Chapter 2
Understanding Ecojustice Education as a Praxis of Environmental Reconciliation: Teacher Education, Indigenous Knowledges, and Relationality

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> *Unless Indigenous and non–Indigenous students understand Indigenous world view and values, they will never be effective change agents toward healthy cross–cultural relations.*
>
> Bell 2011, p. 383

Abstract In recent years, reconciliation has become a central concept in renewing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada. In this chapter, we apply this concept to environmental education (EE), exploring principles through which EE scholars, both in Canada and internationally, can take up EE as a praxis of environmental reconciliation. In particular, we analyze the literature on ecojustice education, discussing both the possibilities and the limitations of this framework in relation to Indigenous education. We then present qualitative findings from teacher candidates (TCs) completing a voluntary practicum in an Indigenous community and discuss how the findings indicate the shortcomings of

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current teacher education practices in relation to EE and the need for an environmental reconciliation-oriented approach. Finally, we provide specific recommendations for EE scholars elsewhere who wish to take up EE as a praxis of environmental reconciliation.

In 2007, a group of Canadian Indian Residential School survivors won a class action settlement agreement against the Government of Canada, worth an estimated 2 billion dollars. One of the outcomes of this settlement was the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada, with a mandate to uncover the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada and to foster reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Between 2008 and 2015, the TRC traveled across Canada, listening to the stories of survivors and facilitating various public commemorative events. Now, with the conclusion of the TRC's mandate, reconciliation has become an important concept when discussing the relations among and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. And yet, as Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (2013) have pointed out, the common use of the word "reconciliation" among various parties can "obscure the complex negotiations surrounding the slippage of meanings attributed to this word" (p. 9). The underlying question, according to the same authors, is what degree of change to the status quo is required for reconciliation to take place. In a settler colonial state such as Canada, one central aspect of the status quo that stands in the way of reconciliation is the relationship of the people to the land they live on (Veracini 2010). Canada was founded on the forcible displacement of Indigenous peoples from the land they had lived on since time immemorial (McCrossan 2015). During this process of colonization, Indigenous peoples' traditional reciprocal and holistic relationship to their environment was replaced with an industrial model for envisioning the environment as an object and a resource existing apart from an artificially abstracted society (Henderson 2000).

Now that the TRC's official report has been released, we believe it provides important ways forward toward meaningful social, political, and environmental reconciliation in Canada. In particular, the TRC (2015) puts forward an important understanding of "reconciliation as relationship" (p. 21). This understanding holds an important potential for renewing environmental education (EE) as a situated relationship with local communities and their respective environments. According to the TRC:

> Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non–Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This is a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth. Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous laws stress that humans must journey through life in conversation and negotiation with all creation. Reciprocity and mutual respect help sustain our survival. (p. 18)

The TRC here suggests a clear way forward for EE in Canada, through renewing local relationships between the community and the environment. However, in many Indigenous communities in Canada, this local and relational approach toward

education remains complicated by the high number of non-Indigenous teachers from outside the community, often from distant urban centers, living and teaching on their reserve (Butler 2016).

In response to this dislocating situation, this chapter examines the process of non-Indigenous teacher educators and candidates learning to teach EE in a culturally relational manner within an Indigenous community. We seek to answer the following question: How can non-Indigenous teachers coming from outside an Indigenous community engage in EE in relational ways that honor local Indigenous knowledges? In doing so, we also hope to deepen our understanding of the ways in which the Teacher Education Program at the University of Ottawa continues to reproduce a neocolonial discursive regime that excludes local Indigenous knowledges (Butler et al. 2015). Such exclusions, we argue, create various epistemological and discursive barriers for TCs (and university educators) who are committed toward creating spaces to develop and become ecologically literate citizens.

In this chapter, drawing on our experience with an ongoing collaborative partnership between a Kitigan Zibi Algonquin community and the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, we seek to understand the potential relations between EE and reconciliation. In each year since 2011, 10–15 TCs, enrolled in the Developing a Global Perspectives (DGPE) cohort within the Teacher Education Program at the University of Ottawa, have been working with First Nation teachers and students at the Kikinamadinan elementary and secondary school on the Kitigan Zibi reserve, located 90 min north of our settler capital, in Quebec, Canada. Each year, these students are asked to develop a social action curriculum project – public service announcements, newsletters, unit plans, etc. – in collaboration with Elders in the community and teachers at the school and within the context of a curriculum design and evaluation course (see Ng-A-Fook 2011). TCs then implement the project at the school as part of their community service learning hours over the course of the academic year. As an element of the scope and sequencing of their professional development, the TCs travel three times to the community during the first semester, for an orientation and to plan their social action curriculum project. During the second semester, they travel once every 2 weeks to volunteer in a teacher's classroom. In May, after completing their final teacher education program, TCs have the opportunity to do a 7–10-day alternative placement at the school.

In the sections that follow, we illustrate the differing ways in which TCs experienced a gradual shift in their perspectives about the relational connections between local Indigenous cultural and environmental knowledges. We present our experiences with this program as a qualitative case study (Stake 2005), exploring the possibilities and limitations of using ecojustice as a model for engaging in EE toward reconciliation within the Canadian context of our Teacher Education Program at the University of Ottawa. Indigenous communities worldwide are extremely diverse, with their own unique cosmological, epistemological, ontological, and spiritual world views. Nonetheless, many of those differing world views are often united in terms of how their knowledge systems are rooted in relation to the land and waterways they live upon and across. As Marie Battiste (2013) observes: "Indigenous peoples have a science or way of knowing, but it is a concept that has embodied a

way of life, an intimacy and directness with nature" (p. 160). Therefore, while our case study relates particularly to EE within the context of Canadian Indigenous communities, our initial research in this specific area of study provides some guidance for international teacher educators who seek to use EE to foster relations of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

In the next section, we present a literature review which works to situate the concept of environmental reconciliation in relation to ecojustice education and Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the world. In the third section, we present our qualitative interview data from six TCs completing a voluntary 7-day alternate practicum in an Indigenous community, demonstrating how their experiences transformed their perception of EE. In our final and concluding section, we provide a synthesis of the possibilities and limitations of our research in terms of recommendations for teacher educators, both within and beyond a Canadian context, who are committed toward developing EE within their teacher education programs as a potential praxis of environmental reconciliation in terms of our relations, not only with Indigenous communities but also with the more-than-human world.

2.1 Situating Ecojustice Education as a Praxis of Environmental Reconciliation

According to Rebecca A. Martusewicz et al. (2011), ecojustice education is a holistic, critical, and social justice-oriented approach to environmental education. One key element of ecojustice education is an emphasis on preserving the Commons, which can be described as:

> the necessary interdependent relationship of humans with the land, air, water, and other species with whom we share this planet, and the intergenerational practices and relationships among diverse groups of people that do not require the exchange of money as the primary motivation and generally result in mutual aid and support. (Martusewicz et al. 2011, p. 9)

Furthermore, these authors continue, ecojustice education "refuses the dichotomy between social justice and environmental concerns, arguing instead that they must be understood as grounded in the same cultural history" (p. 10). This recognition of the interrelation between the society and the environment represents an important step toward establishing EE as a model of environmental reconciliation.

Nonetheless, aspects of an ecojustice approach can be problematic from an Indigenous perspective. In her analysis of the work of ecojustice theorist Chet Bowers, Sandy Grande (2008) contends that Bowers maintains some of the very features he critiques in the Eurocentric tradition: "namely, the importance of critical reflection, an orientation toward (emancipatory) change, and a mastery of critical forms of literacy that enable such reflection and change" (p. 249). These features can be seen as products of the particular form of Western epistemology which philosopher Charles Taylor (1987) has described as characteristic of modern European cultures. This epistemology envisions detached and autonomous individuals operating

within a universe of autonomous objects, stripped of all relationality. While Western cultures and epistemologies are no more monolithic than Indigenous ones, we believe it is important to recognize the broad patterns that characterize them, including the epistemological denial of environmental relationality and the impact such negation has had through the discursive regime of colonialism, namely, the institution settler North Americans call public schooling (Battiste 2013). Insofar as ecojustice remains rooted primarily in the Eurocentric philosophical tradition, therefore, it risks maintaining aspects of the status quo, despite its explicit critical intentions. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012), for instance, caution: "Claiming land for the Commons and asserting consensus as the rule of the Commons, erases existing, prior, and future Native land rights, decolonizing leadership, and forms of self–government" (p. 28). Martusewicz et al. (2011) acknowledge these concerns and dedicate a chapter of their book to describing parallels to ecojustice in Indigenous approaches as a way of "paying respect" (p. 250). This is an important gesture on their part. Nonetheless, a deeper engagement with Indigenous knowledges will enable ecojustice education, and EE more generally, to be more responsive to the cosmological, material, psychological, social, and spiritual needs and world views of Indigenous communities.

Following scholars such as Marie Battiste (2013) and Nicole Bell (2013), we understand Indigenous knowledges as being centered on places and relationships. Traditionally, Indigenous knowledges were grounded in a holistic awareness of what it meant to live well in a particular place. As Bell (2013) explains: "One's very existence depends on the web of interconnectedness between the self and the community and between the community and nature" (p. 98). As a result, a relationship to the specific local landscape was and is central to the ontology and epistemology of Indigenous communities (Simpson 2014). Kulnieks et al. (2010) have built on this understanding of knowledge as situated and interconnected to propose that all knowledges should be understood as originating from the contextual interpersonal relationships of particular communities. This perspective, however, stands in stark contrast to the Western ideals of knowledge that continue to dominate our educational institutions, which have tended to portray knowledge as fixed, absolute, and detached from any particular context (Bowers 2013). As a result, Battiste (2013) contends that education in Indigenous contexts must displace universalized forms of Western knowledge and return the relationality of local intergenerational knowledges toward decentralizing such essentialist settler colonial epistemological positions.

Dan Roronhiakewen Longboat et al. (2013) call for an ecojustice education that moves beyond dualisms and instead returns to a situated, holistic, sense of living well in the world. To achieve such (re)new(ed) balance requires, we suggest, carefully situated critiques of the universalizing ideologies put forth in the name of Western epistemologies (Taylor 1987) that have justified our historical route toward the current ecological crisis by portraying nature as an objective resource, existing apart from human life but available for human manipulation (Bowers 2013). As settler teachers and researchers, therefore, how might we then learn to become more self-critical in our past, present, and future engagements with Indigenous communities

and their respective world views? How might we establish ethical relations with Indigenous knowledges without reducing their differing knowledge systems to ways that fit comfortably into our preexisting Eurocentric disciplinary teacher education categories (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013)? Nonetheless, Longboat et al. (2013) also consider the separation of Western and Indigenous knowledges as another artificial dualism that must be overcome. Drawing on these scholars, therefore, we see the potential reconciling possibilities of reconceptualizing and renewing a relational partnership between models of ecojustice education developed in Anglo-Canadian educational institutions and traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge. Within our Canadian context, we have come to understand this partnership as a form of environmental reconciliation.

Through the lens of environmental reconciliation, we believe ecojustice education can provide a valuable curricular and pedagogical starting point in preparing TCs to teach EE in a culturally responsive manner in Indigenous communities. By disrupting the abstract and decontextualized knowledges of our educational institutions, and by calling attention instead to the concrete relational realities of the Commons, ecojustice education can unsettle many of the assumptions TCs bring with them into Indigenous communities, particularly the old (stock) Eurocentric humanist ideal that the environment is separate from society. However, ecojustice is not an Indigenous model and should be used with caution when preparing TCs for Indigenous contexts. In this light, we propose that Bell's (2013) portrayal of the Four Directions (Fig. 2.1) can act as a model of EE to complement and counterbalance an ecojustice model.

The primary value of Bell's model, for our situated purposes, is how it undercuts the type of analytic subdivision found in the traditional Eurocentric understanding of

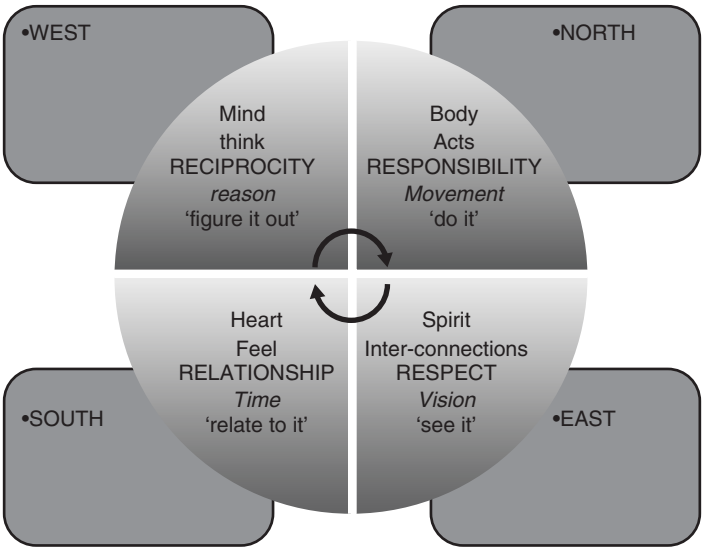

Fig. 2.1 The Four Directions (Source: Bell 2013 p. 96)

the self and the environment – what Bell refers to as "a breaking apart of concepts without relation to the whole" (p. 99). While neither self nor environment is explicitly included in Bell's model, a careful reading suggests that both are present throughout it but exist in a relational rather than an analytic form. A self is not an isolated, autonomous entity lurking in between mind, body, heart, and spirit but a dynamic result of their relational interactions. Likewise, the environment is not a reality separate from and existing beyond the boundaries of self but is dynamically related to mind, body, heart, and spirit – as self, society, and environment mutually constitute one another. Where the notion of environment in the Western tradition is often implied to be inert and objective, the Four Directions here are explicitly relational, for they are not merely a field within which the self can be placed, but are orientations a person always exists in relation to and lives by while seeking to live well.

Our adoption of Bell's model is meant to complement and contextualize ecojustice – not to replace it. Grande (2008) expresses concerns about the critical tradition in which ecojustice operates while ultimately observing the following:

> Nevertheless, if revolutionary critical pedagogy is able to sustain the same kind of penetrating analysis it unleashes on capitalism, it may evolve into an invaluable tool for indigenous peoples and their allies, fighting to protect and extend indigenous sovereignty over tribal land and resources. (p. 249)

We propose, therefore, that ecojustice education, when understood through Bell's model of the Four Directions, can help TCs learn how to live well within, and pedagogically reflect, the interconnected ecological and cultural contexts of the Indigenous communities where they serve. Such education must be a complex, iterative process. TCs should first be given the opportunity to explore general principles of Indigenous and environmental education in order to open critical engagement with their cultural assumptions and reflexivity about their teaching practices. As Cherubini (2011) suggests, TCs often do not have an understanding of cultures that differ from their own, and therefore teacher education programs should be challenging their ideologies and preconceptions, in order to develop a greater sense of self-awareness. This education should not remain at a general level, however, but should become situated as teachers immerse themselves into a particular Indigenous community and expose themselves to local traditional ecological knowledges. By revisiting and critiquing their cultural assumptions in an ongoing iterative and recursive manner, TCs can learn to take up EE not as a set of universal Eurocentric principles, but as a situated praxis of environmental reconciliation.

2.2 Nature's Kind of Like Their Best Friend

In this section, we present narrative snapshots of the critical reflections from six TCs who completed the voluntary 7-day alternate practicum in an Indigenous community. To that end, lead coresearchers Giuliano Reis and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook obtained research ethics to conduct the interviews with the teacher candidates after their practicum placements. The interviews lasted for about an hour each and were videotaped. Some of the questions included in the interview guide were:

"Has your understanding of the environment changed after practicum? If so, how?"; "Has your understanding of nature changed after practicum? If so, how?"; "Has your perspective on environmental education changed after practicum? If so, how?"; and "What benefits do you perceive there may be – if any – in integrating Indigenous knowledge, perspective and/or culture into your teaching practice?"

As we demonstrate, these TCs entered the community with a generalized awareness of common distinctive features of traditional Indigenous cultures, but they were not prepared to teach EE relationally, as a form of intercultural reconciliation. Some of these TCs were initially unsettled that the teachers were not, as they expected, explicitly incorporating references to EE into the curriculum. As we discussed in the previous section, this can be attributed to certain tendencies TCs learn within the discursive regime of a European intellectual tradition. Our findings suggest that these TCs entered their practicum expecting an analytical rather than a relational approach for incorporating EE into the classroom. Nonetheless, they appear to have gradually recognized that the environment was embedded coherently and holistically within the intergenerational teachings of this Indigenous community. We suggest that the learning process these TCs experienced over the course of their practicum, and in particular the preexisting assumptions they had to overcome, indicates the potential value of the situated and relational approach to EE that we have proposed.

At the outset, the TCs we interviewed appeared to enter the community assuming a binary division between the city and nature, expecting the Indigenous community to embody an urban idealization of naturalness. As Helen (pseudonyms are used throughout to preserve anonymity), one of the TCs, observed: "I'm not really a nature person. I'm a city girl which is going to be really interesting … on a reserve." In relation to EE, Helen expressed surprise that the resources of the local environment were not integrated into the curriculum. She spoke enthusiastically about the relaxed atmosphere near the lake and the comfort level of local community residents engaging in social and day-to-day conversations at the cottage where the TCs resided and coming together to have a meal. Helen concluded: "I'm just trying to think if there was anything really about the environment. No … not that I can think of." When asked whether environmental sustainability was integrated into the curriculum, Sarah, another TC, replied "No, not really." She did acknowledge the visible recycling program in place throughout the school: "They recycled. They had recycling everywhere. That's probably all for environmental." Shannon revealed similar first impressions. When asked whether EE was taken up in the school, she responded: "No not with the school as a whole." These comments reveal a particular set of preconceptions about what EE should look like. Coming from an urban context, these TCs seem to expect the environment to be taught separately, as a discrete topic of study. Furthermore, the praxis of EE was assumed to be limited to explicit conservation activities, such as recycling.

Nonetheless, through their experiences in the community, these TCs began to realize the complexity of the Commons. For instance, Shannon commented:

> They have Smart boards in all of their classrooms and I'm sure when they go home they have Internet as well but I felt like there must be some kind of an influence because when you leave the school and go home at night it's just … going to be your house and then the

> neighbours like way, way, way down that way and you know all through the night you can hear the lake, you can hear frogs, you can see stars. And I felt like it was overall a much calmer stress–free environment. And I noticed that in the kids as well.

The holistic and situated nature of the Commons in this Indigenous community led to EE being far more integrated and contextual than the TCs were originally expecting. Helen commented on one such instance:

> I guess the government wanted to cut down trees and they were trying to preserve their land and then they were talking later after we finished watching her video the students were talking about you know how they were losing their land, the loss of how important the land is to them … and then someone mentioned medicine 'cause … there's a lot of herbs and medicine they take directly from the land.

Abigail, meanwhile, commented on how EE was embedded within the very life of the community:

> They didn't give me a sense of protecting the earth–like there's a big focus on … protecting the environment … in Ontario curriculum and I didn't get that sense … from what they were talking about but … it's most like the nature's kind of like their best friend. You know what I mean, it's like a … part of their family. It's a crucial part of their society that they take along with them.

In the context of the school and its community, the environment was not being taught or experienced as a discrete subject, which exists apart from the curriculum and must be artificially integrated into it. Rather, the environment was implicit part of living well within community. As the TCs began to recognize this, it gradually changed their perspective on what it might mean to live and teach well within Indigenous communities.

As Bell (2013) explains, traditional Indigenous education was embedded within organic relationships between the person, the community, and the environment. As the TCs' narratives suggest, the day-to-day life of the school and its community was interconnected by deep intergenerational relationships with their history, culture, and environment. However, our analysis also suggests that the TCs were not well prepared to encounter this relational approach to EE in their practicum. In this sense, we propose that an ecojustice model of EE can be one resource to better prepare TCs for the complex interconnectedness of EE with Indigenous communities. While ecojustice maintains certain Western philosophical assumptions that limit its value as a possible praxis toward reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, it can provide a valuable first step in disrupting the initial assumptions of TCs and preparing them to be open to the relationality of intergenerational Indigenous environmental knowledges. In our concluding section, we will provide some specific recommendations.

2.3 Teacher Candidates and EE Scholars Acting as Agents of Reconciliation

As we have suggested throughout this chapter, an ecojustice framework provides a valuable starting point for preparing TCs to recognize and engage with the complex relational interconnections of the environment within an Indigenous community.

Our findings indicate that an awareness of the traditional historical–cultural practices of different Indigenous communities is equally important for TCs, but that on its own, such awareness can simply become a new source of stereotypes. This generalized knowledge must be augmented with a relational awareness of how these traditions are preserved and transformed in the day-to-day reality and situated local contexts that remain specific to the different Indigenous communities who have inhabited these territories since time immemorial. We suggest, therefore, that the adoption of certain elements of ecojustice education within teacher education programs can help prepare TCs to encounter the interconnectedness of environmental and sociocultural education within an Indigenous community. By better preparing TCs to teach EE in a relational rather than a Western analytical and "enlightened" manner, we believe that these future teachers can be better equipped to act as agents of environmental reconciliation within and outside of Indigenous communities, both in Canada and internationally. In what follows, we recommend two specific principles of ecojustice education that can be used toward environmental reconciliation.

First, an ecojustice approach toward preparing TCs to engage with EE in Indigenous communities should begin with a critique of the Eurocentric logic of domination that was used to justify the establishment of settler colonial states like Canada. As Martusewicz et al. (2011) describe:

> We suggest that this logic of domination, deeply rooted in Western culture, and operating metaphorically, underlies the acceptance and continuation of class inequality, along with gender and race inequalities, other forms of social degradation, and ecological devastation. If the rational is superior, and humans are rational, then humans are morally justified in dominating or exploiting nature and anything else defined as analogous to or "like" nature. (p. 63)

This critical approach parallels Battiste's (2013) call for sustained critiques of the "cognitive imperialism" (p. 158) that continues to position Western knowledges as superior to Indigenous knowledges. In order for TCs to be able to engage respectfully with local Indigenous knowledges, they must first encounter the limits of their own epistemologies.

Second, an ecojustice approach emphasizes the importance of learning in collaboration with the community in relation to our local environments. Such situated learning is particularly important in relation to Indigenous education. As our small study indicates, even as TCs become more aware of Indigenous cultures, they will still tend to generalize this knowledge into abstract principles. This is a result, we suggest, of our Western educational system, which often valorizes abstracted knowledge (Bowers 2013). Our study also illustrated, however, how resilient these cultural assumptions are, even in the midst of situational learning. While our interviewees did gradually shift toward a more relational understanding of the interconnectedness of community, culture, and environment, such relational transformations and connections to the local environment could have happened more quickly if they had been better prepared within their teacher education program. This, in turn, would have enabled these TCs to make more effective use of their practicum,

to the benefit of their Algonquin students and associate teachers. For this reason, we recommend having TCs visit an Indigenous school before their practicum. Particularly when bringing these experiences into dialogue with the critical approach to education previously discussed, TCs can reflect on these initial experiences as a way to work through their settler colonial assumptions before beginning their practicum.

Through official mechanisms such as Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), settler colonial societies like Canada are becoming more aware of the need to bring reconciliation to our constitutional, community, and environmental relationships. As we have suggested in this chapter, one crucial area in which this work must take place is the preparation of TCs to teach in Indigenous communities. In particular, we have argued that they should be prepared to teach EE in a way that respectfully engages with the complex and situated interrelationship of culture and environment in specific Indigenous communities. We suggest that ecojustice education can provide a praxis to help prepare TCs to live within and pedagogically reflect the complex ecological and cultural contexts of the communities they serve. While ecojustice education has limits that must be acknowledged, we believe it can provide a valuable starting point, through which the initial settler colonial assumptions of TCs can be unsettled. In turn, TCs might become better prepared to take up EE within and in collaboration with Indigenous communities, whether that is here in Canada or abroad. Furthermore, these principles, drawn from Indigenous world views, can help international EE scholars and educators develop EE in a manner that is more responsive and related to situated and local contexts and, in turn, connected to other national and/or global environmental issues. In this way, both non-Indigenous TCs preparing to teach in Indigenous communities, and EE scholars working to make their work more responsive to Indigenous cultures, can take one small but important step toward being agents of reconciliation.

Questions

Discussion questions that could help instructors and students to engage in meaningful conversation about the ideas presented in this chapter.

1. What are ways in which Indigenous educational relations with the environment differ from those of non-Indigenous settlers in North America?
2. What are some strengths and weaknesses of ecojustice education, from the perspective of various Indigenous education scholars?
3. How might we draw on an Indigenous and ecojustice environmental education praxis to critique the cultural assumptions underlying existing curriculum policy documents and/or teaching practices both inside and outside the contexts of public education?
4. In what ways does our praxis in this course challenge and/or reproduce Eurocentric epistemologies that separate us from the relational context of the environment?
5. What are some ways we might engage a praxis of reconciliation with the environment as teachers and educational researchers?

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