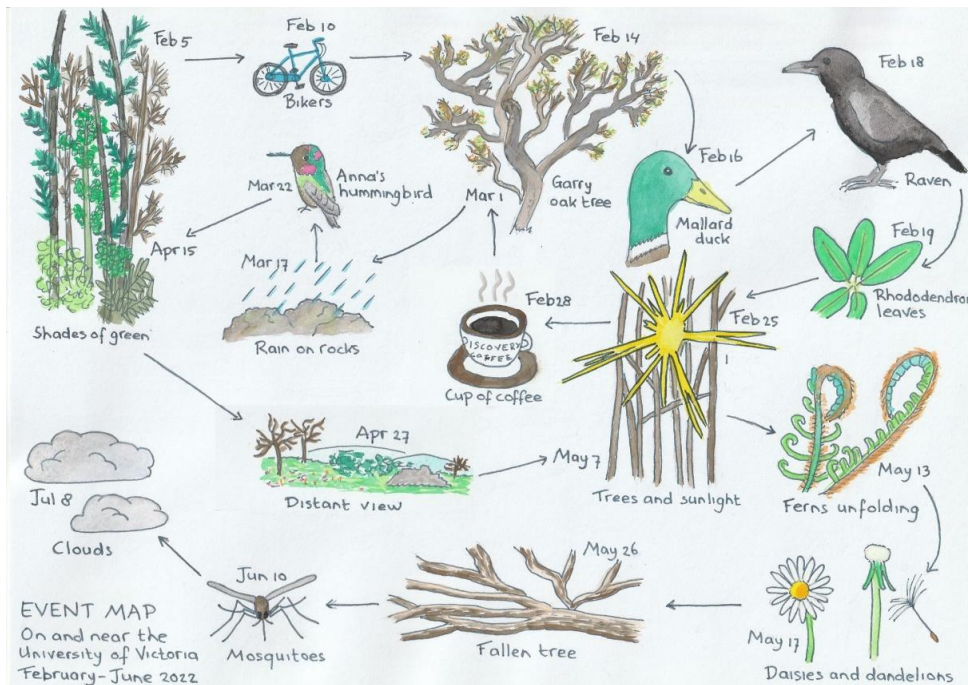
The most distinctive feature of the university campus is the perfect circular road that surrounds the academic buildings. The design also includes a quadrangle with grass in its centre, trees and greenery between buildings, a connection to the university's botanical gardens and trails through local forests. As Lovell and Turner (1999) explain: "The Landscape Concept, prepared in March 1968 by John Lantzius, articulated the design principles that sought to bind the campus buildings together by a major tree framework with open areas of contoured lawns merging into native forests" (Introduction, para. 9). Students also have access to surrounding parks and beaches within walking distance from campus.

The landscape and environment of this region may be new to students who come from other parts of Canada or the world. Traveling to a new place may bring unfamiliar views that draw attention, or recognisable features that feel comfortable. For me, the hills and rocky beaches catch my eye as they are unlike the place I grew up in. But the climate, trees and access to water are familiar. As a visitor on these lands, I am not able to speak about the land other than my short relationship with it. To understand the land more deeply, I invite readers to watch the video *Lekwungen: Place to Smoke Herring* (Hirtle, 2019), in which Hirtle shares the messages of Songhees and Esquimalt People who have built relationships with these lands and waters through cultural and ancestral connections.

The research places that are part of this research include ten locations that are on or near UVic campus, and were selected by the students as places they felt connected to. Eight places are on UVic grounds. Two locations, a place on the shore and a city park, are not on UVic campus. Figure 2 shows a chronological map of my experiences in the research locations. Based on the work of Hannah Hinchman, Baldwin (2015) describes the process of creating an event map as a field journaling exercise. She states: “rather than describing a landscape through traditional cartographic symbols or GPS coordinates, event maps depict your interaction with place through a series of “events” that have been experienced” (p. 22). The event map shows my journey through the area as I met students for the interviews. Even though the memories of the visits are narrowed down to one single event per meeting, it gives an example of relationships that formed with each place, and experiences that connect the places of this research together.

Figure 2

Event map



In this chapter the research places are presented as five topics: locations outside buildings, forest, park, garden and shore. Though there is a clear overlap between these forms, for instance, a forest and a garden can also be a park, focusing on their distinctions helps to see place from an ecologically holistic perspective. UVic campus includes several forest areas with wildlife specifically adapted for living in trees or undergrowth. Botanical gardens on campus and parks in the city are created for a specific purpose, and the surroundings of different buildings on campus offer places to sit or walk outside for short or longer breaks. Student participants who selected these locations for the research are introduced within these sections. As a participant in my own research, I responded to the interview questions after I had interviewed the other students. However, to show my intentions and perspectives as a participant, I will begin the next section by sharing the story of my own connection to place.

Locations outside buildings

When I was studying to become an elementary school teacher in the Netherlands, I worked on an assignment for which I had to develop a nature focused activity for children around their school. I did the assignment, but also wrote that there was not much nature around the school where I did my practicum. The instructor commented that there is always nature, even if it is some grass between the tiles on the playground. I am often reminded of this as I tend to focus on trees, plants and animals around new places where I live and work. As humans we are never completely surrounded by only humans and human constructed materials. There is always a sign of more-than-human beings, even if they are just bugs or clouds. Awareness of our surroundings includes acknowledgement of these and three students in this research specifically selected places that are near campus buildings, easily accessible from our living and working spaces. Figure 3 shows an image of these places on campus. Though I aim to include built environments and indoor places in the definition of environment, research

shows many positive effects of being in nature (White et al., 2019), which is perhaps why many people, including students in this chapter, seek the outdoors, even if it is just one step outside of our buildings.

Figure 3

Research locations near buildings on campus



Anya

As a student participant in my research, I selected the place beside my house on UVic campus. Though I had considered other places, such as the forest, shore or hills that characterise the beauty of this land, I decided to focus on the place I spent most of my time in, both by being directly in it and by seeing it through the windows every day. On two occasions I sat down specifically to write down my responses to the research questions. On both days it was sunny with some clouds. I was surrounded by sounds from passing cars, distant construction workers and the occasional flapping of bird wings. As I felt embraced by my surroundings, I explored my connectedness to where I came from and where I was. I moved to this house with my family in December 2019, three months after the start of my PhD program. I decided to come and study at UVic because my family and I had already made a connection to Victoria and the focus of university best matched my study interest and goals. When thinking about my connectedness to the Netherlands, I mostly feel positively connected to the people who are my relatives, and the land I got to know when growing up:

I feel specifically connected to the trees, birds, water and landscape. My happy memories often include connecting to the land, for instance, looking for fall objects, bird watching, looking out the windows during travel. I feel I have grown from the land, feel a part of it, the sounds, the smells I know well.

However, exploring my connectedness to my native country also includes feelings of disconnect, though these feelings are not related to the land but to general social structures and beliefs that did not match my own. For instance, I did not feel connected to an education system that highlights comparison, hierarchy and normalisation. However, this social system is not directly related to the land and is comparable to education systems in other countries. I realized that connecting to the land may be a way to escape the discomfort and disconnect that can be experienced in social systems, in any place in the world, which is why I enjoy walking and getting to know the land in the new places I live.

The place outside my house includes a small patio, a grassy hill with one small tree, and groups of trees and bushes on the other side of a sidewalk. Here is how I explained the choice for this place in my journal:

This place is very familiar to me as I spend a lot of time here. Especially now that it is summer, I enjoy sitting out here and try to think of fun activities to do with my now four-year-old son, such as playing ball, or playing in the sandbox or wading pool. I have seen this place in different seasons and observed cycles of changes. Despite the constant traffic and noises, seeing the green, feeling the sun, hearing the birds, somehow helps me feel grounded and relaxed.

My connection to the place goes deeper once I explore how I know that I am connected, as I write while observing place:

I feel connected to this place because I feel at home when I watch the trees. I feel part of it and experience a sense of belonging. I feel that I am allowed to be. Breathing in the cool morning misty air makes me feel alive, gives me energy. (Meanwhile the humming of the hummingbird is loud!).

Noticing the place makes it a timeless experience and completely entangled, all is one. ... I feel connected to the sky. In summer, when it's blue and you can see some birds, clouds, planes, etc. it reminds me that life is larger than what we know. That makes me feel safe, somehow.

My connection to the place is further expressed in photographs shown in figure 4. Looking at the same place in different seasons, different times of day, thinking about the tree that was trimmed to make space for electric wires, the small ornamental tree that probably came from elsewhere in the world, the cars that zoom by, the fence that allows me to be in my own space, I realized that in the moment, all is one. Sharing place, each being with a different background story, connecting too with other beings that jump, run, eat, fly, are born and die here, my connection to it is a reality.

Figure 4

"My Place"



Kikila

I met Kikila two times in the place he selected, just outside one of the main faculty buildings. We sat beside a wall, surrounded by grass and bushes. Through the trees we could see and hear some cars on a road and parking lot. I had brought two small stools to sit on and as we talked, we occasionally

noticed that we were being watched by birds. We heard the hummingbirds calling, a sound that we both had started to recognize after having moved to Victoria. On one occasion a big bird flew past us, catching our attention, and we wondered if it had been an eagle. During the first interview, two times a biker rode past us, but during the second interview the intimacy of the place was felt as we were the only humans connecting to the place, discussing how it was an ideal location for self-reflection.

Kikila grew up near Ottawa but spent most of his life in Montreal. His ancestral roots are Swiss, French and German, one of his grandfathers having moved to Canada from Bavaria. However, Kikila didn't grow up speaking French or German and identifies himself mostly as an Anglo-Canadian. At the time of the interviews Kikila was in the third year of his PhD study in Indigenous Studies (focused on Political Science) and Geography. His research topic is place-based cultural exchange and in his own words he describes that his aims are to learn "how settlers, participating in Indigenous led land defence ... might become relational in their outlook and move away from an extractive world view that we tend to see among European descendant settlers, in a way that better supports Indigenous resurgence". Kikila describes coming to UVic as a call, not motivated by any specific reason, but after moving here he found that his interest in activism and land defense could be further supported by studies and research at UVic.

Kikila speaks about how he started to explore his connectedness to Canada, after he had traveled:

The first time I experienced the difference and then was able to see that there was a difference was, I was in Aotearoa, New Zealand, just traveling and participating in some land defence there too. But Māori folks would interact with me way differently because I was a visitor and I wasn't a settler. You know, my accent was different, the questions I was asking were different. ... There wasn't that tricky relationship. And I wondered why I couldn't have that experience in Canada. ... Then coming back here I couldn't help but noticing that every step, every step was tricky after that. Even just going to

the forest. And I was trying to cultivate, I didn't know this is what I was doing, but I was trying to cultivate, through my life, relationships with place. But then I couldn't just go to that forest anymore and not see all the people who had been there before and who had been removed.

Kikila explains how he was able to turn feelings of guilt into a sense of responsibility:

And it's taken a long time to work through the, I hate to say it, but the white fragility and all that. Just getting to the point that understanding that I am displacing Indigenous people here, but I have a responsibility to the land because of that. That kind of moves me past the guilt and the awkward components of it. Because my being here comes with responsibility. And once I was able to acknowledge that, responsibility to the land, responsibility to the people who I displace, it became an active being here. My being a settler wasn't, to me, being a problem anymore, it was almost a solution. Because then that gives me a great ability to speak in settler communities and to be seen in settler communities where Indigenous folks just aren't. And I could use that privilege to then kind of like honour the responsibility I have to being here. And this is like years of self-reflection to get to just that answer.

Kikila further mentions how as a child he felt connected to outdoor places, such as a forest area near his house, because he didn't feel safe at home:

It was easy for me to connect with place because it was safe. It was safe outside of the house. So, if I could run into the forest, even though at the time the forest really scared me after dark, and I didn't know what was in there. But at least during the day I could go in there and I knew I'd be safe. And when we moved to Montreal one of the first things I did was, there was a little wood near our place, and I went right into it and found a place where I could be alone.

For the research Kikila showed me the place on campus where he comes to be by himself, outside one of the main faculty buildings. He describes his connection to this place as:

This place, I feel really connected to. This is the first time I'm seeing all these blossoms here, and it immediately feels welcoming. And that's just it, it feels like, even though to me it's a bit loud, there's the road and this road is active, it just feels like a bit of a breath of fresh air.

Kikila mentions the aspect of time and that accessibility to the place is helpful:

You know, on campus everything else is about deadlines and time and meetings and moving quite rapidly between all that. And here, regardless of how rushed for time, I just feel I don't need to be. ... It's easily accessible and maybe that's a part of [why I connect with this place]. ... And this is the big problem, my problem, about the relationship with the culture I come from. The time domination. ... I have a lot of anxiety around time. So, I can get here very quickly, I can get back to work very quickly, and that's a handy aspect for me. Because then I can get worried or anxious about time. But not while I'm here.

When coming back for the second interview Kikila had not visited the place for a while and describes a sensation of feeling welcome:

It's been pretty active in my life the past month at least and it seems like with spring, and people are getting really fed up with covid, there's this real move to, they keep saying, go back to normal. And that seems to me to just create a lot of activity. But while we were walking over here, yeah, it feels really good to just be back. It feels like seeing old friends in a way. ... Like that fern, I've been watching that. It's still kind of unveiling itself but watching the ferns getting back to being full fern mode. And the leaves. It feels very welcoming now. And with fewer people on campus it even feels a little bit more private.

Sarah

I met Sarah not too far from my own house on campus, near the student apartments and close to the Mystic Vale Forest. Sarah admitted that there were so many beautiful places on campus that it was challenging to choose a location for the research. We ended up meeting by a picnic table for our

two conversations. The sounds from the forest were clear in the recording, especially the ravens calling every now and then, while some distant engine noises from lawnmowers also reminded us that we were on campus. Sarah came to UVic as an international student from the United Kingdom. She grew up in a small town near London. She lived there for about 18 years, after which she started moving to different places. At the time of the interview, she was in the second year of her master's in Art History and Visual Studies, specifically focusing on Film. Sarah mostly remembers feeling connected to people in the town she grew up in, as her childhood friends all lived close to each other and enjoyed visiting and spending time together. Then Sarah spoke about her connection to central London, where she lived for about a year:

I just loved being in London. I really did. And I'd do things like go for a run along the Southwark Bridge and go and stretch in Hyde Park and then wander around the National Gallery ... It's not quite environment. Well, I guess it is, it's built environment, right? But I just remember because of where I lived in London. I was very lucky that I really wasn't far from those kind of very iconic bits. Like Trafalgar Square was really close and Charing Cross and Waterloo and all these areas of London that people kind of think are the touristy bits. But I would just be there on the weekend, and I just loved it. I felt very connected to the city, I guess, I really enjoyed that.

We continued discussing how the term environment is mostly thought of as natural places, whereas when we aim to move away from binary thinking it requires us to include built areas in the definition of environment. Sarah then linked her interest in art to her connection to the city:

What I love about London as well is like, you could turn a corner and because it was built all at different times, some of it is like the old city of London, like the official city, which has its own kind of appearance. And then you turn a corner and you're in a totally different space and the architecture is all different again. It's like so many cities but just in one, which I loved. And yeah, my interest in art I think helped because I could just wander 'round the galleries.

At the time of the first interview, Sarah lived on campus. She discovered a picnic table outside of student housing that became a good place to study:

I remember just coming here and finding this and feeling like it was such a find. Like, you know when you find something kind of special and not a lot of people know about it. And that makes it feel like kind of selfishly more sort of special to you, you're like: "ooh this is mine". So, I guess I was looking for somewhere to read. I was having a hard time with my reading that day, and I just walked around with my laptop and I found this table and I just find it's a really good place for me to concentrate and just to, we can kind of hear it, you kind of heard it, the birds and stuff, you can hear them a lot, because the forest is just there. It's a nice space because the sun gets it but there's a little bit of shade from the trees too. So, when it's a hot day it's not too bright. So, I remember finding this table and kind of really feeling like, ooh this is such a good spot. And it's kind of on its own, you know. It's kind of one off, so, yeah, I really like it.

When the second interview took place Sarah had moved off campus, but when we met by the picnic table for our conversation, Sarah expressed her comfort in visiting the place again:

So, I am now no longer living on campus. I've not been in this space so much in the last few weeks because I've sort of been shifting and moving things around and unsettled. But it's actually really lovely and relieving to be here again. It's nice sometimes to go back to somewhere that you used to live and revisit it. It's kind of comforting. So yeah, that's nice. And it's beautiful in the spring too.

Forest

Once I was entering into this forest, I felt the sun coming from the sky and the sunshine going through the forest. ... I think that the forest was praising me or hugging me. ... The trees are green and the skies are blue, and the sun made everything active, energetic, you know, the sun. And the wind also made this feeling that someone, or the trees and the spirits are talking ...The sound I hear

in the wood doesn't sound like it was made by the wind, but by someone. They are talking, or they are singing.

— Guoliang Li

Forests are one of the main characteristics of this region. Trees have always been important in many Indigenous cultures. Cajete (2015) speaks about the importance of the “Tree of Life” (p.10) as a metaphor used in Aztec mythology, showing how trees can support people in learning and healing. Atleo (2011) explains that for Nuu-Chah-Nulth People on the west coast of Vancouver Island, trees are acknowledged and respected as persons. Cedar trees, common around the Victoria area are considered to be grandparents as “the cedar tree is the tree of life, capable of sustaining the mind, body, and soul” (Mowatt, et al., 2020, p. 20).

Like many places in the world, the region of South Vancouver Island has changed drastically since colonization, and many original trees have been cut. Several organizations and friend groups have attempted to restore and protect forest areas on and around campus. Many of these projects are still ongoing and described in the *Campus Restoration Guide* (Hebb & Shaefer, 2018). Two campus forest areas have been part of this research: Mystic Vale and Haro Woods. The Mystic Vale Forest consists of a lower and an upper part and includes a creek flowing through the centre. Since the early 2000s the area has been protected from development, but not from human use, which was then reported as one of the main concerns leading to degradation of the environment (Chanoine, et al., 2009). However, several restoration activities have been implemented since, and often included students gaining hands-on ecological experience as part of a study course (Hebb & Shaefer, 2018).

Haro Woods is located on the northeast side of campus, and is characterized by second growth forest (Hebb & Shaefer, 2018). Management is shared by three parties, according to the law of ownership: The District of Saanich, Capital Regional District, and UVic. In a 2018 report Parks and Recreation concluded that the major ecological concerns of Haro Woods included off trail biking which

caused damage to vegetation and soil, and degradation of the natural creek. Extensive restoration plans have been implemented and included improving paths, adding clear signs and removing invasive species (Parks and Recreation, 2018). During my time at UVic since 2019 I have seen changes made in the form of cleared paths, fences to protect sensitive areas, and new information signs.

Davey

I met Davey two times in the upper part of the Mystic Vale Forest, which is close to the student housing area. We found a bench to sit on and as we overlooked the valley of the forest with many shades of green, we could hear the sounds of different birds. Every now and then a jogger or dog walker passed behind us, while we were occasionally visited by a sniffing dog. Davey came to Victoria from North Vancouver and at the time of the interviews they were a first-year Theatre student in the Fine Arts department, with minors in Film Studies and Art Education. They chose to come to UVic to be not too far from home after just having experienced COVID-19 lockdowns and because UVic started offering in-person classes again. Davey also felt drawn to the natural environment around campus that is similar to the environment they grew up in:

I'd say I do feel connected to it in this kind of nostalgic way. Like, growing up in the same place, I think when I moved it was definitely the right time to move because I had grown up there and had experienced so many things like, in my house, in my school, on the land, around there, that moving to a new place was kind of like a fresh start. So, I do feel connected to it in the sense that I'm very familiar with the place back home. But I don't know if that's necessarily a super positive or super negative thing. It's just a thing.

In high school Davey had a chance to focus on connectedness to place and nature as part of an educational program:

At my high school we had a program called Explore, where we'd go out camping and as part of that there was always a little, I forget what they called it, but we had our silent time, kind of, in nature,

where we would go out, find our own little spot and be left alone for a certain amount of time. And the focus of that was to journal and experience the world around us. ... I've always felt connected to nature and that's just one of the ways I perceive the world that could be different from other people. And I'm very thankful for that. But definitely, that experience and being taught like that in high school has influenced my decision to be outside in the forest.

During the time of the interviews, Davey lived on campus in student housing close to the Mystic Vale Forest. Having easy access to this forest helped Davey to feel connected to this place specifically: I guess it's just because through all my busy classes, sometimes I remember I need to take more time outside and even though I'm trying to do that, this place is so accessible and close to me that I really wanted to focus on that [for the research], and just be outside in nature a bit more, get more fresh air. I think that's important.

Davey suggested that a description of the Mystic Vale would allow readers to create their own visualization of the place:

Mystic Vale is a forested ravine that was acquired by the University of Victoria in 1993. It is a Douglas Fir Ecosystem ... [and] home to more than 75 native plant and wildlife species, including Douglas firs, Indian plum, Snowberries and the sword ferns that cover the slopes into the gully, as well as five species of woodpeckers. Mystic Vale's tree canopy is dominated by large specimens of Douglas fir and grand fir. A few western red cedar can also be found. Scattered among these conifers are deciduous trees such as bigleaf maple, black cottonwood, and willow. Some Garry oak is present at the forest edge. Canada's only native broadleaf evergreen tree, the Arbutus is also present. Mystic Vale proves to be one of the most popular outdoor green spaces on campus as thousands of students and community members access the area each year for both recreational and academic purposes. (UVic Community Green Map, n.d., para 1-3)

Guoliang Li

Guoliang Li chose Haro Woods as his location for the research, which is close to the family housing area on campus where he lives. In our two meetings we walked together through the forest, talking about the research and our families, as Guoliang Li took me to a specific location. As we walked Guoliang Li mentioned how he came through this forest often with his children or after he dropped his daughter off at daycare. After we reached the place, we kept standing during our conversation. This allowed us to turn around, not only to give space to passing people, but also to observe the influence of the sunlight as it peered through the many dense, but narrow trees.

Guoliang Li is an international student from Guangzhou, a city in the South of China. He came to Victoria by the end of 2019 to join the master program in Electrical and Computer Engineering and is living here with his family. At the time of the second interview Guoliang Li was finalizing his masters and began applying to continue his studies in the PhD program, for which he was accepted. He chose to come to Victoria because of the reputation and ranking of the university, which is important when considering employment opportunities in China. Other reasons for choosing Victoria were the mild climate and the size of the city, which is relatively small compared to Guangzhou and other Canadian cities with major universities. Guoliang Li enjoys living in family housing on campus and expresses the joy of having access to diverse natural places, such as beaches, mountains, lakes and forests. Haro Woods forest reminds him of trees from his childhood:

My hometown was a village that [was] close to the city and there was a big tree there, a huge, maybe even bigger than this one [pointing to a tree]. And I remember that when I was young, I was playing there under the tree and used it as a shelter when we were playing there. So, the old growth tree [here] made me feel relaxed, made me think of my childhood.

He further mentions the changes that happened to the environment of his hometown:

Nowadays the old growth trees are being cut down because of the optimization. It was a big news that happened a few months ago and many people there opposed against the decision of the government to cut the trees. But it didn't make any sense for the government to make that decision and a bunch of old growth trees were cut there. ... Farms turned into the houses and the rivers also filled with land, and also the lakes have been filled with the land and turned into houses, and all the roads, and everywhere turned into houses, just like a concrete jungle.

Guoliang Li remembers his first visits to the Haro Woods:

When we moved to family housing in March 2020, we first visited this forest and at the beginning we thought that this forest is a huge city forest because the trees are so high here and even couldn't see the edge of the wood and we walked and walked and explored everywhere here and the kids also liked to walk here ... It was an amazing place where we have exercised and walked.

The forest became an important place for Guoliang Li to visit and his connection to the place grew as he observed the sun and the trees, especially in one specific location:

When I want to be calmed down or want to find a quiet place I would still come here. I feel some kind of peace when I am at this place especially, not only anywhere else in the wood. Especially when I was staying here and reminding the sun coming from this way and it made me feel something spiritual. Sometimes I also make some wish, like my dream would come true, I hope that my dream will come true, that everything goes well. Yeah, it made me feel hopeful when I was standing here.

Mahya

The first time I met Mahya we had intended to meet at a beach near downtown, as she had indicated that she felt connected to that place. However, it was a rainy day and we ended up meeting in a local coffee shop in downtown Victoria. Enjoying a warm coffee on a wet day, Mahya was able to express her connection to indoor places and to this café in particular as it reminded her of trips to

Europe. Reminding myself of my intention to limit binary thinking and include indoor places in the definition of environment, I welcomed the experience. Our second meeting was in Haro Woods, where we sat on a bench, but as we were constantly visited by mosquitos in the dampness of a forest after rains, it was not easy to sit still. Nevertheless, in both meetings Mahya was able to express her connection to different places she had visited during her life.

Mahya is an international student from Iran where she lived in the city of Teheran before coming to Canada, five months before the first interview took place. She came to UVic to study in the Computer Science and Engineering program, working on her master's degree. One of the reasons she chose UVic is because she found a supervisor that matched her unique interest in combining computer science and music. Mahya is interested in researching a recommendation system for music based on artificial intelligence. Another reason to come to Victoria was the mild climate compared to other Canadian cities, and funding opportunities she was offered. In the first interview Mahya expressed her connection to indoor places in her home country, Iran:

Teheran, where I live, is the capital city and it's so crowded and polluted, so I wasn't really connected to outdoor places. I was connected to theatres, art gallery, exhibition, and some artistic places like this. ... I had a best friend when I was in high school and our hobby was to go [out]. Actually, we were rich persons. I didn't have this kind of mindset when I was younger but right now I understand that we were rich at that time, and we spent lots of money in the cafés, and we ate a lot, and eating and chasing new things was our hobby. I think it started with that, and cafés in Teheran have real connection with theatre and art galleries.

Mahya also speaks about two outdoor places that she remembers connecting to in Iran. One is the mountains by Chabahar in the southeast of Iran. The other is Kish, an island in the south of Iran. Mayha explains:

There is a bit more freedom in that island, about the hijab or some political things. But after many years that many rich people go there and built some houses near the beach, it became polluted and crowded again and I don't love the way that they put some billboard in the city and on the island. It made the island bad, but it is still a big difference between that island and the rest of Iran.

After the first interview Mahya moved to family housing on UVic campus and began to feel a special connection with the Haro Woods behind her apartment, where we had our second meeting.

Mahya talks about the first time she came to this forest:

One day I came out from the apartment, and I thought that I have a meeting. I walked to the street and I realized, no I don't have any meeting. Then I tried to do a random walk. And the first thing that connects me to this forest is kind of like, that I found it by myself not by googling or anything like that. That was a very beautiful day, and I did a random thing and I found it. It's the first thing that comes in my mind when I think about this forest. And the second is that there is lots of shades of green. And I don't know how, but it affects me when I look at this many greens.

The second time Mahya came to the Haro Woods was with her husband as she specifically asked him to come with her:

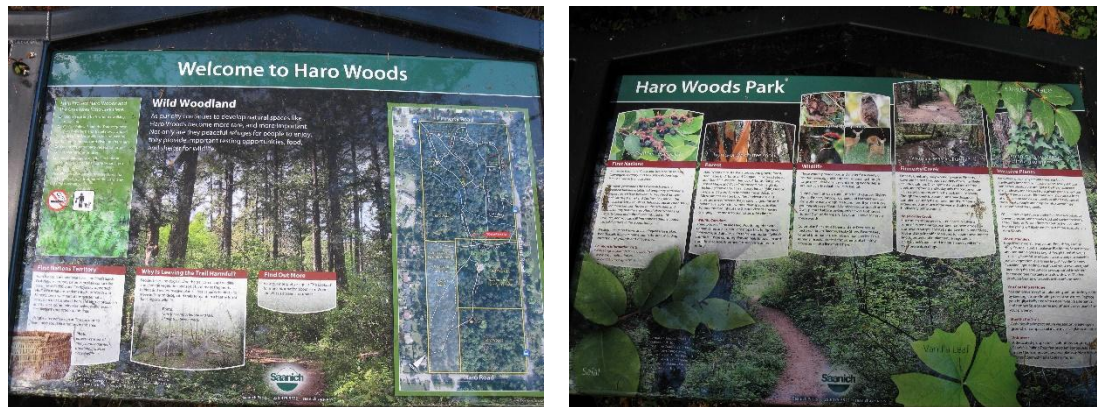
The second time [I came to this forest] I put a bit pressure on my husband, please come with me to this forest. And it was six or seven in the morning, before he go to his work and it felt really good.

We did a bit stretch and it feels like, o yeah, I have a very luxury lifestyle right now, I'm going to go stretching inside the nature.

After the interview, Mahya suggested that one good way for people to learn about Haro Woods is through the information signs that are placed in different parts of the forest. The signs, shown in figure 5, speak about the history of the land, the animal and plant species that can be found in the park and the importance of visitor collaboration in the maintenance and care for the place.

Figure 5

Information signs from Saanich Parks in Haro Woods



Park

The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* gives eight different definitions for the word “park” as a noun. When looking specifically at an urban park, a park is defined as “a piece of land usu[ally] with lawns, gardens, etc. in a town or city, maintained at public expense for recreational use” (Barber, 2004, p. 2534). City parks are usually open to the public and free for people to enter for their enjoyment, relaxation or socialization, within certain rules as specified in park bylaws. Hern (2018) explains that the idea of city parks points back to times of the Industrial Revolution when life in cities was harsh. Urban planners developed parks to offer people an escape from the dirt and discomfort of the cities. According to Hern, two opposing approaches to park design can still be observed today: a structured design to create an orderly space with specific purposes, or a natural design to mimic the idea of nature as wilderness. The concept of a community-based park was first inspired by journalist and activist Jane Jacobs who suggested that parks are dead and cities need to breathe life into them (Hern, 2018). Hern, et al. (2018) present the stories of a various people as regular visitors of a city park in Vancouver, ranging from mothers with children, local commuters and sport enthusiasts, to socializing youth, homeless people and substance users. Different people request different needs, however, not all people’s needs or wishes are considered or included in park management meetings and plans.

Edmonds (2010) explains how city parks in Victoria have been created from a colonial mindset. Many parks are currently undergoing restoration, which is based on three frameworks: “aesthetic”, aiming to create beauty for people to enjoy; “biotelic”, referring to protection of species and habitat from humans; and “extractive”, focusing on usefulness for humans (Hernandez & Vogt, 2020). Hernandez and Vogt point out that these frameworks are based on Western knowledge systems and do not include an Indigenous or holistic lens. Speaking about an urban park in Seattle, they recommend Indigenizing restoration practices. They state:

Indigenizing restoration allows us to create and implement more holistic conservation and restoration initiatives to heal these severely altered lands. We need to start looking at the entire landscape, as every nonliving and living species in this park is an integral component of healing these lands through restoration and conservation practices. (p. 42)

Research shows that access to parks is beneficial for people’s health and physical well being (Slater et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic many parks and other public places were closed to prevent the spread of the disease. Slater et al. (2020) speak of the importance of access to green areas, especially during such times, and offer several suggestions, including scheduled visits, clear messaging, access through local transit, and organized visits for vulnerable populations.

Summit Park in Victoria remained open during the COVID-19 lockdown. This park, characterized by its large Garry Oak ecosystem and scenic views, is surrounded by residential areas. The land is part of Songhees traditional territory and is likely to have been a camas harvest site in the past (City of Victoria, 2011). In 1908 a water reservoir was built on the land, but by 1972 the area was developed for the “pleasure, recreation and enjoyment of the public” (p. 6). In 1973 the park’s name changed from Smith Hill Reservoir Park to Summit Park. The *Summit Park Management Plan* includes restoration objectives to “maintain the ecological values of the park through habitat restoration and invasive species removal” (City of Victoria, 2011, p. 4). A UVic student selected Summit Park for a restoration project in 2014 when

she worked to increase the number and health of one particular endangered plant, the Yellow Montane Violet (Breen, 2014). As I visited Summit Park several times during the research, I observed various wildflowers in the low grass.

Mona

Mona selected Summit Park as her location for the research, which is about a 10-minute drive from UVic campus. I met Mona here three times, as the first interview was spread over two visits. The first time I came to the park I thought I had arrived in a different world, reminding me that I am indeed a visitor in these lands. The place, being unique and different from other parks I had visited, gave me a small glimpse into a time in the past when the landscape was “blanketed with camas and Garry Oak meadows” (McGonigle, 2009, p. 47). As many rocks lay spread out over the park, embedded in the land on which we walked, we could easily find a place to sit. During our second visit, when the ground was wet from earlier rain showers, we sat on two small stools I had brought. As we spoke, place joined our conversation with the sounds of birds in nearby trees, other park visitors, electric tools, and distant sirens. Our third meeting was on a sunny afternoon, and we sat again on the rocks, enjoying the sound of the birds and hearing the surrounding city in the distance.

Mona is originally from Alexandria, Egypt. When she was almost nine, she and her family moved to Madison, Wisconsin in the United States where she did most of her schooling. During her college years she became interested in language, which she often connected with her life experiences and observations. Mona came to UVic to study in the master’s program of Linguistics. At the time of the interviews Mona was in the third year of her studies. However, by the end of the school year, after much reflection, she had decided to discontinue her studies as it did not match with her life goals and perspectives anymore. When thinking about connections with place Mona remembers living in Alexandria, where visiting water and walking along the promenade were important and frequent activities:

By the water, you could walk along it for a good hour, two hours, and a lot of people would hang out on the rocks or the ledge of the promenade, the Corniche. And so, I had a lot of memories and connections to that. And often, it was associated with things like the experiences and being able to be out with family, with friends, have food, whatever. So, it wasn't just like an isolated appreciation for the space itself but also the opportunity that space was giving, like its interaction with our activities and our form of entertainment.

Mona further explains how connection to place mostly involved connecting to people, as even in Madison, nature was experienced mostly as a backdrop. However, when living in Spain for a while after graduation, she began to change her perception of spaces around her, including the natural world:

I believe one factor in the changing perspective might have been the change in network and living on my own, and in a small town that was even more quiet and had even less crowdedness and diversity, and my criteria for appreciation of the place I was living had to shift a bit. The space gained more presence in my appreciation for a place, not just abundance of people and services and amenities and noise. I had more chances of exploring natural landscapes, like going on excursions to the countryside or nearby mountains, that I didn't have in Madison, when my experience and movement were mostly bounded by school and family obligations and expectations.

Mona explains how she started to connect with Summit Park in Victoria, which was near her apartment, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even with Victoria I was initially seeing it kind of similar to Madison, where its services seemed maybe very limited in terms of activities and human diversity and the social interaction and everything. So again, focusing on human accessibility more than the rest. ... I had come [to Victoria] in 2019. I was in that same apartment this entire time, but quarantine was like the first time I actually came to this park. Because my experience [in Victoria] was being defined by school and you know, going to places where I can study, that have wifi, and outlets to plug in my laptop and all of

these things. Or a place to disconnect, with friends and just have a coffee and food. And so, once that was removed, I was able to see this other reality of the space here that I wasn't seeing before and form a deeper connection with the place.

Mona further explains how her connectedness to the park is based on her depth of experience with it, and how such depth can be formed:

So, what made me, for example, ... think of Summit Park as a place I'm connected to. I think part of that is its stabilization in my memory through its familiarity and my depth of experience with it, which in general might come with just one experience where like, oh my god I had this incredible observation or incredible thought or whatever. But also, it could come with frequency of experience where you kind of gain depth with familiarity and it becoming more known. So, there's more familiarity with a person, with a place or whatever, then you're able to feel safe and open up and relax and connect with your thoughts. (The sound of a siren in the distance). And ... I think that gives it greater presence in memory and kind of highlights it a little bit more, where then I even find myself recommending it to people.

Then Mona further elaborates on the difference between recommending a place like Summit Park compared to a place like a restaurant, showing how connectedness to different kinds of places invites different acts of relationship building:

I can recommend this to people even without knowing their specific interests or preferences or certain dislikes. You know that sometimes you have to be really careful when suggesting a restaurant or a café or whatever. But a place like this I feel is more widely recommendable because it's kind of like you make your own experience. (Helicopter sound). It's like you play a bigger part in being able to tailor it to your experience rather than you having to adapt to a certain cuisine or a specific menu or price range or whatever, right?

Garden

An exploration of the word “garden” in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* shows that a garden is typically understood as either a piece of ground with flowers and vegetables bordering a private house, or “ornamental grounds laid out for public enjoyment” (Barber, 2004, p. 1381) where plants are usually “cultivated, not wild” (p. 1381). UVic campus includes many gardens, the Finnerty Gardens being one of the well-known locations visited by many people from around the community. As a botanical garden, besides public enjoyment, its function includes an educational purpose: a botanical garden is “a large garden in which plants are studied and displayed” (Barber, 2004, p. 409). The Finnerty Gardens were named after the Finnerty brothers who farmed these lands. The Gardens started as a rhododendron garden in 1974 with trees that were donated to UVic. Most of the trees were grown from seeds that were collected in mountain regions of Afghanistan and India (Hebb & Schaefer, 2018). In 1988 the gardens were moved from their original location inside the ring road, to its current location, due to the need for dryer ground. Many other plants and trees have been donated to the gardens over the years. Figure 6 shows the variation in greens and flowers in two photos taken by my then four-year-old son.

Figure 6

Finnerty Gardens (by F. Hall, April, 2022)



UVic's most recent Campus Plan, intended to provide direction to the physical development of campus, includes the aim to restore natural areas on campus by prioritizing native plant growth. Finnerty Gardens is given an exemption status as a botanical and historical garden. But "while native plants are not the focus of Finnerty Gardens, they have been part of its design since the move to its current location. The rhododendrons and companion species were integrated into a preexisting woodland" (University of Victoria, 2016, p. 212).

Aurora

Two students selected the Finnerty Gardens as the place they connect with while on campus. During my conversation with Aurora we were sitting on a bench by a small pond where two ducks walked around us while being fed by Aurora. Every now and then people walked by, and we greeted each other. While we were immersed in place, our conversation led us from talking about memories to feeling connected to animals. Aurora was born in India and moved to Canada when she was eleven, living in the Toronto area for 48 years. She initially came to Victoria for a co-operative housing conference and felt drawn to move to Victoria because of the ocean air and a desire to leave Toronto. After applying to study at UVic, she managed to move to Victoria a few months after her conference visit. Aurora explains:

I am very religious, and I got a feeling God was calling me: move here. ... So, I moved. I packed up all my bags, got my flight. It just happened so fast. Everything happened so fast and so quickly, I knew it was meant to be. Because nothing was preventing me from coming. I was having no roadblocks, nothing. Everything was falling into place.

In Victoria Aurora completed course work at Camosun College before joining the bachelor program in Theatre at UVic. At the time of the interviews, she was in her first year of studies. She chose to study Theatre as she already had a large portfolio with 22 years of experience in a theatre company of actors with disabilities. However, Aurora expressed a desire to study visual art, which she hopes to

focus on more in the future. In Toronto Aurora felt connected to the people in the co-op as she was very involved with the board and volunteer activities. Outside she enjoyed going to Hyde Park where she regularly walked with a group of people. Living in Victoria now, Aurora often visits Beacon Hill Park, which is close to where she lives. She explains:

When I go to Beacon Hill Park there is this one spot I go to that I just feel so much peace. So much. It's a sunny spot and I just sit there, and the ducks are there, and I just feel so at peace. It's like my oases. My taste of heaven.

Aurora speaks about her special relationship with animals and how this is connected to her religion, being a second order Franciscan:

I've always felt connected to animals. And Saint Francis of Assisi is a saint, patron saint of animals and the environment and so I feel connected to Saint Francis a lot. Plus, I made vows and promises that I would keep to, follow His rule and His order and so that's what I do.

While coming to UVic campus, Aurora started visiting the Finnerty Gardens. She remembers her first visit:

The very first time I came to Finnerty Gardens, and I stood over there, the pond was all green, it was in the spring time, the pond was all green, and there was a dragonfly. And it kept looking at me and chasing me. And I'd come here, it'd come here. And I'd go there, and it'd go there. I go across, and I was having a relationship with this dragonfly. And I would go here and come back, and it was so exciting, and I thought, how exciting my first time at Finnerty Gardens a dragonfly catches my eye.

Lindsay

When Lindsay and I met in the Finnerty Gardens for the first interview, it was a windy day. We were determined to meet whether or not it would rain. The rain mostly stayed away and we sat on a bench, while observing our surroundings and greeting an occasional passerby. For the second interview we attempted to find the same bench, but could not be sure as the winding paths, many benches and

changing seasons create a new experience of the place each time. During our two visits, Lindsay shared her memories and experiences with connectedness to place. Lindsay has lived on Vancouver Island since she was 12 years old. She was born in New Jersey and has also spent 3 years in Scotland as an adult. At the time of the interview, Lindsay was in her first year of the PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction, in the Faculty of Education. She had completed her master's in Art Education from UVic many years earlier. Coming back to UVic for her PhD made sense as her family lives with her in Victoria, including her husband, mother, daughter and grandchild. When discussing connectedness to place, Lindsay remembers an experience from her childhood in New Jersey:

I met my friend, and we went through the drain tunnel under the road to this pool kind of area, but it was really swampy and gross, and she was telling me about some of her friends, and they had gone into the middle of it. And it was like black water, with sticks coming out of it. It was disgusting, all rotting leaves and such stuff. And she dared me to go into it, and I said: "no". And she got mad and huffed off to some other area. And so, I went off. We're talking probably about 10 or 15 feet away from each other maybe, and I saw this crystal-clear water. It was not far from the big swampy area and I had a, like one of those experiences, peak experiences. I guess they call a peak experience when feeling connected, ... like completely a part of everything that was there in my surrounding. And the water was so clean. It was a little spring. The water was springing up from under the ground. And I was sitting in this little pool and there were pebbles and stuff. ... So that was awesome, and I felt like it was a gift. Because I had stood my ground and didn't go into the murk and muck.

Even though Lindsay had lived on Vancouver Island since she was 12, she describes how she started to experience a connection with the land here after she moved back from her time in Scotland:

When I came back here, I noticed one particular day that I felt like I hadn't felt the whole time that I had been away. I felt like I was at home again. Just going from my apartment to the grocery store, I

was like, “What is that feeling? Oh, I’m relaxed! I feel at home!” So, yeah, I definitely have an affinity to this, southern Vancouver Island. ... It’s not so open. Like Iona [in Scotland] is so open and New Jersey is so closed in, and this is like in between. You know, you get that fresh sea air and you can go down to the water. But the ocean doesn’t go on forever, it goes over there to the mountains and over there to the mountains, and so that variety of expression of nature all around and the rocks and the, yeah everything. There’s so much variety here.

At UVic, Lindsay feels specifically connected to the Finnerty Gardens:

I really appreciate the way it’s been designed. It’s very arty to me, like there are viewpoints and from lots of different angles you get some distance and nearer and a variety of textures and all that stuff. It’s just so interesting. And I love trees. I also love it that it’s not so overcrowded that you can’t see the sky.

The rhododendrons in the Finnerty Gardens have made a special impact on Lindsay, as she explains:

Because rhododendrons are a flower from my childhood. They weren’t a big part of my childhood but I recognize them from my childhood. And then one of the experiences that I had here ... was with one particular rhododendron. ... I’d seen it in a way that opened me up to where it was, you know, its home. Its relationship to the sky was a big part of what I learned about that particular rhododendron. And I guess I was communing with it through my eyes and identifying it and it lifted me, made me feel lifted up to that place where its flowers met the blue sky. And somehow the relationship of the white and the blue is very striking. And it being above me, also was important, right down to beside me. So it was like this big kind of growing, vibrant wall, like a being, that was sharing with me who it is and its relationship with the world. So that important experience, I guess I feel really appreciative of it right now. How I carried it with me. And also, it’s inspired me. It’s inspired me so that I want to have a rhododendron garden. And I’m working on that.

Shore

The shores of South Vancouver Island are characterized by sandy and rocky beaches. Several of these are in walkable distance from UVic campus. One shore location is part of this research, the bay between Arbutus Cove and Hollydene Park. The bay includes a small beach, somewhat hidden, and visitors need to walk down steep stairs to reach it. The bay is part of the Salish Sea, which was officially named in 2010 to acknowledge the area as one bioregion. The name Salish Sea indicates a recognition of the Indigenous people generally known as Coast Salish Nations and acknowledges shared place identities across the national border of Canada and the United States. Even though the name Salish Sea was never used before European contact, many Coast Salish leaders supported the decision. However, Tucker and Rose-Redwood (2015) state that the renaming itself did not actually lead to diminished political powers of the state in favour of Indigenous people's autonomy over their land and "it has arguably had the effect of further marginalizing Indigenous people's claims to self-determination by limiting their own assertions of authority over the naming of places in their traditional territories" (p. 204).

An important aspect of the lives of people in coastal regions is a connection to water. Pacific nations have strong connections to the ocean. Hau'ofa (2008) describes how small island nations in the Pacific are often described by outsiders as small countries, whereas local inhabitants have always considered the ocean part of their land: "The land of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea" (p. 32). More locally, a study by Evans et al. (2015) shows how people from S̷ÁUTW First Nation traditionally and presently harvest and share ocean resources that are now under threat due to increased marine traffic. Claxton and Rodriguez (2018) discuss how revitalizing the traditional Reef Net Fishing practice in a W̷SÁNEĆ community was approached as an educational project that allowed young people to return to their traditional lifeways close to the sea.

Robyn

One student selected the bay between Artubus Cove and Hollydene Park as her location for the research, based on her personal connection with water, which became immediately apparent in our conversation. Robyn had already connected with this area for her own research project. I met Robyn early in the morning at Hollydene Park and she took me down a slope, leading to a rocky shore where we walked until we came to the edge and sat down near the water. I could tell that Robyn knew the place and was comfortable walking fast on the rocks. It was a very rainy day. Robyn lent me a rain poncho, I set up my recorder under an umbrella and then we talked about connectedness to place and the importance of water in Robyn's life. Robyn was raised on a sailboat in the Caribbean. Her parents were Canadians who decided to travel the world when they were in their twenties. Robyn describes how they ended up in the Caribbean as they were waiting for customs to provide them with a permit:

[My parents] were heading for Nova Scotia, but after having been stuck on this one island for a month they were like: "This is kind of a nice area". ... And they wouldn't let them leave the island, ... like customs, and once they realized that, they went through all the papers and figured it out, and it's just slow processes, and they were like, okay, you are Canadians and you are just traveling the world ... But then they loved it and they stayed in the Caribbean for almost 20 years.

At the time of the interview Robyn was in the second year of her master's in Visual Arts. Robyn has Irish and Scottish heritage but has not visited these countries. Before coming to UVic she had lived in the Okanagan where she spent time exploring the land, its rivers and lakes, through her art, but then decided to move to Victoria where she was reconnected with the ocean:

I was just starting to get to kind of know what it means to make work there. And then I was like a seed, I think those of us who do not have these ancient traditions and belongings with place have to kind of relocate ourselves. We're like little transplants, is how I describe it. And I feel like I was a seedling and I was just starting to grow some roots and kind of learn what it meant to exist there

and make art there and then I was transplanted again here. I landed here beside the ocean and for me that is a, well, it by no means it is a solid place to stand, it is a place that grounds me and makes me feel a kind of belonging that I don't feel elsewhere as someone who doesn't have really a land to belong to.

As we were talking, sitting on the rocks, we noticed several animals, including two seals and a heron. Robyn pointed them out to me, and I realized how she came to know the animals by being a regular visitor to the place. She explains why she enjoys coming to the same place as often as she can:

It takes thousands of years to get to know a landscape, and a place. As someone who isn't from here, I think it's kind of nice to find a singular point, somewhere that is, you can revisit a lot and after a time there's these lovely little nuances that you get to know and these patterns of place that you get to know.

Robyn talks about her connection with her place on the rocky shore and how she started exploring it through her artwork, while our conversation is challenged by the sound of rain on my umbrella under which the audio recorder sits:

It started out of this [inaudible] need and my desire to be near the ocean and swimming. But then it was like, I really wanted to come back here more. And then the artwork that I was working on, I wanted to play and explore the place materially, so I buried Burlap fabric there and then it turned into a sculpture that would periodically install in the water, as a way to capture the movement of the waves. And I was thinking of this relationship with the land and sea and other like romance between them that lasts like, you know, forever. And so far beyond our ability to perceive time and space and what a lovely relationship that is to have that kind of reciprocal back and forth. And I wanted to kind of collect that relationship in the memory of the material and my own time there.

Robyn further explains how she is continuing her project with the intent to share her experiences by the end of her studies:

My work has shifted since my work next to the water. And yet, I still come here to work on what is becoming like a record of experiences with this place. I'm compiling this kind of footage and these experiences with this place. ... I want this record to be like a place that people can visit. A sort of living, breathing acknowledgement of land and place and my time here and my work here.

During our conversation the rain keeps falling, making us even more aware of our surroundings and our connectedness to place. Robyn expresses her thoughts on the importance of connectedness when it is experienced specifically in places such as this:

When we're disconnected or we can't see or can't emphasize these experiences of connection, then our ability to collaborate with the world is lost. And people that live without connecting with the environment in a way that we are right now, lose the ability to understand it. You know, we're freezing and it's wet, but it's also beautiful because we're exercising this muscle. I think it's a language that we're losing connection with and the more that we push ourselves away from environment, the more we lose our capacity to speak that language.

Chapter five: Memory, beauty and time in connection to self and place

The analysis of my dialogues with participants led me to the following topics that I considered “productions and provocations” (Vagle, 2018) in the study of the phenomenon connectedness to place: memory, beauty, and time. Vagle explains that a production “signifies the ongoing ways in which the phenomenon is being shaped over time” (p. 160). “Memory” and “beauty” were frequently mentioned topics in the dialogues. Vagle further mentions that a provocation can be, for instance, a single line in an interview that “ignites something about the phenomenon” (p. 160). This led me to include “time” as a topic for further exploration.

During my exploration of these topics, the following themes emerged: the burdens of memory, the transparency of beauty, and time as relationship. This chapter makes visible how I developed these themes during my writing process. This writing was an interactive process of “plugging in” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) theory with dialogue transcripts and self-reflections. Philosophers I chose to “think with” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Vagle, 2018) are Krishnamurti, Merleau-Ponty and Brady. Krishnamurti speaks about many topics, including memory, beauty and time, while he continuously encourages his audience to find out for themselves the workings of the mind. Ideas from Merleau-Ponty’s writings are included in the exploration of memory and time. His core principle is that we are our bodies, and we “know the world bodily and through our embodied actions” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 128). With the prominent link to theories of embodiment in my research, I decided to include my self-reflections as descriptions that inspire movement. While analysing and playing with interview and literature excerpts, I imagined and performed a series of dance movements that helped in the exploration process, which will be described below. Emily Brady is a philosopher specialized in environmental aesthetics, ethics and philosophy of art. Suggestions from her theory are included in the exploration of beauty. For this section I used painting as my self-reflection method. What follows is the result of this analysis and merging of data, theory and self-reflections.

The burdens of memory

Krishnamurti (1954/2001) states that “if you understand something completely, that is see the truth of something wholly, you will find there is no memory whatsoever” (p. 190). This statement seems rather radical and brings up many questions. Does this mean that if we have formed a memory of a lecture, we have not totally understood it? When we tell the story of an experience from memory, does that mean we have not grasped the whole truth of it? What is the point of understanding, if we do not remember the lessons we learned? Of course, Krishnamurti’s statement was made within the context of a conversation, which I will share below, and requires an inquiry into the concepts “memory”, “understand completely” and “see the truth of something wholly”. In my research, several student participants mentioned memory when speaking about connectedness to place. What follows is an exploration of the concept, inspired by student comments, philosophical and theoretical considerations, and explorations of movement.

According to student participants, memory plays a role in the experience of connectedness to place. When we feel connected to place, we want to remember it:

Sometimes I have these moments when I’m in the Mystic Vale and I do think: “Oh, it is so beautiful here and I feel very lucky”, or, you know, I want to take like a photo or something. So, I’ll know that it’s a place that I enjoy and that I feel good in because I’m like: “Ooh I want to remember this, I want to document it”. (Sarah)

Remembering our connection with a place can make us want to visit it again: “I carry it with me when I’m not here. I remember it and come back to it” (Lindsay). Our memories allow us to visit place in our minds if we are not physically able to: “I intended to [visit the Gardens] and I wasn’t able to fit it in. And so, because of my intention to do it, I visited it in my mind many times” (Lindsay). Mona mentions feeling connected to memories of a place: “I guess one of the things is that I feel connected to memories

in this place, and I have experiences here that kind of stabilize the place in my memory and give it, for the most part, positive association.”

Movement reflection: I am thinking of the times I visited Schiermonnikoog, a small island in the Netherlands. In my mind I can see the colours, the images, the activities that form the memories of my visits to this place. I feel my body interacting with the place, as I recall the sounds, smells and my emotions. My eyes are closed, as I am focusing on what is in my mind, and my thoughts make me happy.

When discussing the concept of memory, it is helpful to distinguish different types of memory. Camina and Güell (2017) give an overview of contemporary scientific theories of memory classification. The main memory types are sensory, short-term and long-term memory. In this analysis I am interested in long-term memory, especially the type of memory that is involved in remembering events and facts, such as visits to a certain place. This is referred to as declarative or explicit memory, which consists of episodic and semantic memory. Episodic memory is personal memory of an event and semantic memory is memory of facts and information (Camina & Güell, 2017). Both these types of memory are involved in memories of experiences in place.

Working with memory of experiences is an essential part of learning processes in education. In higher education students are often asked to reflect on experiences by using reflection models such as Gibbs' (1988) "reflective cycle", Ash and Clayton's (2009) "DEAL model", and Driscoll's "What? So what? Now what?" model (Driscoll, 1994; Driscoll & Teh, 2001). When following these models, students begin with describing an experience, followed by analysis and ending with a conclusion and new plans for future action. This type of reflection requires explicit memory of what happened, what and why decisions were made, including our own thinking at the time. While this is important and useful in social learning situations, having to remember details of our experiences and past thoughts can also create a burden. Kikila discusses how he was inspired by Maracle's (2015) discussion of how memory works

depending on the direction you are traveling. This made him realize the comfort of not being pressured to remember:

The thoughts that come to me [in this place], are they really important outside of here? ... While I'm here it's sometimes almost more comforting to just say the whole universe ends where my eyes can no longer see. And if I'm not angling at anything grander than that, well then me and the thoughts that come to me here are really powerful, just for being here. And then it takes the pressure off on them like, "oh, I better remember that big, deep thought". Because the pressure is the bummer.

Krishnamurti (1954/2001) also speaks about the burdens of memory. He explains that he refers to what he calls "psychological memory" rather than "factual memory" when he discusses how memory limits our awareness of the present. When we watch a sunset in a certain place, we fully experience it the first time. However, the next time, when we seek to relive this experience, "memory is intervening between you and the sunset, therefore there is no enjoyment, there is no richness, fullness of beauty" (p. 192). Memory can create expectations, which may block our awareness in the moment. I have experienced this too, when I visited Schiermonnikoog. Memories of happy moments made me want to experience the same sensations, leading to disappointment when things were different. However, when awareness was activated, I was able to focus on the moment, with new experiences in the same location.

Movement reflection: I open my eyes and wish to relive the happy moments from my past. But as I look around, I notice that things are different and I feel disappointed. I sink to the ground, my mind not focused on place but overtaken by inner discomfort. Then I notice a small flower by my feet and I begin to look around. As I interact with my new environment in the present moment, my experience of wonder returns.

Chang (2020) explores the experience of wonder and points out that in environmental education the term has come to represent a positive experience with nature and an expectation to

provide positive connections between students and the environment. However, Chang discusses how this prioritizes a human experience of nature from an anthropocentric perspective. He suggests an approach that incorporates the Buddhist concept of “suchness”: “According to Buddhist thought, *suchness* is the world as it is, in its own vivacity and wholeness” (p. 7). Is it possible to experience place in the moment, as it is, without any expectations or the need to have a positive experience? It requires an open awareness of ourselves in the environment, as we interact with place.

Movement reflection: As I enjoy interacting with place, I become the director of the experience. I look for what is beautiful and this gives me a positive experience. I take everything in, as if it is mine. However, as I continue to explore, I finally notice the environment responding to my presence. I realize that in my interacting, I cause changes that I did not anticipate. My realization makes me stop and I pause to meditate on my relationship with place. I take a deep breath and focus on my body.

I used to imagine that my fingers have little brains when they would remember instantly how to move on the guitar to play a classical piece I had not played in years. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005) discusses this experience when he talks about habit. He explains how habit does not require thinking but is also not involuntary action. Rather, “it is knowledge in the hands” (p. 127) and “habit has its abode neither in thought nor in the objective body, but in the body as mediator of a world” (p. 128). He describes how an organist can quickly learn to play an organ he has never played before, because the knowledge in the body enables him to respond to the slightly changed environment.

Movement reflection: My body remembers being in the world. It remembers how to breathe and how to move. I do not need to think about my movements. But as an inexperienced dancer I struggle because I do not have the skills to mediate my intentions in the space. However, if I focus on being in the moment, sensing myself in my environment, my body directs my movements and I flow within time.

Krishnamurti (1954/2001) describes memory as time: “Memory of yesterday conditions today and therefore shapes tomorrow. ... There is a time process going on, which is the will to become.

Memory is time, and through time we hope to achieve a result” (p. 191). Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005), on the other hand, discusses how memory is active in the present, not as a thing in itself but as part of the subject. When we perceive, we perceive holistically, and remembering does not mean going back in time, but connecting to past experiences in the present moment:

To remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting. (p. 19)

Merleau-Ponty aims to disprove the theory that memory is used to fill gaps in our knowledge in the present moment. This theory would claim, for instance, that when we skip letters as we are reading a text, we fill in the gaps with knowledge held in our memory. Merleau-Ponty points out that instead, when a gap in knowledge exists, we first need to have an idea of what we are looking for, before we can retrieve the correct memory:

Before any contribution by memory, what is seen must at the present moment so organize itself as to present a picture to me in which I can recognize my former experiences. Thus the appeal to memory presupposes what it is supposed to explain: the patterning of data, the imposition of meaning on a chaos of sense-data. No sooner is the recollection of memories made possible than it becomes superfluous, since the work it is being asked to do is already done. (p. 17)

Movement reflection: I continue to be in time, where the body memory is active in the present. When there is a gap in the music, I stop, and I ask myself: “How do I respond? Do I struggle to fill in this gap by trying to repeat what I had done before?” But as I attempt to do so, there is no flow of movements and there is no connection, not to place, not to my body. Then, instead of trying to fill the gap, I decide to be in it. As I exist within this gap, I become my body that exists in place, and I realize I do not need memory to interact with place, but rather, a meaningful engagement is formed in the moment.

Student participants also indicated that not just memory, but meaning in these memories influences their connectedness to place. For instance, Lindsay mentions: “If I didn’t get that connection to it in the beginning it probably wouldn’t occur to me to come back to a place”. Mona discusses how a meaningful connection can be created through the depth of your interaction, where “you can feel connected with a person [or place] after one interaction and you feel familiarity, you feel like you’ve known them [or it] forever”. For her, connectedness to place has a deeper meaning than just being connected to one specific place. In this case, the memory of a place is less impactful than the experience in the moment:

When I find myself talking about connectedness to this place, I think what I often find myself thinking isn’t necessarily specific to *this* place. And it’s not necessarily connectedness *to* the place, but *within* the place and in relation to the place. It’s connectedness to self, which I experience within the space and what it contributes to my self and the moments that I’m experiencing.

Krishnamurti (1974/n.d.) mentions the concept of meaning when he talks about the meaning of life versus the purpose of life:

Your daily living, when you look at it very deeply, has no meaning. You are striving, wanting money, position, prestige, and when you do have it, what is it? You have not found out for yourself if life has real meaning. You ask what the purpose or goal of life is, rather than the meaning. The purpose can be invented by clever people, or you can invent purpose out of your misery, confusion and conflict. But the purpose is not the meaning. The meaning is to find out for yourself by looking at yourself, the depth of your heart, the depth of your feelings, the depth of your thought. (para. 1)

Where Krishnamurti applies this comparison of meaning versus purpose to the exploration of life, we can apply the same comparison to the exploration of connectedness to place. This means comparing the “purpose of connectedness to place” to the “meaning of connectedness to place”. The purpose refers to the significance, and for this research that means stimulating an awareness that may

lead to actions for sustainability and decolonization. This is an extremely important purpose during the current environmental and social crises. However, my exploration here is looking at the meaning of connectedness to place. The meaning is found when asking “how do you know that you feel connected?” and refers to feelings and inner exploration, or put differently, meaningful connectedness requires self-reflection.

Reflecting on an experience afterwards, is what Schön (1983/2016) calls reflection-on-action. This form of reflection is most commonly applied in education when students are asked to write reflection papers describing their learning process and outcomes. When we reflect-on-action, we use memory to create knowledge, which can be used to guide our future actions. As mentioned earlier, Schön also describes a form of reflection that happens in the moment, which he refers to as reflection-in-action. Reflection-in-action is not easily defined or applied. Critics of Schön’s model point out that Schön’s explanation of reflection-in-action does not differ much from reflection-on-action, as it still requires the thinker to pause and look back, and both models prioritize knowledge over experience (Hébert, 2015). Others describe reflecting in the moment as a form of tact and embodied knowing (Van Manen, 1995) that eliminates the temporal gap between action and reflection (Hébert, 2015) and connects with Merleau-Ponty’s description of knowledge that is present in the body.

In Bloom’s revised taxonomy the first three levels of cognitive processing are: remember, understand, and apply (Krathwohl, 2002). According to Bloom (1956) and Krathwohl (2002) the levels are hierarchical in that the higher order levels depend on the lower order levels for their development. For instance, one can apply knowledge only when one correctly remembers relevant facts. However, remembering does not automatically lead to understanding and what is understood is not always applied. Furthermore, applying always happens in the moment. We may have understood something in the past, but that is not a guarantee that we still do. Our understanding also changes over time, as we gain new experiences. When Krishnamurti speaks of “understanding something completely”, or “seeing

the truth of something wholly”, this is based on application or action in the moment, or reflection-in-action as tactful or embodied knowing, rather than on memory of experiences.

Krishnamurti’s quote from the beginning of this chapter is a response to a questioner asking him the following: “Memory, you say, is incomplete experience. I have a memory and a vivid impression of your previous talks. In what sense is it an incomplete experience?” (p. 189). Krishnamurti responds:

Obviously, it is an incomplete experience if it is merely an impression, a memory. If you understand what has been said, see the truth of it, that truth is not a memory. Truth is not a memory, because truth is ever new, constantly transforming itself. You have a memory of the previous talk. Why? Because you are using the previous talk as a guide, you have not fully understood it. (p. 190)

If understanding happens in the present moment, there is no burden of memory, such as the burden to wish to understand a philosophical concept, as in Krishnamurti’s example, or the burden to remember an experience of connectedness to place. Students in this research expressed that memory is involved in connectedness to place. We can agree that memory is important for survival, especially factual memory, such as knowing one’s address, remembering one’s language, and recognizing a location. However, using memory as a guide does not lead to understanding, as Krishnamurti stated. If we combine this statement with Merleau-Ponty’s (1962/2005) suggestion that memory is active in the present, we see that memory can lead to understanding, but this understanding does not come from past knowledge but from memory that we experience in the moment and through the body as a mediator of our being in place.

Movement reflection: When I focus on my thoughts, I feel heavy and burdened. My movements are short, rough, and stagnating. But as I interact with my environment, I don’t need to possess any knowledge and my movements happen freely, as I flow through the space like a leaf on the wind. When disaster strikes, such as a forest fire, and I feel the flames reaching closer, my body memory responds by moving to a safe distance and the event gets absorbed in the flow of creation.

Self-reflection

As a self-reflection practice I carried out the dance movements described above, supported by the songs *Doux Zen* and *Before Tuning*, by Charbel Rouhana (2010). In this section I describe the results of this experience.

There was a moving back and forth between positive and negative moments. The positive flow was interrupted by realizing that new experiences do not recreate happy memories, by realizing my actions affect place, by not knowing how to fill a gap, and by encountering disaster. When I entered the gap between the two songs, I delayed the start of the second song so I could explore what would happen during this sudden silence. I watched my thinking as I moved. First, I tried to act out the discomfort that came from the silence. Then I tried to move freely and I felt that this was possible because of body memory, where my actions repeated without planning. When I wanted to expand my movements, I imagined the music and heard the tune in my mind. Realizing that I was filling the gap from memory, I decided to stop hearing the music but focus on sounds I could actually hear in the moment. My footsteps, as I moved in rhythm, became the beat. The sound of my breathing joined in the rhythm. I realized I was focusing on my body moving through the space and began to feel connected again, to myself and to the environment. The role of dance in forming connections is discussed by dancer and philosopher LaMothe (2015), who explains that dance is vital for creating relationships with others and the world around us.

Another experience during the dance was that when disaster struck, my movements became fast, as my body reacted by running in fear. Though fear was evoked, the body saved itself and the dance continued in the new environment. Not everything we see in place is peaceful and positive. Memories of place can be especially painful for those whose lives have been affected by disaster, which could be natural or social-political. While I used dance as a reflection tool, it is also used as a healing practice

(LaMothe, 2015), or as a method to raise issues of injustice. Pearl Primus, African American dancer, choreographer and anthropologist in the mid-1900s, wrote:

Dance is my medicine. It is the scream which eases for a while the terrible frustrations common to all human beings who, because of race, creed, or color are “invisible.” Dance is the fist with which I fight the sickening ignorance of prejudice. It is the veiled contempt I feel for those who patronize with false smiles, handouts, empty promises, insincere compliments. Instead of growing twisted like a gnarled tree inside myself, I am able to dance out my anger and my tears.” (Primus, 1979, para. 4).

The next section begins with the acknowledgement that not everything in place is experienced as positive, even in places that are created to show beauty.

The transparency of beauty

My exploration of beauty begins with an excerpt from my dialogue with Mahya. She talks about her experience during the art workshop. In the workshop we were asked to pick ten things from the garden without causing damage, such as leaves or flowers that had fallen to the ground:

When I collected the stuff from inside the garden, I was a bit obsessed to not pick some ordinary things. And also, it was hard because I could see a really beautiful flower, but I wasn’t allowed to just pick that flower. So, it was really hard. And what was left was dead leaves and garbage, and I was in this challenge that there is a beautiful flower and there is garbage. Do you want to keep your pocket empty, or do you want to pick something like that? And yeah, it was a bit challenging for me, and I saw in myself lots of tendency to not pick anything I don’t feel is beautiful.

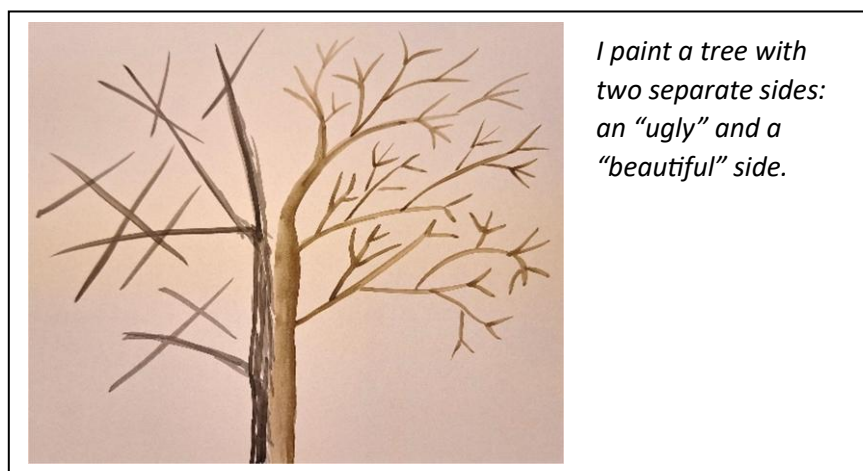
We can all recognize this experience of being drawn to beauty in place. We prefer to visit and live in beautiful environments surrounded by aesthetically pleasing natural landscapes or architectural design. How does the concept of beauty influence our experience of connectedness to place? In the discussion that follows, I will explore this question through a philosophical lens, referring to literature that describes

beauty in relation to nature, art, and mindfulness. I will also include reflections from student participants and use painting as my creative self-reflection tool.

During an interview for my master's research on creativity in children, an art educator told me that she sometimes tells the children to draw an "ugly" tree when noticing their fear of not being able to draw well. Upon hearing these instructions, their eyes would light up and they would eagerly start drawing. Brady (2022) suggests giving attention to both positive and negative aesthetics. Especially in current times when the negative effects of climate change are increasingly visible in diverse landscapes, Brady points out that negative aesthetic language can support dialogue on climate change. She explains that tragedy and negative emotions are commonly portrayed in art, but ugliness is not often combined with aesthetics.

Figure 7

Painting reflection 1: Two-sided tree

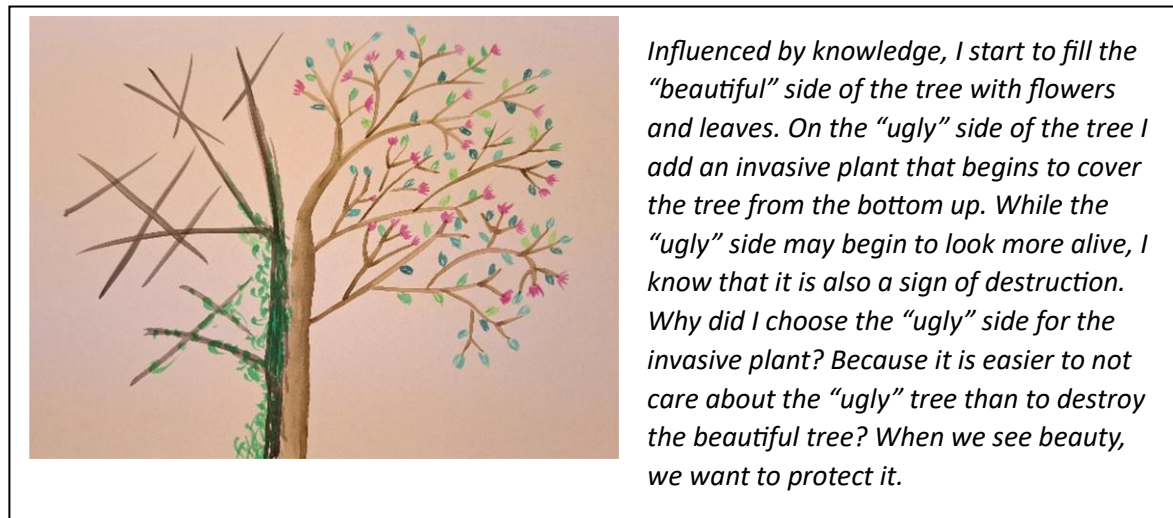


How does seeing both beauty and ugliness in place, as mentioned by Mahya and expressed in my painting above, affect our experience of beauty in place? Environmental degradation is a frequent topic in conversations about place. For instance, Guoliang Li talked about the "concrete jungle" his hometown in China had become and Mahya mentioned how the island Kish in Iran had become polluted over the years. Brady (2022) discusses how an experience of beauty may be influenced by knowledge.

For instance, “it is one thing to experience a hurricane from a place of shelter and safety, and quite another to be caught in a hurricane and have one’s life or livelihood affected or taken away” (p. 34). Another example she mentions is the beauty that may be seen in plants that are known as invasive species. Knowing the damage these plants cause to the indigenous vegetation affects our experience of beauty. In environmental restoration activities, ecological knowledge leads to a shift in what we experience as beautiful. On the other hand, our idea of beauty also influences restoration activities, which can be seen in the current trend to imitate wilderness in the practice of “rewilding” (Brady, 2022, p. 38).

Figure 8

Painting reflection 2: Knowledge of trees

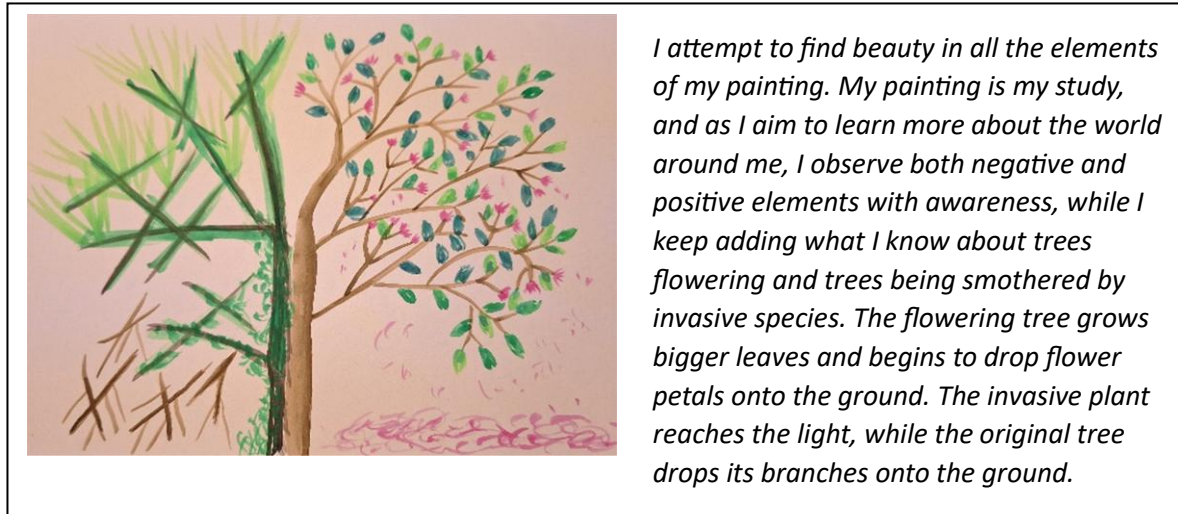


Though aesthetics is not the only and major area of climate change discussion, it can help motivate people into action to protect, preserve and restore natural environments. Similarly, integrating the topic of aesthetics in science education can help stimulate an appreciation for nature, as shown by Blades (2016). Based on the idea that scientists are often already inspired by beauty in their study topics, Blades invited science education students to create an aesthetic expression after studying a topic of their

choice. He found that the activity helped increase an appreciation for science and beauty in the world, stimulate an interest in teaching science and increase feelings of responsibility towards the environment.

Figure 9

Painting reflection 3: Beauty in the study of trees



In daily language, beauty often simply refers to “a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 372), to which I would add “hearing”, as beauty is also commonly experienced in music. Sarah points out that the experience of beauty in place can be personal and unspoken:

I’d come to this space on my own and so it’s a feeling that is kind of internally spoken. Like, I just have that kind of internal monologue: “o it’s so nice to be here and it’s so beautiful here”. And maybe I’m studying or maybe I’m reading and I’ll just have little moments where I look up and be like: “o this is actually really nice, lovely place to be and I appreciate it a lot”. I suppose that’s what I mean, it’s sort of unspoken. I wouldn’t normally tell anyone else about this space.

When beauty is discussed, it most often relates to art, attractiveness in humans, other lifeforms or landscapes. The similarities and difference between beauty in art and nature have been a discussion among philosophers for many centuries. Crawford (1993) describes some of the opposing viewpoints of

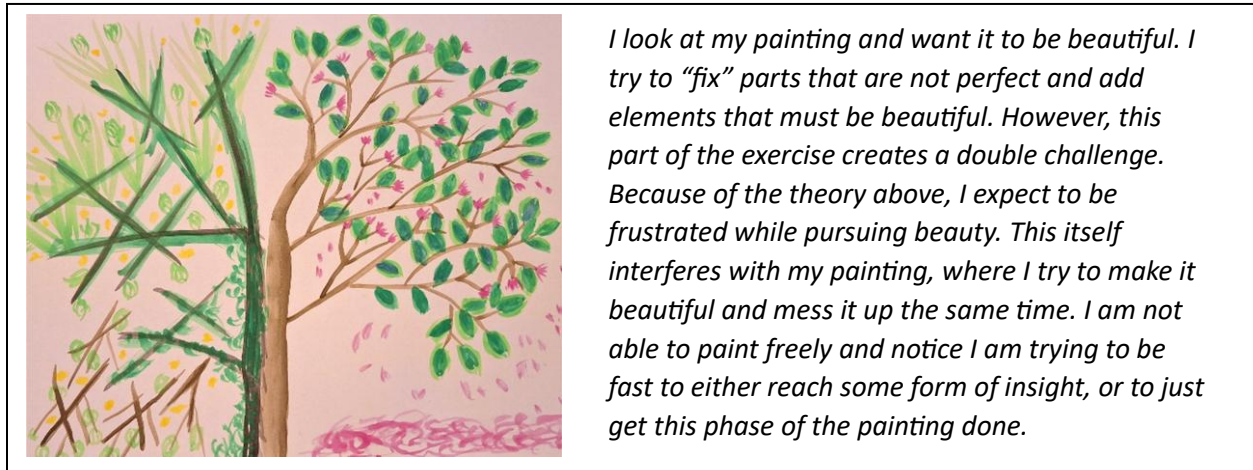
those who claimed that beauty in nature is perfection, which is imitated in art, versus others who argue that natural beauty is perfected in art. Some mention that beauty in art is more complex than beauty in nature, because it adds an element of judgment about how and why the art was made. However, this is denied by those who point to the complexity of design in nature. European philosophers such as Kant and Hegel are the most cited in philosophical literature about beauty. One of the main discussion points is the question whether beauty is objective, as a thing in itself, or subjective, being unique to the perceiver. In various forms and to different degrees many philosophers agree that it is a combination of both (Sartwell, 2022). My interest here is not in the history of European philosophical discussions, nor in finding evidence for the effect of beauty on people's health and wellbeing. Instead, I turn to Krishnamurti for guidance in learning what happens when we experience beauty.

Krishnamurti (2000) states that "beauty is where you are not" (p. 87). When we watch a beautiful scenery, such as a snow-capped mountain set before a blue sky, in that moment when we are being absorbed by the watching, we are not thinking about ourselves. However, the experience of beauty often leads to wanting more of the same, in which case it is the self that aims to pursue beauty. Krishnamurti (1956/1994) explores what happens during the pursuit of beauty:

Worship of beauty is an escape from what *is*, from yourself, is it not? How can you be sensitive if you are unaware of what you are, of what is? The ambitious, the crafty, the pursuers of beauty, are only worshipping their own self-projections. They are wholly self-enclosed, they have built a wall around themselves; and as nothing can live in isolation, there is misery. This search for beauty and the incessant talk of art are respectable and highly regarded escapes from life, which is oneself. (p. 193)

Figure 10

Painting reflection 4: The struggle of mind



Krishnamurti (1985/2023) asks if it is possible to be in the state of experiencing beauty without the self: “Is it possible without being absorbed, taken over, surrendering, to be in that state, without the self, without the ego, the me always thinking about itself?” (para. 7). Langer, et al. (2017) compare contemplative experience with aesthetic experience and suggest that the practice of mindfulness can increase the experience of “the intrinsic beauty in ourselves, in others and in the environment that surrounds us (p. 219). They describe the practice of mindfulness as: “Focussing one’s attention on what is being experienced in the moment and being aware of it with equanimity, curiosity and openness whilst momentarily suspending conceptual evaluation of what is observed in favour of direct perception” (p. 219). They highlight that mindfulness practice invites a perspective of self and of beauty that is not static:

We suggest that the contemplative meditative experience bestows a state of consciousness and acceptance of life which places the practitioner in a progressive encounter with a self-concept that begins to detach from a static sense of the self and from the categories that define it, so that it may be experienced as an ongoing mental event, removed from cultural ideals of beauty or positivity (p. 207).

Figure 11

Painting reflection 5: The fear of judgment



I turn to my painting and focus on the colours and shapes that filled the paper so far. I try to continue to paint without thinking. At first it is very difficult not to think. I am hesitant to put paintbrush to paper, afraid of engaging in judgment and afraid of the judgment itself. I worry that this painting reflection exercise will not lead to any insight. Trying to not think, I pick a different kind of colour and just start adding lines. However, it is a struggle to not think and judge and this process continues while I paint.

Considering the different approaches to mindfulness described in chapter two, it is clear that Krishnamurti's suggestion of awareness without pursuit, corresponds with "thick mindfulness" (McCaw, 2020), or "mindfulness as education" (Ergas, 2019), that do not aim for improvement and transformation, that do not isolate the self, but merely focus on the state of awareness. Awareness then includes awareness of self, and in this form of self-awareness there is not an attempt to escape from the self, but there is also no separate "me". Rather "the observer and the observed are one" (Krishnamurti, 1946/2023) in the moment of the experience. In my self-reflection journal, on May 27th, 2022, I noted the following experience:

I was traveling on the bus with my family last week and as I was looking out the window I experienced this sense of beauty in everything I saw. The sun was shining and I first noticed the flowers in the grass. I felt the beauty of the scenery and started to look around at other things. My mind said: "What if you can't see? Then you won't see all this beauty." Then I thought: "But you can also hear beauty." And then my mind said: "What if you also can't hear?" Then I thought: "You can feel beauty when touching things." Then I realized that it is possible to focus on beauty, through all or any of our senses. And that brought me to experience a moment of awareness. When I was, for a

moment, focusing on my surroundings, sensing beauty in everything, I thought that this is perhaps the kind of awareness that Krishnamurti talks about. It was an interesting experience.

Figure 12

Painting reflection 6: The search for beauty



I watch my mind as I paint and try to create beauty. I watch my mind that is struggling, trying to find beauty, trying to define beauty. As I continue to paint, I watch all this. I watch my hand as it moves the brush. I see the colours and shapes appear. I add blue all over the painting. It is not easy to watch my thoughts, as I am still tempted to not think and not judge. I look at what I am doing and am thinking that the paper will get curly because it now gets wet all over. I think that I am messing up the painting, just making it into a blur. I know that I have limited knowledge and skills with watercolours. I do see beauty in the colours and shapes and how things are blurred and how both sides of the tree become connected through similar colours. Though I expected to experience beauty at this stage of my reflection, I know that I am now searching for beauty.

McGilchrist (2020) mentions: “beauty is the unity of sameness and difference that produces a harmony” (2:33). He explains that the beauty of mountains is experienced because of the opposites between mountains and valleys. Harmony between opposites refers to relations that exist between things. Brady (2023) explores how aesthetic value emerges from our relations with the world. She describes how perceptual, sensitive, meaningful, and temporal relations influence our aesthetic values. Our sense of beauty depends on our perception of and sensitivity to the world and being “curious and receptive to things other than oneself” (p. 81). Though this indicates a focus on the “other”, Brady also states that “receptivity is fundamental to the reflexive relations that arise in aesthetic experience and lead to self-exploration” (p. 81). Aesthetic value also depends on what we experience as meaningful relations and these relations can be deepened by frequent and multiple encounters. All these aspects of

our relationship with place support our sense of beauty over time, and our wish for future generations to experience the same.

Robyn describes the experience of beauty as being comfortable with feeling small:

I think that there is this recognition of our smallness within the vastness of everything ... And when you can feel small and learn to feel comfortable in that smallness there is such a beauty there, and you can feel connected to the world from that place.

She further talks about beauty as seen through the eyes of an artist. I remember an experience where, for a while, I saw the world with different eyes. When I was in secondary school, I joined an art camp during which we spent a few days painting different outdoor scenes. I remember that after this art camp, when I looked at the landscape, I noticed more variances in colour and shapes. Robyn refers to this when she describes how she sees the world:

I see what artists see in the world all the time, is this extreme, hyper, vibrant aliveness in a thing, someone. We can look at the same sunset and see a different sunset. But when you're open to it, the world kind of really becomes alive.

Figure 13

Painting reflection 7: Opposites and aliveness



I look for opposites in the painting. The tree bark has opposite sides, and the colours of the feathery leaves show opposites of light and dark. I try to connect these parts to show their relationships. The darkness of the bark reaches over to the other side, and the feathery leaves reach out to touch each other. Then I add bright colours in the form of red fruit and yellow light to express the aliveness I feel when I think about my connection

In this research, art was used as a tool to explore and express our creative selves and most student participants explored their connectedness to place through some form of artistic expression. Appendix C shows an assemblage of arts-based reflections that includes images of students' artwork and excerpts of their written or spoken reflections. I distinguish four different ways in which art making supported self-reflection and connectedness to place. First, art was used to express the experience of self-reflection and connectedness to place. Guoliang Li showed his experience of the healing power of nature through photographs. In her painting, Mahya shared her experience with finding beauty and mystery, and Mona used paint to express her reflections of contrasts and complex boundaries. Davey shows how a combination of observations in place and self-reflection inspired them to be poetic and engage in metaphoric thinking.

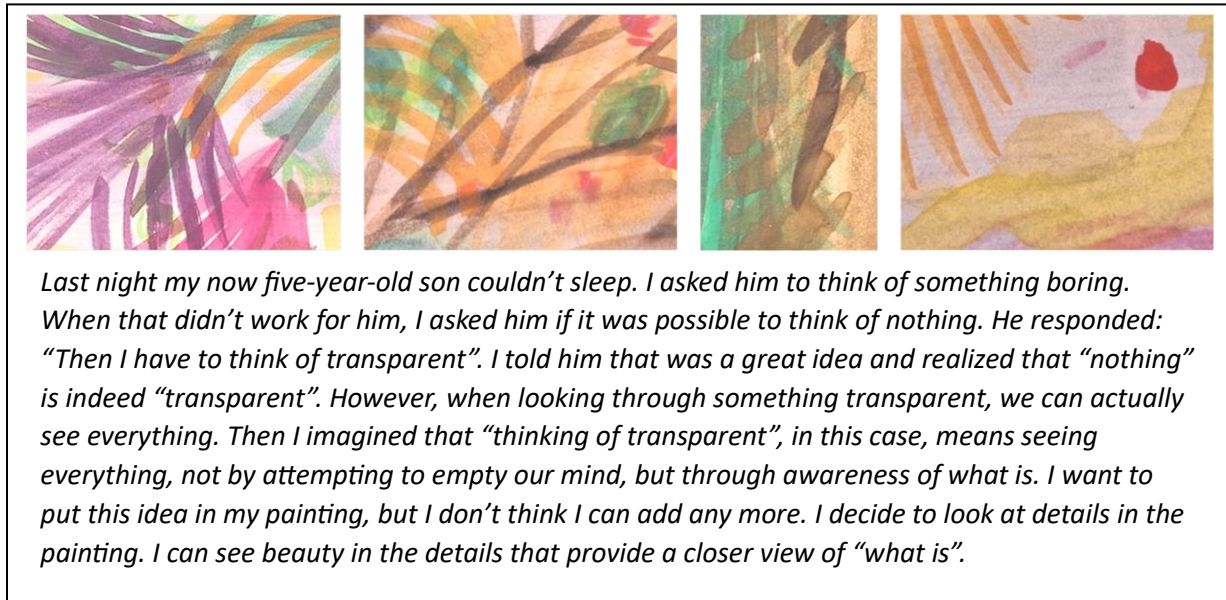
Second, in my own artwork, I experienced how artmaking itself can deepen self-reflection. Through painting I experienced a deepening of my connection, moving from seeing separate elements in place to seeing them interconnected through a flow of energy. Third, some students show how artmaking can help deepen connectedness to place. Kikila experienced this through music and Sarah purposefully focused on place by taking photographs and making sketches of details observed in place. Finally, Robyn shows an example of how art, place and self-reflection can be blended into one experience of connectedness to place. In her work, it seems that the natural place, the art materials, the sequence of events, and the personal reflections are combined in one experience that cannot be separated when describing her connectedness to place.

To summarize, the concept of beauty played an important role in our experience of connectedness to place. Beauty was perceived in the places themselves, in our creative work, and in our relationship with place. In exploring what beauty is, there is a tendency to define it separately for art and nature, and to describe it as objective or subjective. Krishnamurti indicates that beauty is an experience whereby there is no sense of self. However, any attempt to escape from the self in the search for beauty

is instigated by the self. Awareness without an attempt to escape from the self includes awareness of oneself existing in place. In other words, through awareness in the moment, beauty is experienced as oneness of subject and object, not through a conscious effort to combine them, and not even as a merging of the two. Instead, both self and place are existing separately and together at the same time.

Figure 14

Painting reflection 8: Transparency in beauty



Beauty is transparent in the sense that we instinctively seem to be drawn to what we experience as beautiful. Our experience of beauty is often unspoken and may create a sense of aliveness in us, as described by participants in my research. However, it is not something we can easily recreate. I once experienced seeing beauty in everything, but when I tried to recreate this sensation during my painting, my search included struggles of thinking and judgment. Krishnamurti's insight that beauty is experienced when there is no "self", suggests that any form of thinking or pursuit will not lead to the experience of beauty, because they involve a "me" that experiences. Awareness of this process is what I describe as the second meaning of "transparency of beauty", which is seeing everything as it is and as it moves, and this includes both beauty and ugliness, self and other.

Time as relationship

The exploration of time begins with a conversation between Kikila and me. We are talking about music and place. Kikila speaks about how he likes to play music and sing to place, while I mention how I once created a song while watching a lunar eclipse. What follows is an excerpt from our dialogue on May 13th, 2021.

Anya: When you sing, do you sing songs that you know or is it something you improvise, that comes to you in the moment?

[some traffic can be heard]

Kikila: Both. Either. It's anything. Sometimes it might be a tune. I might just hum a tune or vocalize a tune. ... Sometimes just a line of words and I'll repeat that line of words and the melody. Just a bit repetitively like, it's not going anywhere, it's just a cycle. But just enjoying the repetition of it. Like the chords as you described.

Anya: Yeah, maybe there's something in there, that repetition. That does something maybe when we're connecting to place. ...

Kikila: I found the more I connect with place the more ritual becomes important. And now we're having this conversation where repetition is coming up again. And to me that's hyper important because place changes at such a slow rate. How would it recognize me if I don't come in a very similar way?

Next Kikila mentions forms of meditation that include repetitive sounds like a bell.

Kikila: Maybe there's something about that, like bringing us into some kind of an alignment.

Anya: Maybe it stops time somehow.

Kikila: O wow. Yeah, maybe it does stop time. At least linear time, right? ...

Anya: I just thought of that because when I played that song that was just repetitive and then later, I'm thinking, if somebody else would hear this, it's very monotonous and it shouldn't be too long

because they'll be bored. But when I'm in it there is no time. It just goes on as long as it goes, and it doesn't end until it ends.

Kikila: Wow, yeah that's right. So true. And when it ends it's like, it's just when it ended.

Anya: It's just done.

Kikila: Yeah. And so maybe by extension, being in place stops time. Like in that relationship of coming to your chosen place.

Anya: There is so much more to explore.

Kikila: O yeah.

After this dialogue, I continued this exploration of time, by plugging in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) philosophical theories and self-reflections in the form of dance movements. What follows is the result of this analysis.

Rhythm is a musical term, referring to the repeating patterns in the beat of a song. In a similar way, we can speak of the rhythm of place as it goes through cycles of movement, growth, action and interaction. We all know the cycles of the seasons that are unique to different locations on Earth. Rhythm of place can also be noticed in the day and night cycles, the life cycles of plants and animals, and in the way that different elements of place respond to each other. A fly gets caught in a spider's web, and the spider responds. Sunrays reach a patch of grass, and flower buds open to the light. The wind carves the rock into new shapes that colour the landscape. Kikila says, "place changes at such a slow rate, how would it recognize me if I don't come in a very similar way?"

Movement reflection: I see place changing slowly. Flowers opening so slow that it is hard to catch the movement with our own eyes. We use special cameras to speed up time, so we can see the movements in slow changing places. Northern lights videos are often sped up to give the impression of a playful dance in the sky. However, in my memory of living in the north, the lights moved very slowly. The experience in my memory is not relived by watching those videos. Instead of using tools to translate

place so we can understand it, how can we hear place in its own language? Instead of using tools like special cameras, how can we use our own bodies to experience slow movements in place?

Atleo's (2011) principles of living sustainably provide guidance in approaching these questions. The principle of consent points to the importance of creating balance by respecting agreements, such as an agreement for fishing quota, or mutualism as an agreement between two animals that benefit from each other. An agreement between a person and place begins with the recognition and consent that the other has a right to be as they are. Supplemented with the principle of continuity, the person agrees that the other has the right to continue existing in their own way. Hearing place in its own language and experiencing place through our own bodies begins with an agreement of accepting the other and ourselves as we are, and acknowledging our bodies as a part of place, through which we experience.

Movement reflection: I see my body absorbing what it senses. Energy. Colour. Movement. Sound. And then it bursts into energy. Without thinking or planning, but responding. Communicating. And then again, listening. It adapts to the rhythm of place.

Kikila used music to explore connectedness to place. He felt that the rhythm and repetition elements of the music can support our connection. He said that maybe it is "bringing us into some kind of an alignment." According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, alignment is "a position of agreement or alliance" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 105). We continued to discuss that somehow, this alignment led to the sensation that time had stopped. Is it possible to stop time, or to be outside of time? Merleau-Ponty describes the philosophical concept of time in great detail and writes that a person "cannot be a series of psychic events, nevertheless cannot be eternal either. It remains for him to be temporal not by reason of some vagary of the human make-up, but by virtue of an inner necessity" (p. 365). However, Krishnamurti mentions that "it is possible to be free of time" (Krishnamurti, 1954/2001, p. 114), but that to understand this, one needs to explore the concept of time psychologically. His exploration shows that the idea of time is created by thought:

We know time as chronological and psychological, growth and becoming. There is the growth of the seed into the tree, and there is the process of psychological becoming. Growth is fairly clear, so let us put that aside. Psychological becoming implies time. I am this, and I shall become that, using time as a passage, as a means – what has been becoming what will be. We are very familiar with this process. So thought is time, the thought that has been and the thought that will be, the ‘what is’ and the ideal. Thought is the product of time, and without the thinking process, time is not. The mind is the maker of time. It is time. (Krishnamurti, 1958/1991, p. 107)

When Kikila and I were playing music in a rhythmic and repetitive format, our minds were not focused on thinking, on analysing, or rationalizing, and we experienced a sense of timelessness.

In further exploring the concept of time, both Krishnamurti and Merleau-Ponty explain that the understanding of time cannot come through time itself, since we are living in it and cannot escape that fact. We simply cannot step outside of time, to study it, but rather, we must see it as a part of us: “The problem is how to make time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident, time at all times underlying the notion of time, not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2005, p. 369-370). In a helpful analogy, Merleau-Ponty explains how time is often compared to the image of a flowing river, leading from past, to present, to future. He also explains how this metaphor is confusing because in reality, we are not sitting on the banks of the river of time, watching it flow by us. Instead, we are part of the river itself. Therefore, we need to imagine ourselves as being on the river:

If the observer sits in a boat and is carried by the current, we may say that he is moving downstream towards his future, but the future lies in the new landscapes which await him at the estuary, and the course of time is no longer the stream itself: it is the landscape as it rolls by for the moving observer. Time is, therefore, not a real process, not an actual succession that I am content to record. It arises from my relation to things. (p. 366)

In the debate about slow pedagogy, certain approaches seem to suggest that we can manipulate time by creating more time or stretching time. Beside examples from, for instance, Wattchow and Brown (2011), who stimulate educators to make changes in their programs, some scholars point out that educators do not often have the power to change deadlines, demands and expectations that are placed upon them. These scholars propose changing our view of time by focusing on larger perspectives and collaboration (Rayzberg and Smith, 2019; Shaw et al., 2013). In this perspective on slow pedagogy there is no attempt to slow down time, something we could never achieve, but instead time is being in relation to what is around us.

Movement reflection: As I am communicating with place, so do I move along with its changes. My body moves as the river flows, and I cannot stop it. At first, I may attempt to stop it, to get out of the water to see the river from a distance. I try to climb onto the shore. But as I hold on to a branch with my hands, my body is pulled further along the river, and I have to let go. Realizing my fate, I begin to observe. And I begin to interact again. As I sense the rhythm of the changing landscape, I move along with the beat of time.

Kikila mentions the “relationship of coming to your chosen place.” When purposefully connecting with place, we are in relationship with it. Krishnamurti speaks about relationship and explains how in relationship we often begin to create images about the self and the other. Images are based on thought and on experiences from the past, and according to Krishnamurti, relationship between images is not true relationship. To be in relationship without images is to see the other as if seeing them for the first time, before images are created by the mind. If time arises from my relation to things, as Merleau-Ponty stated, and true relationship is one without images, as Krishnamurti mentioned, then being in relationship means being aware, in the present moment.

Movement reflection: I am fighting my images. As I am observing and being absorbed by what I sense, my mind breaks free when a memory gets triggered. This memory invokes fear. I fear that I might

get stung by the bee that I see. But my mind recognizes the fear and the struggle that I was committed to break free from. I close my eyes and as I open them, I again connect with my senses. But my struggle continues as I get frightened by the sound of a barking dog. Until I watch the struggle, as I go in and out of concentration. My movements go back and forth, from inside my mind, to what I am observing. In this rhythm of movement, I remain. Until slowly, all becomes still.

Educators of mindfulness programs encourage people to observe the mind and the environment. However, as literature has shown, there are different approaches to mindfulness education, one where mindfulness is used as a tool for self-improvement and healing, and the other as a way of being (Ergas & Hadar, 2019; McCaw, 2019). In my analysis, there is a difference in relationship that is based on images from the past and relationship that is created by being in the present. The interview excerpt, analysed in combination with a philosophical exploration of the topic of time, shows that our experience of connectedness to place matches the theory of slow pedagogy as building connections, and the theory of mindfulness as being in the moment, without aim for improvement.

During this exploration of time, I realized my tendency to create opposites. There seems to be a dichotomy of time and timelessness, knowledge and being, relating through images and relating through awareness. This brings to mind the theory of the two brain-halves, as described by Iain McGilchrist. McGilchrist (2019a, 2019b) clearly states that he is not confirming popular theories that describe the functions of the left and right hemisphere in dichotomies such as reason versus emotion, language versus images, and male versus female. However, he does explain that the two brain-halves process information differently. Where the right hemisphere approaches the world holistically, the left hemisphere tends to analyse an experience by breaking it into parts. McGilchrist states that dichotomies are sometimes useful and do not need to be avoided at all cost, as they already exist in nature.

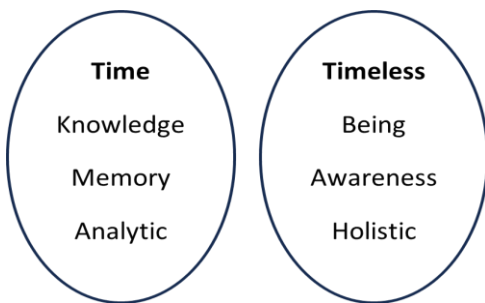
Movement reflection: I am tempted to look for dichotomies, where I had aimed not to do so, as I see a world in which everything is related at a level more complex than in opposites. My body is one. But

then I notice my left arm and my right arm, and they move separately. One goes up and one goes down. One reaches out and one reaches in. It is as if they are both doing their own dance.

To structure my thinking, I imagined a model, showing the differences between time and the timeless, including the concepts that were explored. Figure 15 shows how some of these concepts might be divided, according to the different ways of experiencing, inside or outside the realm of time.

Figure 15

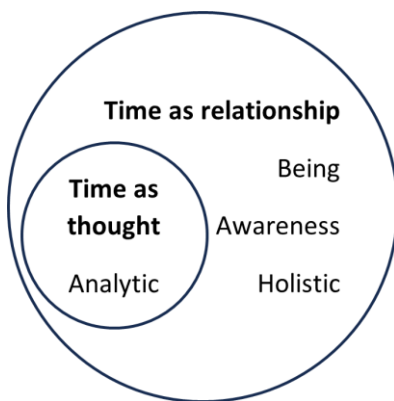
The time-timeless dichotomy



However, after considering the ideas shared by Krishnamurti and Merleau-Ponty, I realized that since we cannot exist outside of time, it is not possible to roam only in the left or right side, but rather, both sides exist within the same sphere, as shown in figure 16.

Figure 16

Time in different perspectives



McGilchrist mentions that the right hemisphere, looking from a holistic perspective, is aware of the left hemisphere, but the left hemisphere does not acknowledge the right. In figure 16 the larger

circle includes the small circle, but not vice versa. It shows that thought is not able to reach awareness, but that it is possible to be aware of thought. If connecting to place means being in relationship, then connectedness to place is something that is experienced holistically, by being aware in the moment, while including awareness of thought.

Movement reflection: Two arms are moving separately, but slowly one arm reaches out to the other and brings it into alignment with the movements of the body, creating a harmony in which all parts move together in a joint rhythm that stretches into time.

Self-reflection

As a self-reflection exercise, I performed this dance to the song *Raindance* by James Asher & Sivamani. After the experience I wrote:

There was a strong sensation of opposites. The going in and out of struggle was felt in my body. But somehow, this movement was peaceful in and of itself. That makes me think that perhaps there was no goal to reach harmony, but that harmony was found in the movement between struggle and calm. The dance ended with flight. Flapping of wings and gliding on the air. That could represent insight, like the eagle soaring high. I like how the description of the dance is not completely prescribed. It leaves room for free interpretation in the moment of the dance itself. That allows the body to feel and express the sensations inspired by the text.

The experience of dance as a self-reflection tool supported my analysis in ways I could not have anticipated without carrying out the movements physically. Especially being someone who did not have experience with dance and learning through movement, it showed me how embodied learning can lead to new insights and perspectives. In the next chapter I will explore this further where I discuss participants' experiences with self-reflection and connectedness to place in this research.

Chapter six: Experiences of connectedness to place and self-reflection

As an international student, someone who has traveled to different continents and grew up in a town away from her parents' roots, I have often wondered: "where is my home?" Ali (2021) asks the same question, as his parents had lived as Muslim minorities in India, while he was born in London and grew up in Canada before moving to the United States. When he revisits a remote northern town in Canada where he lived only for a few years as a child, he learns that the town was a settlement for dam construction workers and does not exist anymore. Returning to the area as an adult, he learns about the effects of colonialism and environmental destruction, while wondering why he felt drawn to revisiting this place from his memories. Research shows that people often feel connected to places from their childhood, especially if they have spent leisurely time outside (Rosa, et al., 2018; Van Heel, et al., 2023). When we travel, we may begin to feel connected to new places, or feel a longing to return to places in our memories, or even places we have only heard of. What then, is our experience of connectedness to place?

In chapter three I mentioned how analysing the transcripts through two cycles of coding led me to the following topics for further exploration: experiences with connectedness to place; experiences with self-awareness in place; and experiences with methods of self-reflection in connection to place. Further exploration of these topics showed me that participants experience connectedness to place through what I summarize as different "forms of awareness" and "interaction between self and place". This was supported by their engagement with "self-reflection in connection to place". These themes are explored in this chapter.

Forms of awareness

Student participants in this research elaborate on how they know that they feel connected to the places they come from and the places they selected for the research. Some students mention that when they feel connected, they notice responses in themselves, such as feeling happy or calm. Others

point to responses in the environment that make them feel connected. An example of this is when Aurora notices animals following her. Some examples from students show awareness of a physical connection between self and place, such as when Robyn speaks of seeing herself as part of the environment through a reflection in the water. All these experiences indicate that connectedness to place involves awareness. Awareness of connectedness to place can be experienced through embodied, cognitive, affective, and perceptive awareness.

Embodied awareness

One way in which student participants express that they are aware of their connectedness to place is by noticing responses in the body, where the body feels “comfortable”, “calm” and “relaxed” or “at ease”. Mahya adds that place doesn’t necessarily need to be calm for it to have a calming effect on her: “I feel more calm when I look at the sea. And even [though] I feel more calm, I love not calm sea. I love big waves.” Some students describe how they feel connected to places that make them feel “safe” and “healthy” and how connectedness to place establishes itself through an embodied experience:

I can come to a place like this and it’s bizarre, as soon as I focus my attention on being here, I can feel everything change, from my heartrate to just my style of breathing, and being aware of a deep breath having a calming effect. I can’t do that when I’m at work. But I can enter a spot like this and just take that deep breath and I can almost feel my heart opening. (Kikila)

The suggestion that learning happens through bodily awareness was already mentioned in my definition of “experience”, supported by Merleau-Ponty’s embodiment phenomenology. Van Manen speaks about “pathic knowing”, a type of knowing that takes place before rationalizing and theorizing. Van Manen (2007) explains that “pathic knowing inheres in the sense and sensuality of our practical actions, in encounters with others and in the ways that our bodies are responsive to the things of our world and to the situations and relations in which we find ourselves.” (p. 11). Connectedness to place through embodied experience can be seen as a form of pathic knowledge, which, according to Van

Manen is much more difficult to describe than informational knowledge, however, it “actually constitute[s] a major dimension of our experience and practice” (p. 21).

Cognitive awareness

Though some students stress how connectedness to place is experienced through the body, others add or highlight that they notice how their mind responds to place when they feel connected to it. Students express this as being “not worried”, “able to concentrate”, noticing a mind that “is perceptive and aware”, “free to go somewhere good”, and “can focus by filtering out other things”. As Davey explains: “My thoughts aren’t racing and I feel very present in the moment,” and Mona states: “I’m able to reach deep thought or able to just be and hear my own voice rather than it being like a bunch of other voices or projections of voices and just having that clarity of mind.” Mona further elaborates on how she experiences this freedom in the mind through connecting with place: “I’m seeing and thinking of things through my own eyes, which is very much a mental internal process. And that’s kind of what’s being most activated [when I’m here]”.

Memory also plays a role in the experience of connectedness to place, as described in the previous chapter. Students express this as “thinking of the place”, “familiarity” and “wanting to remember”. In some cases, being connected to place can have such a strong effect on the mind that it creates hope, as Guoliang Li experienced: “Yeah, it made me feel hopeful when I was standing here.” Another response that was mentioned by several students is that connectedness to place stimulates creativity and inspiration, to have an “open mind” for “new ideas”, where you are “able to express yourself” or “feel inspired”. As Davey explains: “I would come up here to brainstorm ideas for work or pieces of art I was doing. I’m writing a play right now and I came up here for some ideas. Or even just start writing essays or writing poems.” Mahya mentions a similar experience: “Another thing that will happen when I look at the sea is, some new ideas come in my mind, about writing a story or poem, or do something, or planning a trip. Something will come in my mind.”

To summarize, students express how their connectedness to their places makes them aware of a mind that is relaxed, creative, or clear. However, this does not automatically mean that going to these places will give us this experience. Krishnamurti (1954/2001) mentions that what he refers to as “a quiet mind”, which is a mind that is creative and not confused or agitated, cannot be reached by following any method or attempt. According to him, “quietness of mind, tranquility of mind, is not a thing to be produced by willpower, by any action of desire; if it is, then such a mind is enclosed, isolated... Such a mind is not creative” (p. 255). He further states that “stillness of mind comes only when there is no process of isolation through accumulation but complete understanding of the whole process of relationship” (p. 256). It may be true that coming to their chosen place on campus helped the students experience a “quiet mind”, but this reason may be because being in their places enabled students to be aware of themselves in relationship with place. In other words, the experience may be gained in relationship rather than through a pursued effect of the natural place on the individual.

Affective awareness

Some expressions of connectedness to place are simply statements of emotional responses, such as feeling “happy” and experiencing “joy”. Mahya explains how she notices a connection with place when she experiences different kind of emotions:

Going to these places makes an amazing feeling inside me, something between calm, sad and frightened. But frightened in the kind of, you are doing something exciting. For example, I love scary movies. ... I feel it in my body, but I love it.

The link between emotion and connectedness seems obvious. The definition of the term connectedness already included a reference to “feeling” and the importance of “awareness” for the connection to be experienced. In discussing arts-based methods for data collection I mentioned the benefits of combining art, where emotion is seen as a tool for learning (Moffatt, 2019), with researching connectedness, such as connectedness to nature (Muhr, 2020).

Krishnamurti talks about observing nature and begins many of his writings with descriptions of nature. In this, he often indicates a sensation of beauty and affection: “As you walked on the beach the waves were enormous and they were breaking with magnificent curve and force. You walked against the wind and suddenly you felt there was nothing between you and the sky, and this openness was heaven” (Krishnamurti, 2000, p. 67). He also talks about awareness of emotions before thought comes in:

To find out for oneself whether it is possible to look at something with all the senses and end there and not proceed further. ... That requires an extraordinary sense of awareness in which there is no control; no control, therefore no conflict. Just to observe totally that which is, and all the senses respond and end there. There is great beauty in that. (Krishnamurti, 1977, p. 163).

When students express their experiences with connectedness to place in affective terms, their awareness is based on observation as mentioned by Krishnamurti, without the need to analyse and explain.

Perceptive awareness

Finally, students described experiences that showed how they perceived their connectedness to place. This includes, for instance, noticing how the environment responded to them, such as in Aurora’s experience:

I remember when I was in Ontario and I was walking along the boardwalk and I was walking on the beach, there was a swan and it kept looking at me and it wouldn’t go in the water. And as I was walking this way, it was walking too. And I kept walking, and it kept going. ... And finally, we came to this blockade, and it didn’t have anywhere to go except come with me or go in the water. So that’s how you feel connected. You have an encounter with nature, with an animal, who doesn’t speak, but yet they’re connected to you.

In other situations, students noticed how they responded to influences in the environment. For instance, Davey felt connected to place when they noticed their body was reacting to pollen in the air. Sometimes a connection between self and place is literally visible, such as in Robyn's experience:

Water becomes like this beautiful mirror. ... If I were to look into the water right now and see the rocks beneath me and myself reflected in it, myself and the rock would become entangled in the reflection. So, I think water becomes this beautiful sight for us to see ourselves connected.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005) perception is not merely what we sense, nor is it just made up from our analysis based on memories, as discussed in the previous chapter. Perception is embedded in context and meaning. Some students described their connectedness by adding their interpretation or perspective on what an experience means to them. Lindsay felt that the rhododendron tree was "sharing who it is and its relationship with the world", and Guoliang Li said: "When I am stretching my body it seems that the spirits or the nature also embrace me, and I'm inside the embracing of the nature and the spirits." Students recalled their experiences because the memories were specific and personally meaningful. Aurora may not have remembered her experience with the swan if she did not already feel a connection with animals. Robyn may not have spoken about water reflections if she had not already been connected to water since her childhood. Students' memories were called upon by the questions in the interview, but it was the meaningful context that made them "relive" these moments of connectedness to place.

Interaction between self and place

In many school curricula, learning about outdoor, natural places is typically approached through the sciences. Learning about oneself is usually considered a personal learning goal in elementary education, with a more social focus on sense of belonging, in secondary and higher education. Traditionally, school curricula with a strong separation of subjects, especially in secondary and higher education, would not combine learning about place with learning about oneself. Wattchow and Brown

(2011) discuss how in outdoor education there is a tendency to see place as a background for adventure or self-development activities. In this case, learning about oneself happens in an outdoor location, however, the connection to this specific place is often irrelevant. Another tendency they mention in outdoor and place-based education is form of experiential learning whereby concrete experience in the local environment is merely a transition to reach the higher goal of gaining abstract knowledge. In this case, a connection between oneself and local environment is also not a main objective.

The current British Columbia curriculum encourages an inquiry-based, place-based and interdisciplinary approach to learning (Government of British Columbia, 2023). This means the focus is not only on teaching about place, but also about one's relationship with it. Learning about how students experience a combination of learning about themselves and place, is thus a relevant inquiry that can be applied to all levels of education. In my conversations with students, we specifically spoke about how we can learn about ourselves, or be self-aware, while learning about, or being aware of place. Sometimes our mind is so occupied by thoughts about our daily lives or issues we are facing, that we become unaware of our environment. Other times we are so focused on what is around us that we seem to forget ourselves. Through examples, students mentioned that they were aware of themselves in place when they interacted with place. Interacting with place happened by sensing place, collaborating with place, being accountable to place, and learning from place.

Similar to embodied awareness discussed earlier, when we sense place, we are aware of the different ways that our body interacts with place. While sitting beside a pond in the Finnerty Gardens, Aurora mentions that you can experience yourself in place when you "are in tune with your senses. You use your eyes for visual, but [also] your hearing, your scent, smelling. If there's anything, berries or something to taste, you taste that. ... And watching the ducks. See, they're having a bath." In my own self-reflections in connection to my chosen place, I wrote: "When I feel the fresh air and focus my awareness on that, in this moment, I am aware of myself in this place, interacting through breathing."

Lindsay describes how she tries to work collaboratively with others who live in her garden when she carefully tries to save a spider's web. Collaboration with place is also mentioned by Robyn: "I work a lot with the land, like collaborating with it. ... Making sculptures on the water and in the water." When Robyn creates art in the environment, she needs to collaborate with the water, the wind, and other elements of place. While collaborating with place in such an intimate way, Robyn reflects on the history of place and how she experiences the land: "That just became a big conversation for me. The way that landscape changes and remembers experiences that happened on it and how that relates to our bodies and how we can perceive imprints of that."

Within a paradigm of relationality, we can see that because we are related and relating to place, we influence what is around us. When we understand this relationship and our role in it, we know that we are accountable to place. Kikila mentions: "If I'm in a relationship to this place I want to be accountable to it. And I have to learn what that means for me." Wilson (2008) explains that relational accountability is fundamental in Indigenous research: "We are accountable to ourselves, the community, our environment, or cosmos as a whole, and also to the idea or topics that we are researching. We have all of these relationships that we need to uphold" (p. 106). Sarah mentions how she became aware of how she relates to place:

I might have thought before that I wanted to do a sketch where I pick flowers or collect things and actually, I didn't want to do that this time, because ... I sort of began feeling like I don't want to take things from the space because it's not mine. So, I think in a roundabout way I became aware of how I'm interacting with my space, which then has a knock-on effect on feeling what I should do as a person in nature and how I should respond to it and respect it.

Similarly, Guoliang Li discusses how he holds himself accountable for his actions in place:

I learned that as a foreigner, this place doesn't belong to me and I was just a traveler. And then that, yeah, maybe I can feel the past. I mean, this land belongs to Indigenous people, Lekwungen People,

and I am grateful that they allow me to stand on this wonderful place and I should be a better person, better myself, you know. In order to stay here I shouldn't do anything wrong like destroy the plants here and bring anything back.

Reflecting on our relationship with place can lead to moments where we learn from place. For instance, Lindsay mentions that she learns from her garden:

In my yard, I learn from the way things are, the way things move, the way things change, the way the plants interact with one another. And I do relate that to myself. I do take it as a lesson, as something to know about life. And sometimes it might be relevant for me.

As an example, Lindsay discusses how she learned from observing a relationship between raspberries and dandelions and how this reflects an aspect of herself:

I learned from observing somebody else's raspberries that the dandelions growing with their raspberries were bigger than any dandelions I had ever seen. And at that time, I really valued dandelions because they were food for my iguanas, so it was really easy to notice them. And so, in my raspberry patch I decided to not bother the dandelions. And in the last two years they've gotten monstrously huge. And the raspberries are doing well too, and they were struggling because of a condition that we had in the soil. ... The raspberries and dandelions and the relationship that they have, reflects me, in that I like to let things be, a lot.

Examples of learning from plants are also given by Indigenous author and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2003), who writes inspirational stories about her work with moss. She writes: "Traditional knowledge is rooted in intimacy with a local landscape where the land itself is the teacher" (p. 101), and explains, for instance, that "the patterns of reciprocity by which mosses bind together a forest community offer us a vision of what could be. They take only the little that they need and give back in abundance" (p. 149-150).

In summary, I learned that students experienced that it is possible to be aware of both place and self at the same time by interacting with place through the senses, by collaborating and being accountable to place, and by learning from place. Student participants also expressed that certain conditions and perspectives can influence such experience. To learn more about these conditions and perspectives, we will now look deeper into students' experiences with self-reflection methods and activities during the study.

Self-reflection in connection to place

Student participants in this research engaged in multiple forms of self-reflection, many of which were art related. Davey, Kikila, and Mona discussed how journal writing is one of their preferred methods of self-reflection. In addition, Davey wrote small poems during their exploration of connectedness to Mystic Vale. Painting in connection to place was explored by Kikila, Lindsay, Mahya, Mona, and myself during the arts-based reflection workshop. I continued with painting as a self-reflective activity in connection to the place I chose for the research. As an experienced art student, Sarah spoke of painting and digital imagery, while she used sketching and photography in the place she chose for the research. Guoliang Li decided to capture his experience of connectedness to Haro Woods in photographs and video, and Kikila connected with his chosen place through singing and playing the ukulele. During the research, Lindsay was in the process of creating her garden, inspired by the Finnerty Gardens. She spoke of this experience where design became her topic of self-reflection. As a multimedia artist, Robyn explored her connectedness to Arbutus Grove in a three-dimensional art project involving burlap. In our conversation she also spoke about her experiences of making sculptures in the water, which was part of her master's thesis. Other self-reflection forms that came up in my conversations with students include self-reflecting while observing place, being in place, sensing place, communicating and collaborating with place, talking about place, remembering place and dreaming. What follows is a description of nine elements or sub-themes that describe what I call "place-based self-reflection".

Being physically present

To become aware of place and self, it is important to spend time connecting with place physically, for instance by walking in place, taking a deep breath and stretching. Mahya mentions how connecting to the body supports her connection to place, as it helps her to stop thinking about herself. Guoliang Li describes how stretching helps not only to feel healthy in the body but also to embrace the environment, which, in his experience, created a spiritual connection to place.

Literature of somatic or embodied learning shows that there is a growing interest in valuing and implementing practices that involve and connect mind and body (Fugate et al., 2019; Hegna & Ørbæk, 2021). Fugate et al. found that psychology has undergone a paradigm shift and that “rather than knowledge being recoded and removed from the initial sensory and motor experience, embodied cognition posits that the brain *simulates* these details when recalling and using the knowledge garnered through that experience” (p. 280). Horst (2008) describes somatic learning as follows:

Somatic learning occurs from a conscious intention to invite the body into the learning space, to tune into the ways in which the body sends and receives information, and consideration to the diverse ways the body learns. Practice keeping the learner central to the process; the body is already there waiting to be included. Fostering somatic pedagogy requires challenging learners to open their hearts and minds to what is already in front of them; the untapped knowledge of their bodies.

Learning somatically requires intention; a purposeful attention to how the body makes sense of, manifests, and creates knowledge. (Conclusion).

Horst distinguishes four types of somatic learning: kinesthetic, sensory, affective and spiritual learning. In kinesthetic learning, movement provides meaning. This could be implemented by, for instance, walking or stretching in place. Sensory learning involves the senses and is applied when focusing on our senses as we connect with place. Affective learning takes place when we focus on how we feel when we spend time in place. Finally, Horst mentions that in spiritual learning, meaning is

created through connection. Being aware of how we connect to place can also lead to an experience of healing, such as expressed by Guoliang Li.

MacDonald (2021) discusses how embodied learning is needed in the process of decolonization as this should not just be an intellectual task:

Interrogation and integration within one's own body, heart, spirit, and mind may indeed bring forth a more creative understanding of the actions needed to move beyond superficial acts of reconciliation like land acknowledgments and empty apologies that do not promote Indigenous self-governance. How would we honor another's self-governance without fully being present to our own ability to sense into our own sovereignty of thought, emotion, and action within the interconnectedness of all things? (p. 366)

MacDonald further suggests that embodied learning and mindfulness approaches are not written as recipes to follow, but rather act from "a willingness to be uncomfortable, to be undone, to not know" (p. 366), which matches a paradigm of nonlinearity. From a holistic perspective, it is about the whole person, exploring and learning on an undefined journey, or as Krishnamurti states: "Truth is a pathless land" (Krishnamurti, 1929/2023).

Intentional observation

There are many techniques that can help increase our observations in place. Davey enjoys observing details by intentionally looking for colours and textures in the forest. This is how they discovered small nature art objects that other people had made and left beside the trails. Sarah describes how drawing details and playing with different art forms helps with observation. In her garden work, Lindsay showed that observation also includes paying attention to how place responds to our actions, which can lead to understanding how we can work with place instead of imposing ourselves on it. When we are not able to physically go to a place, our memories can also be inspirational for observations when we visit the place in our mind.

Two students mentioned looking up information to learn more about the species that exist in place. Sarah researched the name and specifics of certain trees and birds. As a participant, I wanted to learn about the ornamental tree and a small butterfly I had seen in my place. I was tempted to believe that gaining this knowledge would deepen my connection to place, and decided to test this belief against Krishnamurti's description of knowledge and relationship. Krishnamurti stresses that knowledge is important, as we need it to function and communicate. However, knowledge is always in the past, and therefore limited. In relationship we gain knowledge about one another. With this knowledge we create an image about each other. Our relationship then becomes between images and then, according to Krishnamurti, there is no actual relationship, which is often the reason why conflict arises. Krishnamurti explains that to be free from conflict one must observe oneself:

Can the mind which functions with conclusions, with images, can that mind be free, not tomorrow, not within a given period of time but be out of this conflict altogether? And that is only possible when you can learn how to observe, how to observe yourself and another. It is far more important to observe yourself and not the other, because what you are the other is, you are the world and the world is you, the two are not separate. (Krishnamurti Foundations, 2022, 47:56)

Observing oneself in relationship includes understanding the workings of knowledge. Not to avoid or deny knowledge, but to be "aware of the function in knowledge and the necessity of knowledge, and ... the danger, the poison of knowledge in relationship" (Krishnamurti Foundations, 2022, 43:51). When I observed my knowledge and my connectedness to the *Ochlodes sylvanoides* (Woodland Skipper), that looks like a moth, but closes its wings when it sits and is therefore a butterfly, I realized that in my connecting in the moment, this knowledge was not relevant. The experience that knowledge can interfere with seeing the other is also confirmed by Lindsay's experiences in art. She mentions that when drawing an object, describing the object rather than naming it, helps to see it more accurately, as you focus on what you observe, rather than what you know.

Inviting different perspectives

Many of the activities student participants discussed, help to see place and self from different perspectives, thus increase our understanding and awareness at different levels. For instance, we see place from different perspectives when we visit it at different times of day or year. When Davey went to the Mystic Vale in the dark, they realized that they could use other senses, such as sound, to experience place:

It was also cool [to come here] at night, because without the visuals you can pay attention to the sounds a lot. And so, during the day I would sometimes close my eyes and just pay attention to the sounds and see how that was different to the night.

Kikila described how, during a workshop, he was encouraged to see things from the perspective of something else that exists in place, such as a frog, a building, or a tree, “not to literally adopt the persona of the tree, but just to displace how we are thinking about things.” Davey speaks about a difference in experience when they visited the Mystic Vale a few times with friends instead of alone:

It was cool to see how others I was with experienced the place as well. ... We went down one of the little trails around the back and it was all muddy and so we were fully experiencing the environment, paying a lot of attention to that, in like, teamworking to piggyback over the mud when I didn't have good shoes and everything.

Mixing different art forms also stimulates seeing from different perspectives. Kikila mentions how he learned to combine writing with image in his journals. Sarah describes how she uses different techniques and makes art that is inspired by earlier art to stimulate different responses. My own experience with multimodal art helped me to feel free to express myself without feeling stuck in expectations and thinking. Inspired by the art workshop, I collected ten objects from my place and made a first painting. I wanted to make an abstract painting but couldn't manage to think outside of these objects. I did not specifically enjoy the activity and the result, but continued to make the poem. Then,

when I started a second painting based on the poem, my experience changed. I felt free, started to enjoy the process and without judgment, I could see beauty in the result. Mona refers to this as “finding your own voice”, which she was able to do when pushing herself to freely write in words and images without being hindered by judgment.

Heather, our art workshop facilitator, explained that multimodal art is a process within expressive art therapy. Malchiody (2012), a leading expert in the area of expressive art therapy, writes: “Expressive therapy has been defined as using the arts and their products to foster awareness, encourage emotional growth, and enhance relationships with others through access to imagination” (p. 131). She further states that it “allow[s] people to explore unknown facets of themselves, communicate nonverbally, and achieve insight” (p. 131). In my experience, I gained insight by exploring my connectedness through multiple art forms, inviting different perspectives.

Connecting and layering experiences

One form of seeing from different perspectives is recognizing elements of an experience in other situations. For instance, topics that come up when self-reflecting in place may be mentioned during different lectures, in conversations with others, or in memories of past events. Mona describes how writing down her thoughts made her realize many connections in her own life and in that process she realized she could see deeper meanings and relationships between things:

[I started] identifying things that are sometimes kind of spoken of as if they exist in isolation, and remembering that they don't exist in isolation, like a language and a speaker for example, and the significance of context. ... To see that connection, that relationship between source and product essentially ... and seeing honestly the pattern in the relationships between a lot of things, giving me deeper understanding and appreciation for the things I'm observing or experiencing.

Mona explains how in a natural place like Summit Park she was able to reflect on these connections, but that because of seeing deeper meanings, she feels more connected to the “source”,

which could be described as god, rather than the “product”, in this case one specific park with its specific surface forms that are in constant motion:

When there’s so much fixation on the final product it can kind of overpower, distort the reality of it. And I feel like there is a tendency to disconnect it and have the surface define the bounds of a larger, more complex reality.... And I see the significance in recognizing essentially the background and its relationship to the source, the traceability, the connection from one end to another. And it gives me more appreciation for both the creator and the creation, seeing the complexity behind the place I’m experiencing and all its moving parts.

Lindsay noticed that she had different experiences that kept bringing her back to her connection with the Finnerty Gardens:

The layering, like being a participant in this research, the memories from here, the plans unfolding in my garden because of having people to help, and having somebody give me two plants that go there. It’s just layer upon layer upon layer of these experiences. The workshop, coming here. And it intensifies the connection, because there are so many interconnections.

Literature shows some examples of how layering experiences can deepen connectedness to place. The Couture family deepened their connection to place by studying a local Vancouver park from multiple perspectives and through different people’s experiences (Couture, 2018). In a phenomenological study involving one educator named Arthur, Brian Wattchow shows that immersing students in a remote place without busy schedules and structured activities, allows students to observe and learn about the place in different depths (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Arthur explains that when there is a layering of experiences, such as physical interaction, cultural place stories, and scientific knowledge, place becomes knowable rather than it being a space of wilderness without meaning, although the role of knowledge in this context is debated by Krishnamurti, as mentioned earlier. Even when it is a student’s first visit to the remote location, Arthur observes that after all these experiences,

“by the last day this place that they thought they would be entirely unimpressed by, has just crept into [them]” (p. 173).

Learning with others

Though learning happens inwardly, and self-reflection is an activity that one can only do for oneself, self-reflection does not need to happen in isolation. Guoliang Li learned that connecting with another student can help in learning that we are not alone in our struggles, which can lead to finding support and being supportive. The workshops offered opportunities to learn with other people. This was specifically valued by some students, as Kikila explained:

Just walking around Finnerty Gardens with a group of people and then coming together and doing art, or sitting with a group of people and talking about our relationships to places and to each other and to things, it's no longer isolating. ... I could have a theoretical experience or I can have an experience in community and that's why it's so important that someone is putting them on, and for me to be at them. Because it helps them matter, like in the same way as being here [in this place]. It's not so much having this kind of obvious interaction with place. It's more just steeping myself into it. So, the workshops helped me do that.

Within the paradigm of relationality, it is already understood that our learning is influenced by the many connections we consciously and unconsciously have. When discussing our situation and thinking processes with others, new insights can inspire us, and active participation can increase due to external motivation. Collaborative learning is generally valued and widely used in all levels of education. Research shows that collaborative learning often results in “higher achievement and greater productivity; more caring, supportive, and committed relationships; greater psychological health, social competence, and self esteem” (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012, p. 489). However, Nokes-Malach et al. (2015) point out that collaborative learning is not always beneficial for learning, and therefore it is important to know when and how it is useful to implement it in classrooms. They mention, for instance, that students may

be interrupted in their thinking while listening to others, or experience fear of negative evaluation from others. Collaborative learning seems to be most beneficial when there is student autonomy and involves tasks that are challenging and relevant (Scager, et al., 2016). In my research, collaboration during workshops and other events was optional, there was no expected outcome, and participants gathered because of similar interests and goals. Although learning with others offers benefits, this does not dismiss the value of being alone in place, which was expressed by Mahya:

When I am talking with a person it doesn't matter how close he or she can be, I spend lots of energy and [attention] to that person so I lose my connection to that place, and I lose my awareness about myself. When I'm alone the awareness is one hundred [percent], so it depends on my situation.

(Mahya)

Prompts and questions

Learning with others offers the benefit of being stimulated by suggestions from others. In my research, many students mentioned how prompts and questions supported them in being self-reflective in connection to place. Some students discussed how the research questions inspired them to think about and observe things they would not have if they had just visited place. As Sarah explains: "Talking is an interesting way to reflect. I learned a lot just speaking with you. Actually, having questions and being forced to express something about it is a good way to reflect." The probing questions from Heather's art workshop were mentioned by several students as questions that helped them in exploring place in new ways. Lindsay explains how the prompt "think of how you are seen by place", helped her connect to place when she noticed a hawk in the Finnerty Gardens:

I walked a little ways and sat on a bench. And I sat there for quite a while being seen by the hawk, which I didn't really believe because I'm just one of many going there. And after I was there for a while and relaxing, it came down to where I had been, rustled around, picked something up and flew to another tree and I thought: "I was not just being *seen* by the hawk, I was being *watched* by

the hawk and the hawk was waiting for me to get out of the way so it could finish what it was doing!” ... Its flying back down made this beautiful arch, and it was included in my poem, and it was included in my drawing.

Literature on reflection in higher education indicates that most students need support in learning how to reflect (Veine, et al., 2020). Many reflection models offer lists of questions to support reflection at different stages of an experience. Johns (2022) stresses the importance of guided reflection. His reflective model includes dialogical movements in which a student responds to specific questions during each reflective stage. Questions include, for instance: “Did my feelings and attitudes influence me?”, “How has guidance deepen[sic] my insights?”, and “How can I communicate my insights most effectively in written/performance format?” (p. 37).

Connecting your creative self

Creativity can encourage self-reflection in connection to place, especially when place is used as an inspiration for art or design. Lindsay discusses how her creative thinking includes planning, delegating and imagining stages of her garden design:

I’m building this garden. It’s a pretty creative process. I don’t have the shrubs yet, except for the two azaleas. I didn’t want to leave the bed empty, so I decided to put squash in there and that’s an experiment. ... And the other patch, I decided to put bush beans in there for the summer. So, in a way, the process is creative. But it also is executive functioning, because, it’s like knowing one step after another. ... I am doing that as part of the creative process and delegating people and being careful not to delegate the things that I want to do, because the things I want to do are things that are my connection to place. So, there’s been a lot of figuring it out and thinking about it and making decisions and imagining. ... The image of how that garden will look in stages.

Lindsay further explains how she connects to place by collaborating with place through observation and adapting her design to what she observes:

The path from that gate to the other gate that the dog and its mom walk through is a natural change. There's a natural change between what's growing here and what's growing there. So, I'm kind of following that. And that is influenced probably by the trees and the shade and stuff like that. And the bed that I put in, I'm following the path, which, as much as possible is following that shade line.

This process of creative imagination and collaboration with place brings to mind what Cajete (2000) calls creative participation. From an Indigenous science perspective, creative participation refers to how “the Indigenous “physicist” not only observes nature, but also participates in it with all his or her sensual being” (p. 20). Although in daily language the term creativity is often used to refer to art and craft activities and products, Cajete speaks about the concept in a broader sense, as a quality of the universe. In human beings, creativity is a quality that enables us to adapt to changing situations. “Ultimately, the universe is a creative expression at a magnitude beyond human recognition. Human life at all levels is wholly a creative activity and may be said to be an expression of the nature within us” (Cajete, 2000, p. 15).

Choosing your tools

When Kikila set out to play music when he visited place, he paid special attention to choosing the instrument he would bring: “Even though I brought my guitar that day it was the ukulele that wanted to come with me. Which is fascinating, right? Because it changes how I'm going to be playing music.” When engaging in art as a self-reflection tool, choosing your tools carefully can make a difference in how we experience. As an artist, Robyn has been using gelatin as a sculpture material, and although she finds it challenging to work with, her choice and experience is based on deeper reflection: I've been thinking about this gelatin as being a by-product that I can materially use as a sculpture material ... I basically cook it, and then make sculptures out of it. And I find it really hard to work with. It's actually really emotionally for me to work with it. ... I see gelatin and it being this made of

multiple bodies with all of these bones and skin and ... then coming to this very fine powder that we use in food. It's in pretzels and vitamins and it's just a by-product, and that's what's so crazy. It's so big, it's such a huge industry, but it's just a by-product of an even bigger industry. It's in an even bigger system of trauma, and so I'm hoping that by working with it I can kind of bring people close enough to this thing that is so big. To perhaps begin just to scrape the surface of accessing that and thinking about what it means to the kind of artifact.

Indigenous educators have personally explained to me how they were brought up with cultural teachings around awareness of respectfully interacting with materials, especially when taking from the land. For instance, Dene educators showed me how to offer a gift of thanks when taking something from the land. A Pueblo educator and ceramic artist in New Mexico explained to me the ritual of thanksgiving when taking clay from the river, and the respectful use of the tools used in the process of creating ceramic objects. Wilson (2008) shares the story about recognizing the spirit of a new computer through ceremony, as his co-researcher states: "everything is sacred, and that includes what we make" (p. 90). Within the paradigm of relationality, it is clear that tools used for the creative interaction between a person and place, are elements of connection, become a part of place, and play a role in shaping the experience.

Timing

Timing is an important element to acknowledge and understand when aiming to deepen place- and self-awareness. Some days are simply more suitable for creative and meditative efforts than other days. Mahya feels that she can only connect to nature when she is feeling happy. Guoliang Li, on the other hand, experienced that connecting to nature was helpful when he was feeling depressed. His experience also shows that learning can come unexpectedly:

Before visiting here, I felt so bad that maybe I will even withdraw from my studies. ... I estimated that the worst things might happen. But everything seems changed after that morning. And I have

no idea, now at the moment, [how] my future will be, whether I can find a job, whether we can find a place to live. But that morning was a turning point.

Timing was also involved in experiences where students had time for free exploration without having a specific purpose or focus. For instance, Mahya mentioned how during the Vipassana course, she felt most connected to place when she walked in the garden during break times and was not required to follow specific rules of observing the mind: “That place [in the garden] helped me be connected to place because I had enough thinking about myself. So, like a snack you have in your breaks, in the school time, you love that because you don’t have to pay attention to the teacher.” In my own experience, when I lived in India, I felt very self-reflective, because “that place gave me space and time to do that, as well as others who could inspire and understand and join. I had no tv, no computer and no deadlines. And a lot of nature to observe!” Having free time in place without purpose, connects with Wattchow and Brown’s (2011) first signposts for place-responsive outdoor education: “Being present in and with a place” (p. 182). They explain:

Experiencing being present, or even working on being present, does not necessarily involve activities such as drawing, reading, writing, or photographing. It does not involve trying to record or represent the experience in any way. These things come later. It simply involves making the effort to attend to what is meaningful in our immediate surrounds and to increase our levels of awareness. What it requires of participants is stillness, silence, and patience. What it requires of educators is a sense of timing and a feel for the possibilities in our immediate surrounds. What it does suggest is the need to take time in and with place(s) rather than rushing or pushing through. (p. 185)

This quote brings us back to the value of my first suggestion of being physically present. While Wattchow and Brown (2011) discourage the use of creative activities while initially connecting to place, the acts of creativity my students engaged in were not preplanned, structured, or expected. Instead,

they were implemented as a means of increasing awareness, by allowing time to explore being present in place.

Place-based self-reflection

Based on student experiences in this research, connectedness to place is experienced through different forms of awareness and interaction with place. The following nine sub-themes summarize the ways in which students aimed to intensify the awareness of themselves in place and support their self-reflection activities: being physically present; intentional observation; inviting different perspectives; connecting and layering experiences; learning with others; prompts and questions; connecting your creative self; choosing your tools; and timing. The descriptions of these themes can be read as suggestions for stimulating place-based self-reflection. However, it is important to note that, in accordance with insights from Krishnamurti, any attempt or method to reach some form of enlightenment, will not lead to greater awareness. The knowledge that is offered through these suggestions is not meant to lead to a generalized truth or be implemented in a prescribed curriculum. It is based on the experiences of ten students in this research and can be used as inspiration for engaging in place-based self-reflection or sharing with others in a suggested educational context.

Chapter seven: Summary of learnings and continuing questions

I present this final chapter from within the lens of the research paradigm as I attempt to show how relationality, self-awareness and nonlinearity have guided the choices, processes and outcomes of the research. In line with relationality, I will show how a combination of the previous chapters, including personal narrative, literature, research choices and findings, contribute to the meaning and results of the project. In connection to the importance of self-awareness, I describe how my own learning is a central issue and outcome of the research, but that this learning creates suggestions for scholars, educators and students. From the perspective of nonlinearity, I explore how there is no beginning and no final conclusion, but only learnings and further questions leading to new middle entrances for continued learning.

Relationships between experiences, choices, and findings

There is no doubt that my personal background and experiences have initiated and guided this research. My focus on environment and education have grown from the experiences I had as a child. My interest in alternative forms of education that prioritize self-reflective learning and connectedness to the land were inspired by educators at Krishnamurti centres and North American Indigenous schools. Reading the works of Krishnamurti and many Indigenous scholars continued to further influence my thinking, where relationality was one of the key ontological and epistemological concepts. For instance, Krishnamurti (1954/2001) said: “Without relationship you are not; to be is to be related; to be related is existence” (p. 88), and Wilson (2008) states: “We could not *be* without *being in relationship* with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships” (p. 76). And Kovach (2021) mentions: “An Indigenous epistemological stance is all about relationship between subject and object, tangible and intangible, self and others, self and the world. Indigenous epistemology expands the scope of relationships” (p. 74).

The theoretical framework and methodological choices fit within the research paradigm and have informed, shaped and guided the research process. Using a bricolage approach, and in line with Vagle's (2018) suggestions to think broadly and creatively, I combined different theories and methodologies I had come across and found matching my research paradigm. The blending of Merleau-Ponty's embodiment phenomenology, Vagle's post-intentional phenomenology, Jackson and Mazzei's thinking with theory, Hughes and Barlo's indigenist research methodology, and Somerville's post-structural approach, inspired my actions to include movement as reflection, include the land as participant, and merge data, theory and self-reflections as a method of analysis. The research is grounded in aspects of various pedagogical approaches, such as place-based education, slow pedagogy, and arts-based reflection. In a reciprocal way, this research may offer suggestions to support and further develop those theories.

My own connection to UVic campus and surroundings as a place deepened during all stages of the research. Inspired by noticing other students enjoy the beauty of this land and being mentally and physically supported by the availability of the land during the COVID-19 lockdown, the research began to take shape. While meeting the student participants in the different locations, acknowledging the land and speaking about our connectedness, it felt that the places were indeed present during the process. Through my study I learned about the forests, park, garden, and shore, and became aware of how some of the old growth trees would have been witness to many tragedies and changes to the land. I experienced the land as more than individual elements, as beings that are related through networks of life and time. Hearing the student participants' stories added the perspective of seeing both this place and the places we come from as interconnected through our experiences. During our self-reflection activities, we also explored the question "how does place experience me?". Focusing on this question during our reflections helped us experience our relationship from a different perspective, a perspective that strengthens our awareness of accountability towards the land.

In addition to seeing all these relationships, the thematic descriptions that are presented as research findings were also developed as part of this process. Personal perspectives indicated in the research paradigm, motivations that drew participants to join, and analysis through creative interaction, led to my description of connectedness to place that involves memory, beauty and time. Connectedness to place involves memory. Not memory as facts that are meant to fill in gaps in our knowledge, but as embodied memory that is active in the present. When the body is used as a tool for learning, for instance through dance, it can bring new perspectives, offer healing, express emotions, and create connections. Connectedness to place involves beauty. Not just the beauty that attracts us, that is hard to explain and difficult to maintain, but a beauty that allows us to see things as they are and as they move, including our selves and our struggles. Connectedness to place involves time. Not time as separate moments of past, present and future, but time as relationship. In short, connectedness to place is experienced in the moment, in relationship to things as they are.

Curriculum as a “learning map”, with its focus on outcomes and scaffolded steps of learning, does not prioritize one’s surroundings and relationships in the moment, because the focus is on constant improvement. But curriculum as an “ecological map of learning” includes awareness in the present moment, interaction with place, and suggestions for place-based self-reflection. This approach could be applied to any curriculum or syllabus and is important and relevant in today’s ecological crisis.

Personal learnings and suggestions for educational scholarship and practice

Though my research is not autoethnographical, much personal learning has occurred due to the fact that I felt personally drawn to the topic, was a participant in the research, and used a methodology that prioritized self-reflection throughout the process. Indigenous scholar Wilson (2008) states: “If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135). The research project has offered personally changing experiences to me in three main ways. First, I had never considered the value of embodied learning and had not experienced this form of learning before. Because the concept

was prominent in my dialogues with participants and in literature, I explored this approach while analysing post-intentionally. Through this process I personally experienced that connectedness to place, in the moment and through our bodies, can bring new insights that would not have occurred when exploring my connectedness just mentally.

Second, I have often wondered how the different experiences I had during my lifetime could be connected in my work. Even though we may have spent many shared moments with family and friends, the combination of life experiences is unique for everyone. In my research I unexpectedly found that I was able to combine my life experiences in a project where I could include and learn from the varied authors, educators, Elders, perspectives, incidents, moments, and environments I encountered. From the perspective of relationality it is clear that all these experiences have influenced who I am and have influenced how this research was conducted and expressed.

Third, my engagement with post-intentional and post-structural theories and approaches supported the foundations of my research approach. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, Vagle (2018) describes knowledge as “partial, situated, endlessly deferred, and circulating through relations” (p. 126). Personally, these theories have helped me to build trust that things will come and happen as they do and to see unexpected or seemingly irrelevant experiences as potential learnings. They also allowed me to activate my awareness in the moment, learning about self, without stressing over the burdens of memory, beauty and time.

Theoretical contributions

Literature shows that there are many approaches to and definitions of reflection. The most often cited and influential works are the reflection theories of Dewey and Schön. However, their approaches have also been critiqued by various authors, such as Bleakley (1999) and Hébert (2015), promoting alternative approaches, including holistic reflexivity (Bleakley, 1999) and tactful or embodied knowing (Van Manen, 1995; Hébert, 2015). Matching my research paradigm, I focused specifically on *self-*

reflection and described it as the act of creating an awareness of self in the moment, which includes one's relationships to the environment. The examples of self-reflection activities described by the student participants in my research show how the implementation of reflection in higher education can be broadened to intensify one's awareness of being in place.

Written reflections are the most common reflection assignments in higher education. In some way, written reflections become memory, as they are fixed sentences on paper that can be read to recall one's thinking. If, in line with my analysis of memory, understanding comes from memory that we experience in the moment and through the body as a mediator of our being in place, then new learning may happen every time we read our own or other people's reflections. In place-based self-reflection we ask ourselves: "What are you sensing, thinking and feeling right now?" This includes thinking about the memory, but may also include resistance to reflection, uneasiness with our bodies, or distractions in the environment. It helps us to work not only in the mind but to include the body and the environment in this learning.

When I used arts-based reflection during my exploration of beauty, I continued to analyse my thinking and at some point I began to notice that I was forcing myself to reflect. This realization, and being open to other things that were happening, such as my conversation with my son, gave me new insights. Krishnamurti (1979/2013) says about insight:

If the observation is not based on knowledge or on intellectual capacity of reasoning, exploring and analysing, then what is it? ... [Insight is] to perceive something instantly, which must be true, logical, sane, rational, and that insight must act instantly. It isn't that I have an insight and do nothing about it. (3:18)

Perhaps the type of reflection I was experiencing was not reflection-in-action, but rather action-in-reflection. Schön's terms reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action highlight a difference in time when the reflection takes place. Action-in-reflection, as the new term I am introducing here, prioritizes what is

happening during the reflection. It highlights the content and the quality of reflection, that always happens in the present moment.

The outcomes of this research also contribute to the discourse on slow pedagogy. The importance of slowing down and taking time for experience, reflection and creativity is highlighted by, for instance, Hartman and Darab (2012) and Berg and Seeber (2016). On the other hand, Rayzberg and Smith (2019) point out that the ideal of slowing down time is unrealistic for many in the academic world. In my experience, allowing the time I needed for reflection, exploration of my connectedness, developing my relationship with the participants, and connecting concepts while analysing, caused me to spend at least one extra year to finalize my studies. Implementing slow pedagogy can thus have major impact on our life situations and may not always be possible. My description of time as relationship follows Berg and Seeber's (2016) suggestion to change the way we talk about time, and Rayzberg and Smith's (2019) suggestion to see scholarship in community rather than focusing on individual achievement.

Some authors discuss the need for a place-based focus in higher education, to support discussions and actions of decolonization and sustainability. Gruenewald's (2003b) highly influential article, suggesting a combination of place-based education and critical pedagogy, is an approach to place-based education that supports this important aim. Place-based education is described as an approach that aims to "structure curriculum around authentic investigations that bring students out into the community" (Demarest, 2015, p. 1). Its pedagogical design is intended to improve student learning, community relations, collaboration and action for sustainability. Critical thinking and awareness of one's own biases, privileges, and behaviours are encouraged. My research adds another element to this approach. Interaction with place was one of the ways in which students in this research expressed that they connect with place, but what place-based self-reflection adds, most of all, is a focus on awareness of one's being in place, not as a separate entity, but as a relational being.

A summary of place-based self-reflection

Students engaged in self-reflection activities while exploring their connectedness to place. These activities ranged from painting and journal writing, to simply being in and observing oneself in place. When describing their experiences, students shared many suggestions of what I call place-based self-reflection. One of the suggestions is to be physically present, which can be stimulated through movement, by using our senses, and by focusing on emotions and spiritual meanings (Horst, 2008). Another way students engaged in place-based self-reflection was by intensifying their awareness of place, which can be encouraged by intentional observations, inviting different perspectives and connecting and layering experiences. The role of knowledge was discussed, where Krishnamurti shows how knowledge can interfere with connectedness. Multiple and layered experiences helped students learn about their inner processes, finding their own voice, and seeing relationships among elements of place and self.

Learning with others was described as a supportive experience. Learning in a group, and receiving prompts and questions were inspirational for engaging in place-based self-reflection. Literature shows that students often need support in learning how to reflect (Veine, et al., 2019). In this research, self-reflection is defined broadly, by including any activity that increases awareness of self in place. Therefore, the suggestions and prompts given in the interviews and workshops were helpful for students to think beyond the common methods of reflection as thinking. Literature also shows that both reflection and cooperative learning benefit from giving students agency over their learning process (Beauchamp, 2015; Scager, et al., 2016).

Art and creativity were an important part of the research and many of the participants explored place-based self-reflection through art. Creativity was briefly discussed as being a participative act (Cajete, 2000). Students' experiences show that art can be used to express place-based self-reflection, but making art can also deepen self-reflection and different art forms can be used to deepen

connectedness to place. Two students mentioned purposefully choosing the tools or materials they worked with. Tools and materials that are used for interacting with place are part of the environment and choosing them with awareness can be seen as an element of place-based self-reflection. Returning to the concept of awareness, student experiences also showed that place-based self-reflection requires right timing, and benefits from unstructured, free time to experience awareness of self in place.

Continuing questions

Vagle (2018), referring to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), points out that we always enter into the middle of things. This means that we cannot usually go back to the exact origins of a quest and need to be aware of what constantly influences our study and ourselves. It also means that we make choices in which parts of a theory we use in our study. Vagle (2018) and Jackson and Mazzei (2011, 2013) explain that they do not use all the theory of the scholars they chose “to think with”, but make specific choices based on their knowledge of the theory and their research data. In the same way, I have chosen to “plug in” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) certain parts of the philosophies of Krishnamurti, Merleau-Ponty, and others that were relevant to my research. The belief that we always enter into the middle of things also indicates that there is no clear beginning and no final conclusion at the end. However, this does not mean that a study is meaningless. The meaning of this research is found in the interrelatedness between the themes, concepts, participants, artwork, choices, theory, literature, and everything else that played a role in this work to become what it is, and continues, through readers, to become what it can be.

Inspired by my research, continuing questions arise, and I will end with sharing four questions for further thinking that came up during my writing. The first question is: Does art that is made during arts-based reflection, such as a photograph or painting, need to be accompanied by an explanation in words? When students include arts-based reflection in their assignments or portfolios, or when research participants are asked to engage in arts-based reflection, the educator or researcher needs to understand the thinking of the students or participants for assessment and analysis purposes. Therefore,

students or participants are often asked to either describe their artwork, or reflect on their artmaking process, in written or spoken form. Examples of arts-based reflection described in literature (e.g. Clarke & Bautista, 2017; McKay, 2021) show that even though art forms are said to deepen students' and participants' reflections, they are often accompanied by written or spoken reflections in papers or interviews. In the perspective of reflection in the moment, new learning may happen every time we observe art. However, this learning will be unique for everyone. Even words that are written may be interpreted differently by different readers. Therefore, it may not be necessary to hear an artist's verbal reflections, unless there is a specific message in the art that the artist wants or needs to convey, in which case the reflection of the artist is already in the past and the reflection of the viewer is about to begin.

This also connects with the second question, regarding the challenge of assessment: How can learning be assessed when it focuses on being in the moment and is based on self-awareness? This may require a deeper dive into the topic of self-assessment. The benefits and limitations of self-assessment are sufficiently explored in literature, but in a review of research on student self-assessment, Andrade (2019) writes:

What is not yet clear is why and how self-assessment works. Those of you who like to investigate phenomena that are maddeningly difficult to measure will rejoice to hear that the cognitive and affective mechanisms of self-assessment are the next black box. Studies of the ways in which learners think and feel, the interactions between their thoughts and feelings and their context, and the implications for pedagogy will make major contributions to our field. (p. 10)

The third question I would like to bring up is: How can we invite negative spaces and connectedness in our learning as we aim to dilute binary thinking? Binary thinking certainly has its uses, as it helps us make sense of the world, and our brains are already divided into halves that operate in different ways (McGilchrist, 2019a, 2019b). However, if we continue to think about ourselves and place

in binary terms, we miss the richness that is offered by relational, context rich, and nonlinear thinking.

Chang (2020) suggests the following:

Ponder the range of encounters in nature that do not fit easily in the positive-negative poles of emotional affect. Watch the intensity of light shift on an autumn day, the poplar leaves flickering in a welter of wind — these encounters register on the somatic, emotional, and intellectual planes; but they are neither positive nor negative, nor are they neutral. Binary metrics of emotional affect do not aptly gauge the manifold ways that nature contacts the senses and sways the mind.” (p. 5).

Finally, I would like to return to Krishnamurti’s (1974/n.d.) suggestion to ask about “meaning” rather than “purpose”. A question about the purpose of connectedness to place can easily be answered, through reasoning, even though people’s priorities may differ. Asking about purpose leads to descriptions of importance and significance, such the significance of this research as expressed by the student participants in the introduction. But a question about the meaning of something does not seem as easy to answer. It requires a deeper look at how we define and experience it. It is a phenomenological approach and does not lead to judgments or conclusions, but requires self-awareness. Therefore, my final question is: What is the meaning of self-reflection and connectedness to place? Participants in my research have shared their experiences. It is now up to each of us to continue to explore this for ourselves.

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Appendix A

Recruitment text

1. General email to be shared with students, to recruit participants:

Seeking research participants

Many of us feel a connection with the **beauty of the land** on and around our campus, whether we grew up around here or are visitors from other places. Do you have a special place you like to spend time in to help you relax, study, or think? I am looking for research participants who will help me explore this connection with place.

My name is **Anya Hall** and I am a PhD candidate in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. My supervisor is Dr. T. Riecken. With my research I aim to show how connectedness to place can be expressed and developed through self-reflection. I believe that in a time of ecological crisis, our personal connection with the environment can guide us to **living sustainably**.

Being a participant will allow you to express yourself through spoken or written words. You may also choose to use visual or any other creative form to share your voice. To support you in this, you will be given suggestions for personal exploration, and you may also choose to participate in learning activities that are offered at UVic. For instance, you may choose to learn more about how to explore your connectedness to nature in creative forms, or about how to increase your self-awareness.

I will be working with a small number of students and consider myself a participant as well. Therefore, this research gives you a chance to share your views and experience as a **co-creator of knowledge**.

Feel free to contact me at xxxxxxxx@uvic.ca if you are interested and would like more information.

2. Email to students who expressed an interest based on the first email:

Hi,

Thank you for sharing an interest in my research! In this email I will give you more information about the research, to help you decide if you wish to participate. In my research I aim to show how connectedness to place can be expressed and developed through self-reflection. Participating in my research will give you a chance to explore your connectedness to this place in more depth. You will have the opportunity to learn more about the environment and ways in which you can connect to it. To help you do this you will be offered suggestions to explore on your own and workshops you may attend if you wish.

To learn from your experience, you will be invited to participate in two interviews and have the opportunity to express yourself creatively using any expressive means you like. Interviews are meant to be dialogues in which we both, as UVic students, discuss our connectedness to place. Interviews will take place in the outdoor location you feel connected to. The first interview will be held in February, 2022. After that you are invited to further explore your connectedness individually, at your convenience, and supported by optional workshops and suggestions. The second interview will be held in April or May, 2022.

I am aware that participation requires a time investment (approximately 1 hour per interview and 1 to 2 hours per optional workshop), while you are also studying and perhaps working. Therefore, if at any time you feel that because of workload, stress, or any other personal reason you cannot continue, you may withdraw without explanation or participate partially at your convenience. Also, as with any activity that involves self-reflection, participation may cause some unexpected emotional discomfort. Everything you share will be kept anonymous, unless you wish to be named in the writing of my dissertation, and you may decide what information must remain confidential and what may be shared with the public. During interviews we also need to be aware of a health risk and are required to follow UVic's COVID-19 regulations.

I can work only with a small number of participants (6 students) and seek participants from a variety of backgrounds. **If you wish to participate, please reply to this email before January 31st, 2022 and include the following: your study area/department/program/year, and where you come from (e.g. where you lived before coming to UVic, and your cultural or national background).** Please email me at xxxxxxxx@uvic.ca if you are interested in participating or have any other questions or concerns. To contact my supervisor, Dr. Riecken, you may email him at xxxxxxxx@uvic.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Anya Hall
PhD student, Curriculum and Instruction

Appendix B

Interview questions

The interviews are conducted as open dialogues in which both interviewee and interviewer share information based on the questions.

First interview:

The purpose of the first interview is to situate ourselves (sharing and acknowledging where we come from and where we are) and for the interviewee to express their connectedness to the specific location they selected. The following questions are used to guide the discussion:

1. Where do you come from?
2. What do you study?
3. Why did you come to UVic?
4. How do you feel connected to the place(s) you lived before?
5. How do you feel connected to this place you selected (for the research project)?
6. How do you know that you feel connected to this and other places?
7. Do you feel it is important to deepen your connectedness to place? If so, why?
8. Do you think you can learn about yourself or feel self-aware while you visit this place?
9. Do you believe one can learn about themselves while being aware of their environment? If so, how and what methods would you use or prefer to explore this?

Second interview:

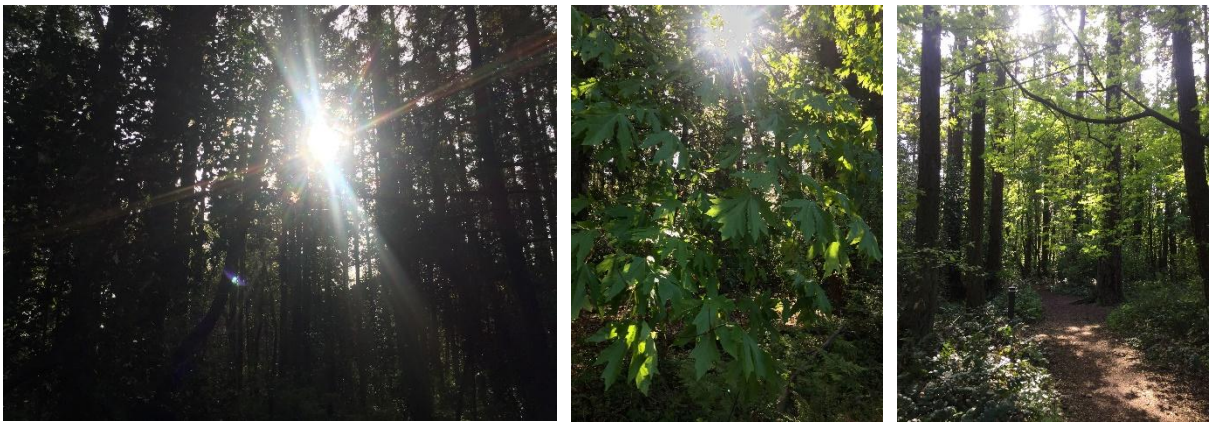
The purpose of the second interview is to re-explore our connectedness to the same location and discuss experiences that happened during the semester. For instance, a participant may describe how they created an art piece that expressed their connectedness or explain what happened when they visited the location earlier. The following questions are used to guide the discussion:

1. How do you feel connected to this place you selected?
2. How do you know that you feel connected?
3. Did you visit the place more often during the semester? If so, when, how and what was your experience?
4. If applicable, did workshop activities or other learning opportunities influence your experience with connectedness to this place? If so, how? If not, why do you believe it did not?
5. What creative means did you use to explore your connectedness? Please describe your experience with these methods, and share samples if you wish.
6. Do you feel that you learned more about yourself or felt more self-aware sometimes while you visited this place? Please explain.
7. Do you feel it is important for people to deepen their connectedness to place? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. What methods of self-reflection do you prefer when connecting to the environment? Please explain.

Appendix C

Assemblage of arts-based reflections in connection to place

I stretched my body and looked into the sun. And I stretched my body and embraced the forest. And I felt the glory of the sun and the trees and [it came] to my mind that I'm feeling better now. And there was a voice talking to me, saying that you are going to be better. Everything will become better. Every problem will be solved later. Maybe the voice was coming from the sun and then passed into my brain. I relaxed and then I took some photos and videos. (Guoliang Li)



Photos by Guoliang Li, shared with permission

I noticed the leaves here from last winter, they're like translucent, but they're a pale white and they kind of look like paper. So, I wrote a poem about the paper leaves. ... I tend to think in a very poetic way when I'm feeling introspective. I notice all the little details that I would write about. Like some of the trees and the shapes that the bark makes or patterns you can find and visualize things in. Like the mushrooms that were like little toasted marshmallows. And the leaves that were translucent and looked kind of like little ghost leaves. (Davey)

Paper Leaves

Paper leaves have fallen from their trees
But it's the trees and their trunks that make paper
Not the leaves
Paper leaves are a translucent off white from a season of cold
Now old, they're the ghosts of spring and summer
Before falling

Poem by Davey, shared with permission

When I was collecting the stuff from inside the garden [during the workshop] I was a bit obsessed to not pick some ordinary thing. It was hard because I can see a really beautiful flower, but I wasn't allowed to just pick that flower, [as we could only pick things that had fallen on the ground], and what was left on the [ground] was dead leaves, or garbage. And I was in this challenge that there is a beautiful flower and there is garbage. Do you want to keep your pocket empty, or do you want to pick something like that? ... And I understand it happens in other situations in my life. When the things are ordinary and they are part of nature, I don't want them. And it will keep my pocket empty. ... So, when I went to that room, my pocket was not really full. One really small pink flower that had fallen, and a branch and an ID card. So, my painting was really minimal. There wasn't lots of elements inside my painting. (Mahya)

It just reminds me of a game I used to play a lot in my cell phone. ... The artist who made that game always create a woman character without any face. ... And I drew that one ID card without a face, eyes, nose and mouth and it feels a bit scary to me. But I know that I have a sense of being, I don't know, really serious, or scary or ... mysterious is the best description. And that ID card feels like that to me. (Mahya)



Photo and painting by Mahya, shared with permission

A four-chord progression. Just moving through them, kind of in a monotonous way. Even though I brought my guitar that day it was the ukulele that wanted to come with me. Which is fascinating, because it changes how I'm going to be playing music. So, there was some strumming, there was some finger picking. But all the while, almost like doing colour splotches of an area, instead of trying to paint it, those were like the tonal colour splotches. (Kikila)

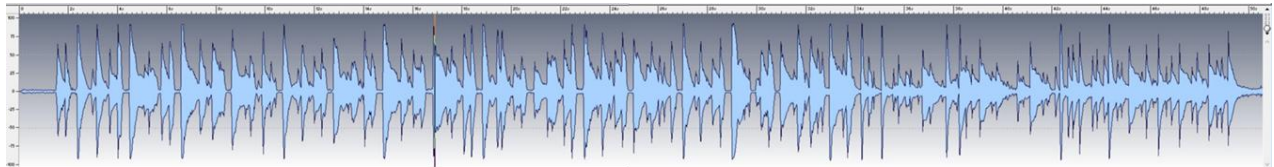


Image of Kikila's audio file created in Steinberg WaveLab 6

I'm starting to realize that that's probably what I've always been looking for in music was that thing, the ritual. The repetition. The ceremony of it, like just taking out your instrument you're like, I'm no longer having a conversation, or I'm no longer thinking those thoughts. I'm about to do something. And it's very emotive, and very, yeah, less in the head and more in the body. And I find like a lot of repetitive acts tend to put me in that mode. (Kikila)

Chords to the ukulele song

Em C/G D G

The C/G is alternating between a C and a G



Photo and painting by Mona, shared with permission

I found myself thinking of the movement and interconnectedness and complex boundaries I associate with our world, which led me to 'blending'. I figured this would be a way to maximize on the use of water colour too, so I just ran with it and let the lines bleed into their surroundings. I tried adding some other

colours and hard lines too for contrast to balance out the piece, which I suppose could be tied to how I also see reality as precise and structured like a puzzle and full of distinctive, contrastive forms. (Mona)



The first painting. You see the dancer connecting to different parts of the place including the clouds, sky and sunlight. (Anya)

Touched
By rain and sun
In a playful dance
All intertwined
Is the evidence of life
Connected

Own photo and painting

The second painting. An expression of joy. This happens in nature when conditions are just right for all elements to interact and flower and grow. There seems to be a core plant. It is being touched by rain and sun and creates an explosion of curly shapes that fill the air. There was no planned composition or



Own photo and painting

colour. It was as if the parts just grew freely. Perhaps there is some repetition in the shapes and colours and some stability in the composition itself that expresses connectedness between elements. There is no dancer, no "I", but I am included in the energy flow that leads from the core out to all directions.

(Anya)

I did make a couple of deliberate trips here to take photos and look at the textures and approach it more creatively than I have done. Normally it's sort of a space that I come to do my university work, whereas I saw it as an opportunity to do something creative with it. So, I think I was a bit more attentive to it when I did come back. And I came back with my little phone camera or with my sketch pad and had a think about that. (Sarah)



Photos by Sarah, shared with permission

You can take a photo, but you don't look at things quite the same in a photo. Everything is flattened. Photos distort things actually. And so, just even getting quick sketches outside, you get more of a place, I think, because it's not just what you can see, it's everything. ... I did mostly pencil sketches because I don't have my art kit with me, so I'm quite limited. So, I used different kind of pencils and trying to work with that. (Sarah)



Photos and sketches by Sarah, shared with permission

On my early days swimming at the cove, it was quiet most of the day and certainly in the mornings and evenings when I swam or the day when I buried a large swath of burlap deep beneath the rocks of the bay. It was a frosty morning. As I recall, the water was clear and turquoise; I could see every shell and every barnacle beneath. I had to reach into the water to bury it. I do not know what drew me to do this, but I know I had to see what would happen if it was given time to live here. (Robyn)

When I uncovered it for the first time months later, the tide was low, and the sun was too. It was just peeking over the horizon. I captured it photographically, racing about in bare feet; my hands frozen, and the wind threatening to pull the burlap and its three supporting steel poles



Photo and art by Robyn, shared with permission

down. It succeeded, but those glimpses of movement in the first set of photos, the elegance of their imminent collapse, and the way the wind tugged at the fabric of sea-saturated burlap sails spoke to me. It spoke to me of my childhood and sailing, the elation I felt at the bow when the wind was in my face. It spoke to me of fleeting moments shared between people, between places, between material elements. (Robyn)

Appendix D

Consent form



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form

Self-Awareness and Connectedness to Place

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project entitled “Experiencing connectedness to place through self-reflective learning: A participatory phenomenological study with students on UVic campus” that is being conducted by Anya van Zijll Langhout. Anya is a PhD candidate in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. The research is carried out under the supervision of Dr. Ted Riecken.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the research is to learn how UVic students experience connectedness to place while implementing self-reflective learning to stimulate awareness of being in an environment. To learn about this, participants are invited to explore and express their connectedness to place in multiple and creative forms. Various optional learning opportunities are suggested to help participants engage in self-reflection in connection to place. Participants are invited to express their experiences through interviews in the form of open dialogues.

Importance of this Research

The result of this research will offer insight into students’ experience of connectedness to place and a deeper understanding of how self-reflection with a focus on being aware in place can be implemented. In a time of ecological crisis and a growing interest in development of self-awareness, this research contributes to the educational field by offering suggestions for place-connected and self-reflective learning based on students’ own experiences. Suggestions that come out of this research can be implemented by educators in all disciplines who wish to include a place-based and environmental perspective in their teaching.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are or have recently been a UVic student, have indicated that you feel connected to one or more outdoor places on or near UVic campus, and that you share an interest in learning more about the topic.

What is involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

- One interview in January or February, 2022 at a time of your convenience. The interview will take place in the outdoor location you have selected and focus on discussing how you feel connected to this place and other places. The amount of time needed for the interview is about 1 hour. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. In accordance with the COVID-19 regulations we will keep a distance of 2 meters and you may wear a mask if you prefer. If UVic’s

COVID-19 regulations change before our meeting, we will adapt accordingly, for instance, we may need to use UVic's Zoom technology for the interview.

- Personal exploration of your connectedness to place through self-reflective activities. To support you, you will be emailed a list of suggestions. Suggestions include optional workshops at UVic that you may freely attend, and short descriptions based on theory of self-reflective learning. Self-reflective activities in connection to place also include your own exploration in creative forms, such as written, visual or multimedia expressions, or any creative form you wish.
- A second interview in April or May, 2022 to be scheduled at a time of your convenience. This interview takes place under the same conditions as the first interview. At this time you may also share any creative artifacts you made, or you may choose not to share them but merely discuss your learning process.
- After these research activities you will be contacted again in the 2021/2022 academic year, to give you the opportunity to review research outcomes that include your information, before it is published.

Inconvenience and risks

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including stress due to the time commitment for interviews and other optional activities you choose to engage in. Also, it is possible that you may experience some unexpected emotional discomfort during self-reflection activities. If at any time you feel that your workload or any other personal reason causes that you cannot continue, you may withdraw or participate partially at your convenience. Additionally, there is a risk of exposure to COVID-19. If you or the researcher show any symptoms, activities will be canceled or postponed, and BC health authorities should be contacted for further instructions. If symptoms occur after an interview took place, contact tracing will be carried out. In this case, personal information will be kept separate from research data.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include being involved as a co-creator of a kind of knowledge that is important in times of ecological crisis and relevant for discussions of connectedness to place and self-reflective learning. Being a participant also allows you to engage in a personal learning journey, supported by educational activities you may opt to participate in.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time by emailing the researcher, without explanation and without any consequences. If you do withdraw from the research, your data will only be used if you give permission in written form.

On-going Consent

Before the second interview your consent will be confirmed by reminding you of this consent form and by asking you to orally confirm that you are still in agreement, or if you wish to make changes by signing a new consent form.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

In terms of protecting your anonymity, a pseudonym will be used, unless you indicate below that you wish to be identified by your real name. Because the interviews take place outside, your confidentiality cannot be completely guaranteed. Depending on the location, people may see you being interviewed.

Future Use of Data: *please select one*

I consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.