



Walking my talk: taking action to learn/relearn/unlearn towards engaged pedagogy

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WALKING MY TALK:

Taking action to learn/relearn/unlearn towards engaged pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

“I tell you this to break your heart, by which I mean only that it break open and never close again to the rest of the world” (Oliver, 2005, p. 54).

We exist in a time where social pressure and desire to conform encourages us to live in excess and wastefully (Leonard, 2010), yet we are seeing increasingly unstable climatic events (Gore, 2011). For example, we are hearing reports from many scientists that suggest that we can, and should, be making changes in how we live (Gilding, 2011). We are past the place of hiding in denial regarding the need for change (Gore, 2011). “We must accept the world as we know it is going to change” (McKibben, 2010, p. 176), yet finding ways to engage others in social/cultural change towards living more sustainably is challenging.

As a teacher educator, I have asked the question, ‘how might I model action and change to help my students learn how to take action to make changes in their own lives’? The following chapter offers a glimpse into my five-year journey to answer this question. It is a small example of the evolving decision making processes I have implemented in an attempt to bring change to personal living practices, the ways I have embraced new discourses that support sustainable living, and my efforts to translate this experience into teacher education curriculum and learning. This work has meant focussing on the development of my own personal living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989). And I have attempted to build this work into what I call ‘engaged pedagogy’. This has become my activism in/through education and an effort to ‘walk my talk’. I begin by presenting the details of this personal journey, with journal entries followed by a discussion of the many helpful new educational and ecological discourses that have become resources to ground new thinking about my role as activist and model for my students.

MY JOURNEY INTO ACTION LEARNING/RELEARNING/UNLEARNING

“There is no passion to be found playing small in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living” (Mandela).

My Journey Began With a Shocking Realisation

It was the revelation that my personal living choices resulted in me not walking my talk as an environmental educator that initiated my embodied research journey. I realised that if change begins within, I needed to work to begin that change.

Here I am, having recently moved to Canada to study environmental education, and I have an ecological footprint of 16.4 hectares. Oh, the irony! Oh, the embarrassment! And it's not just the literal interpretation that is so devastating, it is the implied reality that comes from realising that not everyone can live like me and I feel almost gratitude that this is the case... this is what I mean by reality – what a horribly privileged feeling! How can I possibly hold my head up in any educational situation and profess to know anything about environmental education when, right now, I embody the problem, and I am certainly not living the solution. This needs to change; I need to change how I practice living if I am to practice environmental education with any dignity, self-respect, and intentionality. (Journal 1, 3rd October 2005)

I learned about the ecological footprint analysis when I first used an ecological footprint calculator. Ecological footprint analysis is a tool that can help translate sustainability concerns into public action – it is both analytical and educational. “It accounts for the flow of energy and matter to and from any defined economy and converts these into the corresponding land/water area requirements from nature to support these flows” (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996, p. 3). The ecological footprint calculation is a tool that prompts a quantifiable measurement of how living practices have a real cost to the environment. It is a tool that facilitates comparison to how other individuals, events, or organisations might also impact the environment. While this tool is not without issues. For example it doesn't account easily for the cost to the environment of the infrastructure involved with our western ways of living, yet it does provide useful information to make comparisons. I found within it ideas that suggested how I might continue to change my practices to reduce my ecological footprint even further.

I read about the creation of the calculation (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996) and was impressed with its logic and relevance. As I investigated the ecological footprint concept, I found it to be a treasure trove of ideas and possibilities for future action. Each question of the calculation offers many opportunities to (re)consider my current living practices in such a way that I might lower my total hectare (land/water) use. I found a local online calculator (Royal Saskatchewan Museum) that facilitated a quantified measurement while prompting and generating ideas for continued improvement. The beauty of using a locally generated calculator was that the factors relating to city infrastructure and governance were already accounted for. My data would be corrected for living in Regina. (Journal 1, 11th November 2005)

The Royal Saskatchewan Museum (1999) Ecological Footprint Calculator allowed me to compare my results with other Canadians and people living in other parts of the world, which was useful when considering the implications of my privileged existence and the injustices experienced by others not immersed within my worldview, societal discourses, and western paradigms. However, over time I have come to understand that the living practices I changed most significantly are those made acceptable by western discourse. I make no claim to abstract these living practices towards societies not privileged with such excess and access to resources. This is an important consideration, and one that must be made very clearly when presenting my lived experience. This work is socially bounded.

Through using the Ecological Footprint Calculator my results were presented in ways that visually represented the magnitude and implications of my current living decisions and choices.

- The choices I make everyday affect every other living being. When used with honesty, this tool demonstrates how every decision I make has a result or an impact on others (human and more than-human).
- The ecological footprint calculation makes the implications of my daily living choices more visible and obvious. *All those times when we are home alone, and no-one is looking, we decide to finally clear the hallway by putting all the recycling into the garbage, or to drive the car instead of catching the bus, or to leave the lights on in rooms we have just vacated. These are choices. They are not always made out of convenience. Sometimes it's wilful; however, sometimes it is unconscious. It is our personal responsibility to think through these choices and to make better ones with the bigger (environment included) picture in mind. There is no easy way out of the situation (environmental devastation and/or social collapse) we are in. We are being socially constructed to let others do the hard work for us. In fact, the definition of 'convenience' is paying other people to do it for you. (Journal 2, 19th February 2006)*

I (Re)Learned How to Practice Living: Taking action to learn/relearn/unlearn

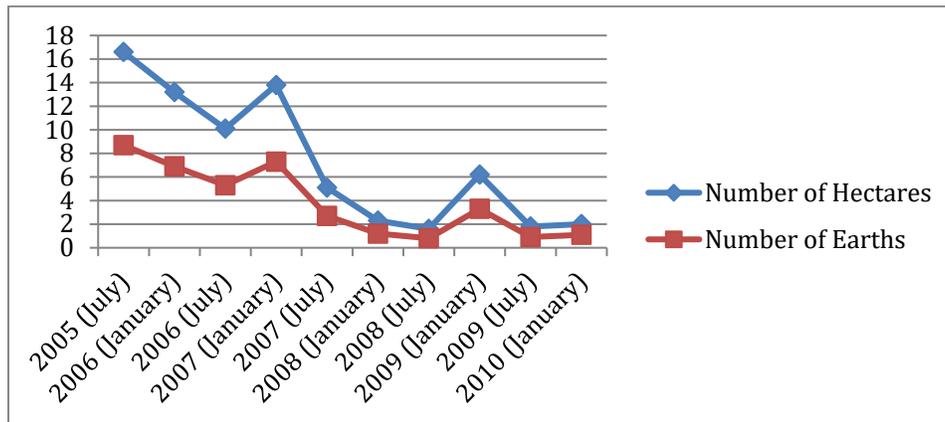
I proposed that with some strategic changes to my living practices I could lower my ecological footprint and respectfully present myself as an intentional environmental educator who walked her talk, took her own advice, and could offer personalised experiences in and around how to make sustainable living choices. I set a goal.

An ecological Footprint of 16.4 hectares is unacceptable, given my chosen profession and philosophical position. While there are obvious reasons for this high hectare use (travelling from Australia to Canada), some changes are required in my living practices so that I am walking my talk and can become the intentional environmental educator I want to be. I aim to reduce my footprint so that if everyone lived like me, while valuing the greatest amount of biodiversity, we could all live on our one planet. I will make changes to my living practices until I achieve a stable ecological footprint of 1.8 hectares (at this point in time with this current world population). I give myself permission and time to explore and embody these changes, ensuring that they become integral to my lifestyle choices. I will also look for the discourses that allow and disallow such practice, considering agency and positioning. I want to feel the rub of the dominant discourses as I come up against them. (Journal 1, 12th October 2005)

My journey was quite an intense experience and often I felt as though I was Alice, disappearing down a self-generated rabbit hole. Unpacking my decisions and becoming confident in my choices took time and embodied experience. It was only as I put my whole body into this research that significant changes occurred. It took time to raise my awareness regarding how to change, and then to work out how to embody that change in an ongoing manner.

Figure 1 offers a graphic representation of how my ecological footprint reduced from 16.4 hectares in July 2005 to 1.8 hectares in July 2009. The higher results coincide with a lot of air travel as I chose to visit Australia once every two years – to spend Christmas with my family. I was careful in my calculations to measure successfully embodied changes to my practice, not just anticipated or desired change. My results now hover around 2–3 hectares, depending upon my transport choices as these choices are the most variable and environmentally costly.

Figure 1. A graphic representation of my ecological footprint analysis from July 2005 through to January 2010. The blue line illustrates the actual hectare result while the red line is the calculated number of earths required if everyone lived like me.



It took some time for me to begin to unravel my (co)constructed notions of what it meant to live as a thirty something woman in our society. Once I began to develop awareness of the possibilities I actively looked for new insights through exploring new educational and ecological discourses. I was surprised about how restricted in practice and thought I have been and how freeing and enlivening my new living practices were becoming. After three years of constant consideration I became more aware, passionate, knowledgeable, and determined; however, I'm surprised it took so long!

Figure 2 offers a visual representation of some of the changes I implemented in my daily life. The ecological footprint calculator gave me some ideas for areas in which I could take action, and others seemed to be obvious. It helped me to keep reading and talking and working on developing further ideas and testing the discourses around what it means to live more sustainably. I decided to select from a wide range of specific areas of action and challenge that I synthesised into the following headings: transport, energy conservation, water consumption, clothing, housing, consumerism, shopping, food, waste management, personal and cleaning products and others. The full details of what changed related to my personal context yet some details are helpful as they offer some examples of the depth and breadth of action I attempted:

Following are some reflections about these actions in some areas.

Transport: *I reduced my air travel, which was challenging as my family and friends live in a different country (opposite side of the world), so I made a commitment to only go home for Christmas every second year. I also reconsidered travel within my current continent, choosing alternatives to air transit whenever possible. I took the train across half of the US, I loaned my car so that one car was servicing two people, and I eventually sold it, choosing to manage my transport in other ways. These included a bike when feasible (not in winter for me), walking (possible though more difficult in winter), and public transport. Often my best choice was to not travel, and this took some effort to get my head around. As Westerners, we have become so accepting of travel, it feels like our right. If I couldn't find safe passage there and back I would just not go. I enjoyed feeling the discourses at play, especially when my friends were frustrated with my choices. Their comments and encouragements voiced many of the dominant discourses and allowed me to feel disciplining discourses in action.*

Clothing: *I learned how to shop for and wear second hand clothes, even shoes. I limited the amount of clothes I owned, returning any unnecessary items to a second hand shop. I attempted to streamline my choices producing a versatile 'classic' wardrobe rather than a selection of rapidly outdated fashions. I also valued spending time to mend my clothes and took extra care in laundering them so that most items experienced an elongated lifetime. I decided not to purchase clothes that were not made from natural fibres or that were processed in environmentally damaging ways (like bleached cotton). I considered where an item was manufactured and attempted to buy locally produced clothes.*

Housing: *I rented rooms close to the university area, house sat, and moved into residence on campus before purchasing an apartment just across the road from campus. These decisions meant that I utilised high-density living and limited the need for transport. Owning my own home meant that I could implement many energy and water saving strategies. It also meant that I could challenge myself to furnish a home without resorting to purchasing new items. I found garage sales very useful in providing well priced, quality items. I also found that I didn't really require much additional furniture, challenging another social discourse. My belongings grew, however, filling the available space, if I wasn't vigilant.*

Consumerism: *I lived to the quote "every cent you spend is a vote for the kind of environment you want to live in" (no reference). This kept me out of Dollar Stores and Walmart. I became very conscious of the items I purchased, becoming aware of the implications of the choices I was making. I considered where I was shopping and who had*

been involved in the production of the goods. I valued the environmental impact of each stage of production. I took time to learn about the processes that products underwent, and grew increasingly concerned at the international transit that many products experience before finding their way to the shop. I learned how to find alternatives to products that didn't live up to my ethics. I learned to live without, and liked it. I was determined to become un-tied to stuff. (Journal 5, 20th September 2009)

A Focus on Food: Three opportunities to get it closer to 'right' each day!

My favourite environmental issues are those that relate to how we choose to manage our health and, more specifically, food consumption. Food and health are interrelated and have become areas where we often seek others' advice, opinion, and products looking for that golden bullet, fast fix, and cure all. Food and health are wonderful areas where personal challenges to embrace a more sustainable living practice can be rewarding and relatively easy to undertake.

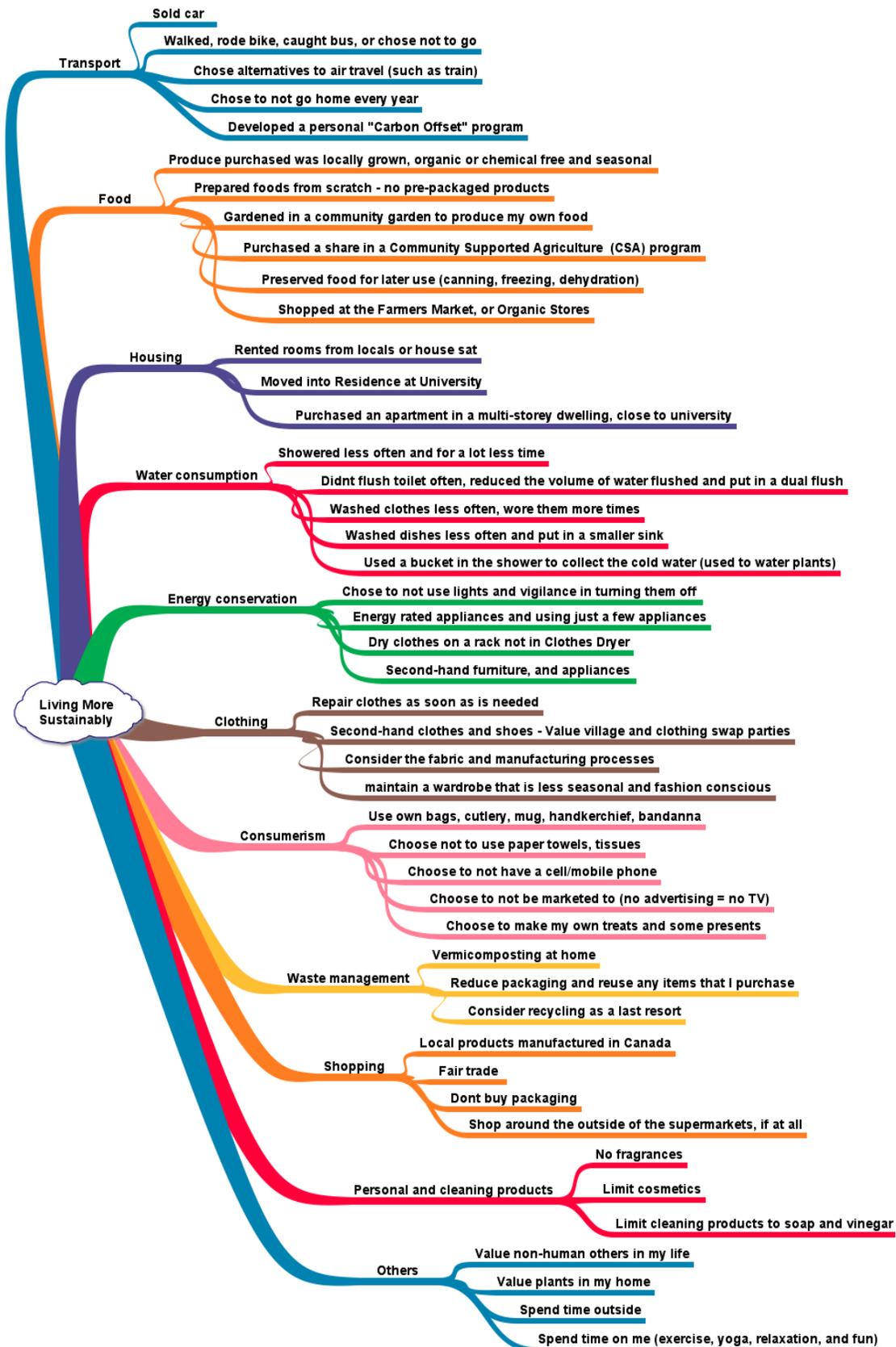
I enjoyed one wonderful Canadian summer immersing myself in food: Reading, viewing, gardening, preserving, re-considering, and constantly inquiring. These are some of the activities of learning to become responsible for my own food. I studied the food systems of western society, especially in North America, which have become corporatised where priority is given to economic growth rather than consumer health. Documentaries such as Food Inc. (Kenner, 2008) demonstrate some of the problems and present the issues in a clear, easy to comprehend, medium. Additionally, Pollan (2006) has written extensively on how to reconsider our food choices from McDonald's to growing and gathering our own foods. Kingsolver (2007) moved her entire family to a location where they could begin to live without the corporatised food system. They learned to grow and prepare their own food and consume local products. I found this inspirational and, in my own way, began to emulate the journey towards taking responsibility, working towards practicing greater sustainability, and finding healthier ways of nourishing myself.

*Health care, as it relates to food, can be as easy as reading and understanding the ingredients in the products we choose. Many products that we eat and apply to our bodies are neither good for us nor safe for consumption. I understand the trust and unquestioned belief in our system that suggests we wouldn't be able to make the purchase if it wasn't safe, yet, as it turns out, the safeguards that should protect the consumer are not in place as we might hope and they really don't deserve our trust. As consumers we should investigate these issues and make our own **informed** decisions. Additionally, many of the processes that our food goes through before it gets to us are alarming and could result in serious health issues. This includes: pesticide use and excessive artificial fertilising, packaging, canning, high heat extrusion, transportation around the world, and often back again, waxing, and preserving, with a special mention for genetic engineering.*

I have changed the way I feed myself. I only shop around the edges of the supermarket, if I go there at all, preferring local food markets or organic shops. I support the local Farmers' Market, preferring to buy from people with whom I have relationships. I make most of my food from scratch having sourced local providers. I have even grown much of my own food and preserved it where I can: dehydrating, canning, and freezing vegetables. However, living in a place that is frozen for over half the year has increased these challenges. And, as a consequence, I have learned about sprouting where I can produce my own fresh, local nutrients throughout the year. I refuse to purchase strawberries year round as they are a seasonal fruit, I don't eat bananas as they are not grown on this continent, and I won't eat beef that isn't locally grown, grass-fed in pasture and locally processed.

Many of these choices cost me time and energy and, occasionally, more money. Yet they offer so much more: increased nutrients leading to a better value, better health, exercise, clear choices with most of the implications revealed, and a significantly increased level of responsibility for my food consumption and personal and environmental health. I have learned a lot about food and food preparation and I enjoy the connections I've made with local producers. I am proud of the efforts I have made towards becoming a more responsible and sustainable consumer.

Figure 2. A visual representation of the issues addressed and actions taken to reduce my ecological footprint to become an intentional practitioner learning to live more sustainably in western society.



And Where Am I Now?

During my study period I managed to work my way down to living with an ecological footprint of 1.8 hectares. If everyone lived like this way, we could all live on our one planet. I continue to measure my ecological footprint every six months, acknowledging that sometimes my choices result in higher than desired analyses while at other times it remains low. I have purchased a car now, and yes, it hurts to have to increase my footprint calculation; however it was necessary given a change in my circumstance and I can see a time in the future when I will be able to revert to non-car ownership. I own an apartment that brings the benefit of ensuring that some of my living practices reduce my impact; however other challenges are created through this choice. It is okay to measure impacts and implications of my choices, to be aware of them, and to consciously change my mind, if deemed necessary. I find ways to live with less that result in making me feel that I actually live with more: greater consciousness and consideration, better health, and a deeper connection to my community, my ecosystems, and my body.

I continue to use humour to cope with many situations. I enjoy a good laugh at myself... regularly. I try to not get wrapped up in the craziness of my efforts and I try to keep it real. These challenges are useful... the disruptions are beneficial to me as they ground me in practices that provide a platform for how I want to be as an educator. I feel that I live with an intentionality that affords me a position of familiarity and knowledge that brings power, experience, and story to my educational practices. I have great passion for this work as it keeps me healthy, happy, connected, informed, challenged, in community, and alive.

RECOGNISING MY ROLE AS ACTIVIST

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing (Roy, 2003, p. 112).

Activism has been defined as the doctrine or practice that emphasises direct vigorous action especially in support or opposition to one side of a controversial issue (Activism, n.d.). Gerum (2007) stated that activism was “being the change, actively leading a life that reflects the kind of world you want to live in, and it’s about creating action beyond yourself and acting as an agent of change” (p. 193). Thus, activism is about embodying change as well as enabling others to see the need for undertaking their own change processes. Schugurensky (2007) offered the following statement at a conference titled “Educational activism: social justice in classrooms, schools and communities” held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Canada in November 2007.

Activism is any intentional action, individual or collective, to make a better world. By a better world I mean a world where all human beings can develop their full potential, a world that is more democratic, just, peaceful, sustainable and enjoyable than the world that we have today. I am aware that there is another type of activism, one that moves in the opposite direction, that is, towards a world characterized by more unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities, violence, oppressive relations, war, poverty, pollution, discrimination, and so forth. (p. 1)

While playing with possibilities here, Schugurensky exemplifies a critical theory of uptake of discourses. While some might choose to take “activism” up as an alternative view of the dominant discourse (environmentalism perhaps), others choose the dominant view itself (such as capitalist consumerism); however, often this choice to follow the dominant discourses are not acknowledged as intentional choices as they are the socially acceptable choices.

Activism, or active and engaged citizenship, can be working towards establishing different dominant discourses around a variety of issues. These issues might include:

Tackling large public issues, local problems, improving livability, reducing conflict, bridging towards stronger democracy, rekindling a sense of community, alternative pathways to better health, and increasing social capital. (Dobson, 2003, p. 4)

And regardless of the different types and scopes of activism, a common feature is that often these activities are beyond what is expected from us in our daily lives; activism is something that we do because we believe in the goodness of the cause, usually on a voluntary basis.

Renowned educational activist, hooks (1994) states,
[m]y commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism. Given that our educational institutions are so deeply invested in a banking system, teachers are more rewarded when we do not teach against the grain. The choice to work against the grain, to challenge the status quo, often has negative consequences. And that is part of what makes that choice one that is not politically neutral. (hooks, 1994, p. 203)

hooks (1994) further describes how her pedagogical philosophies were designed and tested and how she practices with the aim of being critical and political, thereby creating opportunities for transformation of her students and herself, as she continues to learn with her students. She also demonstrates personal agency as she makes the decision to “teach against the grain” (hooks, 1994, p. 203).

Intentionality, or choice, is integral to activist practice. Taking time to explore alternative discourses, to come to know the implications of one choice over another, and making thoughtful value judgments as to which is more appropriate is the basis of activism, as this intentionality precedes any action. In this way activism may be an appropriate method employed to expose and explore problems in dominant discourses. Kumashiro (2004) suggests that activists:

work to change laws and policies by lobbying legislators or staging protests, they teach others to break through the glass ceilings or challenge discriminatory employment or housing or healthcare practices, and they organize community or school groups for political action. And as they teach us to become dissatisfied and uncomfortable with the norms of society, they ask us to examine why we have already become uncomfortable with the “queers” of society. (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 45)

He goes on to liken activism to teacher education, which mirrors my feelings regarding the opportunity (and responsibility) provided through transformative education and critical engaged pedagogies towards supporting social/cultural change towards a more sustainable society. The choice to practice transformative education is activism and an example of personal/political agency.

EDUCATION WITH A CRITICAL TURN: MODELLING CRITICAL ENGAGED PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM PRACTICE

Critical theories offer the potential of emancipation through the critique of systems of domination or dependence, thus being critical is being political (Ellsworth, 2005, Kincheloe, 2008, Shor, 1992; Shor, 1999, Stronach & MacLure, 1997). The employment of critical theory demands that the researcher considers her self-production and construction and how this process shapes how she (co)constructs her world. It is in the practice of critical theory that forms of self-reflection are gainfully engaged as the practitioner is in a constant state of becoming. And in particular, as a teacher educator, this grounding allows me to offer a transformative education that is critical in nature and that works at the level of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Working with these new insights is one way to bring about social/cultural change: transformation via education for myself, my students, my students’ future students, and our communities. The teacher is an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile or shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves (Horton & Freire, 1990). The following exploration will consider critical possibilities in transformational education, or as Taylor (2009) calls it “teaching for change” (p. 3). Undergirding this work with transformational education and the desire to teach for change are critical engaged pedagogies.

Helping My Students Understand the Meaning and Value of Critical Engaged Pedagogies

Critical pedagogies are those that engage us in thinking and actively working to understand and participate in different, new, and challenging ways: to think, as an action, about the issues that confront us. The content of such praxis can be varied. I ask students to challenge themselves, through action, to change an aspect of how they currently live towards a more sustainable practice. Based on my own experiences undertaking such critical work, I can model ways that I challenged myself, sharing my stories.

Pedagogy can be described as “the production and transmission of knowledge, the construction of subjectivity, and the learning of values and beliefs” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 1997, p. xiii). Pedagogy can refer “to knowledge as a thing made [as well as] knowledge as in the making” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1). Therefore, the experiences of the learner during “the means and conditions, the environmental and events of knowledge in the making” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1) are open to exploration. And, as such, pedagogy can be (re)considered

... as the impetus behind the particular movements, sensations, and affects of bodies/mind/brains in the midst of learning, and it explores the embodied experiences that pedagogy elicits and plays host to: experiences of being radically in relation to one’s self, to others, and to the world. (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 2)

The state of becoming is constantly (re)informed by the simultaneous experience of what is becoming while learning and what is learned while becoming. “Pedagogy, like painting, sculpture, or music, can be magical in its artful manipulation of inner ways of knowing into a mutually transforming relation with outer events, selves, objects, and ideas” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 7).

Being critical implies a central goal of “becom[ing] more skeptical toward commonly accepted truisms” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 45). Skepticism is useful when “our beliefs remain unexamined, [as] we are not free; we act without thinking about why we act, and thus do not exercise control over our own destinies” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 46). Learning to challenge commonly and socially accepted ‘truisms’ leads to self-sufficiency, and “a self-sufficient person is a liberated person... free from the unwarranted and undesirable control of unjustified beliefs” (Siegel, 1988, p. 58). Critical pedagogy, therefore, “illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power” (Giroux, 1994, p. 30).

The purpose of critical pedagogy is to engage learners in the act of what Freire calls *conscientizacao*, which has been defined as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970/1995, p. 17). Gruenewald (2008) suggests, “critical pedagogies are needed to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (Gruenewald,

2008, p. 308). Bowers' (1997, 2001) critique offers that critical pedagogy often betrays a sweeping disinterest in the fact that human culture has been, is, and always will be, nested in ecological systems. He suggests that the discourses of ecological systems are often lost as mechanistic and modernist views are privileged.

hooks (2010) reminds us that "thinking is an action" (p. 7) as it is "where visions of theory and praxis come together" (p. 7). The action of thinking is something that can (and has) become undervalued and under-utilised in our classrooms and so taking time to teach thinking skills and to engage students in the thinking processes becomes important to successful practice leading to social/cultural change. I suggest that hooks' 'engaged pedagogy' can be considered as the practice of 'critical pedagogy'. "Engaged pedagogy emphasizes mutual participation because it is the movement of ideas, exchanged by everyone, that forges a meaningful working relationship between everyone in the classroom" (hooks, 2010, p. 21). The importance of having a unique voice and independent thought, where all contributions are 'worthy' and every student is encouraged to participate in the learning process in the ways that they feel most comfortable is the integrity of engaged pedagogy, hooks (2010) says. "To educate for freedom, then, we have to challenge and change the way everyone thinks about pedagogical process. This is especially true for students" (hooks, 1994, p. 144).

SO WHAT? PERSONAL CHANGE THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I - I hardly know, Sir, just at present - at least I know who I was when I got up the morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then". (Carroll, 2004, p. 55)

Personal change, as investigated through autoethnography, and framed theoretically through critical poststructural ecofeminist activism, happened. I learned how to be critically engaged with my personal living choices, successfully lowering my impact on the environment while remaining within my culture. I decreased my ecological footprint, I refined my decision making strategy, I gained knowledge, changed my practice, and occasionally this influenced others to change as well.

My research inspired a metamorphosis of my practice: personally and professionally. I believe I have become a better educator, researcher, and activist as a result of the critical consideration and reflexive practice undertaken. Self-focused research has enabled me to change, my students to experience transformational education that may have changed them, and, I want to believe, leads to changes in society. Through embodiment and doing, as well as theorising and thinking, I have come to know differently. Dewey (1929) suggested that theory must be accompanied with doing and making (p. 281) and this action orientated research undertook embodied practice to reveal not only an experience about what it felt like to change, but also to establish a model of what change could be like for others. Thus, Cuomo's (1998) "thoughtful practice" (p. 143) was evoked as choices were carefully considered and then modelled for others' consideration.

The *so what?* of this research is that these changes matter as they become a new way of being for me, inspire others to consider undertaking change, and begin to change the discourses around what is possible. I have heard and felt the dominant discourses as they rub against my intentions for a different, more sustainable practice. Seeing, hearing, and feeling the dominant discourses has been as important as finding ways to struggle against them, encouraging others to look beyond the socially constructed ways of being. Walking my talk has enabled a different way of seeing, being, doing and thinking with others and has resulted in what feels like a meaningful continuation of change, or critical reflexivity.

An Activism of Hope and Hopefulness

I explore options and challenge my (co)constructed notions continually. I practice making change in my life by doing the small things: many of the small things. I recycle and reuse and, better yet, I reduce and re-think. I use less water and energy and produce less waste. I look for alternatives to air transit and take these options when they make sense and I choose to travel less often than I have. I buy second hand clothes when I really need them. I eat locally and seasonally, forming relationships with food producers. I live close to where I work in a multi-story apartment building, reducing my need for ground transport. These small changes are relatively easy steps to put into practice. It is the cumulative action of these small changes that results in me feeling like I am making a difference and generating discourses of change. These small changes give me a sense of achievement and I choose to celebrate each as a success. I feel hopeful about my changing practice, increasing awareness of discourses, and the influence I provide to change the discourses and, ultimately, others' practice.

I feel great about the time and energy I have put into critiquing my living practices; however it's the ability to hear, see, and feel the discourses as they rub against my new found understandings that is most interesting. As I take the time to explain some of my choices to vendors at the Farmers' Market or in other places I consume, I hope that my opinion might sway their practices a little. I encourage my friends to reconsider some of their practices. I challenge my students to take on their own personal challenges. But mostly, I listen and feel as the dominant discourses wash over me with their disciplining comments or actions or through permission giving advertisements and marketing strategies intending to maintain the excessively consuming ways of western society.

I believe that many are challenged by my discourse and practice around becoming more sustainable. I have been told that my presence makes people behave or feel differently about their practice and choices. I don't actively attempt to generate these feelings (usually of guilt I assume) but I am curious when they are expressed. I wonder at the reasons these people use for not practicing more sustainability if they can simply choose not to because there is no pressure to do so. Perhaps mandating change would be effective? It seems to be working well for Sweden. Ultimately, I'm reminded that it's just desire and active choice that changes practice towards becoming more sustainable.

When offering a presentation to a group of students undertaking environmental activism in their class recently, I was asked if I ever felt anger at the constant application of dominant discourses that are wasteful and perpetuate overconsumption. Upon reflection on this great question I realised that I don't. I have considerable patience as my practice is about how I can change. I'm not able to change others, however I can prompt, suggest, and offer the possibility of other ways of being and doing. Change begins within and as Gandhi's lifework and writing suggests, you must be the change that you wish to see in the world. I strive to follow this mandate, hoping to influence others along the way by changing the discourses around what is possible and acceptable.

I often receive critique of this work that suggests that these small personal changes don't make any effective impact on the footprint of my society. I can see that the impacts of my changes are small in comparison to the changes large corporations need to make. However, changes to how I choose to live are the ONLY changes I can make. My practices impact larger corporations as I choose not to purchase their products and services and to be vocal about it. I use my dollars as a vote for the kind of environment I want to live in. I feel empowered through this critically reflexive practice. I am changing my impact and I am attempting to influence and encourage others' to do the same.

I feel hopeful as my changing practice becomes easier and more ingrained in my body. I no longer have to use my decision making process as often, although I need to remain aware of the implications of each choice. I'm getting better at becoming more aware. The choices I want to make are easier to embody now. Perhaps the item I want is easier to find because it's more available, or the ingredients have changed, or I am used to doing things a different way, or going without. Not eating bananas while living in Canada is now ok and I can begin new challenges (such as, not eating chocolate because that too is not produced on this continent. I know where to look for the kind of shampoo I am prepared to use. I have developed deeper awareness of the numbers on the stickers on my fruit and the ingredients in products.

I feel hopeful when I hear others talk about the changes they are taking on. Leonard (2010) offers great cause for positivity. I have had the pleasure of working with this activist twice now and each time she delivers a keynote address that generates hope and inspiration. Through greater awareness of the implications of our choices Leonard's audiences are becoming more sustainable in their practices. I know this because I am one of them and my colleagues and friends confide in me their own challenges and successes as a result of their interactions with these ideas. As Kingsolver reminds us:

The arc of history is longer than human vision. It bends. We abolished slavery, we granted universal suffrage. We have done hard things before. And every time it took a terrible fight between people who could not imagine changing the rules, and those who said, "We already did. We have made the world new". The hardest part will be to convince yourself of the possibilities, and hang on. If you run out of hope at the end of the day, to rise in the morning and put it on again with your shoes. Hope is the only reason you won't give in, burn what's left of the ship and go down with it. The ship of your natural life and your children's only shot. (Kingsolver, 2008, para. 17)

Finally, I remind myself that language matters. We are not participating in an environmental crisis. We are deeply involved in a social crisis. The false naming of these crises allows for a lack of recognition as to the underlying practices that generate such varied issues and consequences. Humans have misunderstood our place in the Earth systems and we are overstepping our bounds causing damage to others' and the systems themselves. Yet, I reflect that in some ways a crisis is good! Change comes with education, mandate, or crisis. Education works for some, sometimes. Mandating change takes considerable effort, requires policing, and has been a successful strategy in some cases. However, social crisis will come (and in many cases is here already) and almost inevitably with some major devastating catastrophe the over population and excessive consumption will end. I don't like this idea; it will come as a shock and with certain pain and distress, and I hope my friends and family are the ones who make it through. However I also believe that if we can't control ourselves and become aware of our place within our Earth systems then catastrophic social crisis will make us change.

Things will change... there is always change... change brings equilibrium. Ecosystems, for example, are in constant states of flux as they work to establish equilibrium. I suggest that the pendulum has swung as far out as it can and it is time for it to swing back in and western society will have little choice but to change. Peak oil is a concept that has been with us for a while and drives some change. What if we are now at peak humanity? Managing population pressure is a difficult concept. Yet, as with each social/environmental issue, it is one that each individual can take a stand on and make personal choices to practice with critical consciousness. I am reminded of the quote by Buckminster Fuller "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete".

Klein's (2014) book "This Changes Everything; Capitalism vs. The Climate" suggests that the real issue at hand is the prevailing economic system and a constant demand for growth. She suggests that the challenge is not to focus on doing things that reduce the effect of climate change, but that we work out how to engage in a different set of ground rules with our economic system. I think Leonard (2010) describes how a linear system is just not going to work in a finite system in

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her “Story of Stuff” video. In her 2013 video “The Story of Solutions” she even suggests how we can see it differently. This kind of thinking is what we need: Solutions activism that generates hope and possible ways forward.

I choose to see the social crisis as an opportunity for hope and hopefulness. “What we are looking for is empowerment of a particularly deep kind: the enablement of being – or even better, of becoming. For we humans are nothing if not human becomings, always in the process of change” (Fisher, 2006, p. 46). Learning how to live sustainably was where I began in this work. I want to re-name the work to learning to ‘live critically’. Change is constant in our society. New ideas and trends take hold each day. So, to be clear, it is not unbounded change that I’m after, it is specifically related to: resource consciousness, limiting energy, water, and waste production, learning to respect all beings and to know and live as part of the Earth systems. I want western society to become critical about our place in the Earth systems; acting as if we are a part of this system, not owner/manager of all systems, is imperative to our survival. I feel as though I have achieved steps towards practicing this way and I know others’ are acting similarly.

BEST WISHES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE!

Finding words to clarify my worldview, as well as others’ that share elements of my worldview was inspirational and resulted in me finding my community. In this community I discovered strategies and ideas regarding practices and ways to articulate and theorise. For example, I learned to unpack the complexity, develop an awareness of my assumptions (Cuomo, 1998) and the discourses from which they came, look for synergies rather than difference (Robinson, 2009) and to consider Earth as a complex system rather than discrete parts that can be completely knowable (Meadows, 2008). Appreciating the intricate and interwoven nature of these systems and my small part within them holds me accountable for my every action. I now have a solid platform upon which I can walk my talk when practicing/performing environmental education/educator. I have been transformed through an educational strategy. I embodied these changes and learned to feel the impact of discourses. I have become and continue to become critically reflexive when choosing the possible implications of my choices. And as a result of this personal change my ability to teach others has changed.

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