

EMBODYING THE EARTH: HOW WE COME TO KNOW THROUGH
CREATIVE EXPERIENCES AND EXPRESSIONS

By

KAELI MARIE BENOIT

B.Ed., University of Alberta, 2001

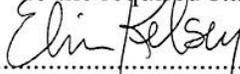
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We accept this thesis proposal as conforming

to the required standard



.....
Dr. Elin Kelsey, Thesis Supervisor



.....
Dr. Richard Kool, EEC Program Head

School of Environment and Sustainability



.....
Michael-Ann Noble

School Director

ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the lived experiences of a small group of potters. It explores their culture of work, craft, and interactions of having the Earth between their hands. My research is theoretically and methodologically framed by ethnography. Observations, interviews, and personal reflections serve as methods for this research. I explore the epistemology of the creative process through handcraft, and seek to understand how these potters come to know through embodied creative experiences and expressions. I wove my own phenomenological understandings in relation to those that I observed and interpreted. This thesis offers a balancing voice in the greater conversation of how we come to know. I propose that tacit, hands-on interactions with our material world play a significant role in shaping our relationship with the earth, and invite the reader to consider how embodied experiences could shape pedagogy of Environmental Education.

Keywords: pottery, ethnography, epistemology, embodied experience, tacit knowledge, environment, embodied knowledge, centering, creative process, coming to know, phenomenology

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Acknowledgements

Art begins with craft, and there is no art until craft has been mastered. You can't create unless you're willing to subordinate the creative impulse to the construction of a form. But the learning of a craft takes time, and we all think we're entitled to short cuts. Art is rare and sacred and hard work and there ought to be a wall of fire around it. (Burgess, 1987, p. 101)

I am so grateful for the opportunity to engage in research and share my voice. Thank you to those who encouraged me to explore these ideas and dare to express them. Just as the wonder of the Earth engages my senses and inspires me, I am grateful for the opportunities and encouragement to discover the world for myself and find connection here. Thank you to the potters who welcomed me into their studios and lives with clay.

Thank you to Dr. Richard Kool for establishing the Masters of Arts in Environmental Education program; it has been transformational.

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With gratitude, I thank my parents, Garry and Shelly, for the seeds they sewed, roots they planted and curiosities they nourished by simply allowing me to get my hands dirty and explore the world that I live in. Thank you for your support, patience, encouragement and love throughout my life, and especially this journey.

Introduction

Pottery is a conversation between friends, between the potter and the clay, between the maker and the user, between the vessel and the meal. It helps us find the common ground between apparently different cultures and teaches us about the beauty of nature and the joy of simply living. (Craig, 2008, p. 26)

Have you ever watched a potter center clay on a wheel? It looks effortless. The wedged clay is dropped forcefully onto the centre of the wheel and the wet hands of the potter wrap gently around the ball as it begins to spin. The fluidity evokes simplicity but there is a firm steadiness that is undetectable, at least until one tries it for oneself. The potter remains calm as the clay begins to soften, warm and ooze between his or her fingers. The gentle dance between the clay and the potter unfolds and the hands give and take in time with the pushing of the clay, until together they fall in synch with one another. Balanced. Centered. You can sense the stillness and almost feel the breath of exhalation that is sighed. The hands release and all is at ease. The mutual shaping and being shaped has begun, a relationship forged and the distinction between the two is no longer clear. Wedging, molding, shaping, and forming clay is a beautiful process that has emerged and taken new shapes and forms since the dawn of civilization. Based on artifacts of archeology, pottery dates back to prehistoric times and existed within pre-literate cultural era. The oldest known piece of pottery is, "...between 20 000 to 19 000 years before the present" (Pottery, n.d.). The process of pottery continues to exist in both functional and artistic forms. For me, the process of centering clay on a wheel invites curiosity about the relationship between humans and the Earth.

Throughout this thesis, ethnography serves as a theoretical and methodological framework from which I use stories from the hands of potters to explore an example of

relationships between humans and the environment. Applying a phenomenological understanding invites us to essentially look at the experience of living. In this tradition we cannot seek to understand the world as separate from human experience, and therefore the emphasis is placed on the lived experience (van Manen, 1997). A possible critique of this tradition could acknowledge the inevitable gap between subjective viewpoints since we cannot directly experience another's consciousness. However, phenomenology approaches this dilemma by acknowledging the authenticity of individual experiences and accepts the differences while seeking common ground on the basis that we have a common existence in a shared world (Craig, 2000). It is here that I bring my own understanding as a contributing voice towards *unearthing* common ground.

The limitations of language challenged me to find a way to speak about humans in relation to the Earth while trying to avoid propagating a story in which we are separate from the Earth. I considered the terms environment, physical world, natural world, nature, the biosphere, material world, and surroundings. However, I realized that each one of them held certain meanings and connotations based on their cultural use, history, overuse, misuse, contextual use and so on. I determined that regardless of the word I chose it would inevitably affect the readers' experience throughout this thesis, and so I acknowledge my awareness of this.

For the purposes of this thesis I have decided to use a variety of terms throughout the writing (material world, physical world, natural world, Earth, nature). The movement between terms is intended to draw in a variety of images and responses to the language and deter the reader from getting stuck on any particular preconceived definitions and connotations that may be limiting. Throughout reading this thesis, I invite the reader to notice their responses and reactions to each term. I recognize that at a later date, a different term may seem more

appropriate or relevant, but for now I hope that using a variety of words creates some space and breathing room to hold the definition in a state of discovery and fluidity. By using terms loosely and interchangeably, the intention is that they conjure up images and thoughts of nature, Earth, home and the interconnected web that connects us all. The struggle for language parallels some ideas that I explore in this thesis by suggesting that knowledge is not always something that can be articulated and cognitively understood, limited or articulated by language.

The belief that meaningful speech is purely human property was entirely alien to those oral communities that first evolved our various ways of speaking, and by holding such a belief today we may well be inhibiting the spontaneous activity of our language. By denying that birds and other animals have their own styles of speech, by insisting that the river has no real voice and that the ground itself is mute, we stifle our direct experience. We cut ourselves off from the deep meanings in many of our words, severing our language from that which supports and sustains it. We then wonder why we are often unable to communicate even among ourselves. (Abram, 1996, p. 263)

By defining a term for the environment apart from ourselves I recognize that this suggests a distinction between humans and the Earth, and yet throughout this thesis I acknowledge my beliefs, perspectives and influences that suggest we are one in the same. Thich Nhat Hanh (2008), a Buddhist monk, teacher, peace activist and poet, writes, “you are your environment: your environment is what you have created personally and collectively... take care of your environment because the environment is you. You help create that environment, whether that is our social environment or the natural environment” (p. 17). I acknowledge that my postmodern perspective suggests we are constantly being shaped and constructed by our social, cultural and material interactions which influence these ideas. Therefore, how can we speak of it as separate

from ourselves? My hope is that this thesis draws the reader into a muddy distinction between the two, just as the image of a potter's hands covered in clay makes us question where the material world stops and the human form begins. I use personal voice, stories, narratives and themes that emerge through this writing as an attempt to heal this separation and invite the reader into a holistic shaping of these identities. The image of a mug comes to mind. It has separate elements: a handle, a vessel, clay, glaze, shape, form, aesthetics...and yet – it is a whole. It is a mug. It is my hope that the distinctions that I make will help to bring awareness to the integrated whole. I envision that the elements of this thesis may continue to hold potential for meaningful conversation and space for ideas to percolate, even as the meaning of words and the use of language shift in relation to our understandings, interpretations and experiences of where we call home.

What is the life behind pottery that keeps this primal process in existence? I wanted to know how potters see this process. Did form or function first draw them to pottery? What inspired them? How does it feel to have the Earth between their hands every day? Does the delicate relationship between the clay and the hands inform a potter about the delicate relationship between humans and the Earth? What draws these artists into these modes of concentration and creation? So many questions emerged. As I began to explore potters, pottery and these potential connections my curiosity about this relationship between a potter and the physical world intensified. Pottery is a unique form of art in that it is often both functional and aesthetic. Greenhalgh (2002) writes, “[w]orks of art are not objects; works of art are relationships between people and objects. If the relationship does not exist, neither does the work of art” (p. 13). As this thesis explores the relationships and connections between potters and clay, it also

draws in the stories of craft and participation in embodied creative experiences to reflect the significance of direct participation with the material world.

This ethnography seeks to illuminate the story of what drives the desire to create and make by hand. It focuses on the interconnected relationships between a potter and clay and the collaborative efforts that unfold through embodied creative experiences. It is not only the literal connection that potters have with the Earth that drives this ethnographic study in my search for the depth of their lived experiences as potters, but it is also a curiosity about the significance of the relationship between a human and the Earth. My own curiosities stem from an underlying belief that at the root of Environmental Education (EE) is a practice and desire to revive states of connectedness, awareness and relationship within our own bodies, communities, ecosystems and the spiritual nature of simply being alive.

This thesis seeks to be a contribution to the under-represented voice of embodiment in the conversation of EE. A potter must respond to the clay and have an intimate understanding of the material they are working with, and therefore creation of any pot is collaboration between the artist and the clay. My interest in including voices of those that work with their hands stems from my own life experiences, interests and embedded beliefs that I hold about how we, as human beings, live, interact and relate to the world that we are a part of. This research is guided by a search for connection through embodied experiences and explores relationships. As I explored the interactions between the potters and the clay, they began to call forth my own reflections and interactions with embodied creative expression. It is through the interactions of semi-structured interviews, observations and reflections on my own experiences that this story is formed, shaped and told.

It was a conscious consideration to use the term potter throughout this thesis. Some of the individuals I interviewed self-identified as ceramic artist, ceramicist, or clay artist. They all viewed themselves as potters but then had additional identities built upon that. Some expressed that their own personal understanding of the term ‘potter’ had shifted throughout their career as a potter within North America, even as recently as the past two decades. One potter expressed that prior to the 1980’s, ceramics in North America conjured up an ‘arts and crafts’ image of pouring clay into child-like moulds. However, since then it has been gaining a new meaning within the pottery community as a respected fine art. Yet, another potter gave me an example of how in Japan, the term potter would most likely conjure up meaning referring to the dedicated master of the craft and the fine art of pottery. This exemplifies how the meaning attached to words is fluid. Words hold meaning based on contexts and histories and “semantic change deals with change in meaning, understood to be a change in the concepts associated with a word” (Campbell, 1998, p. 255).

These artists felt that as their craft, skill and art developed, they began to reclaim the term potter with depth and significance and to adopt it comfortably along with other titles. My decision to use the term potter rather than ceramic artist or ceramicist emerged from a conversation from one potter that was comparing two clay programs at two different universities.

I used to hate the word potter; my mom used to call me that, but now I am a potter. The difference now is that I own it. I make my own pots. But when my mom used to say that I was a potter, I felt like I knew she wanted me to make a certain type of pots and fit into her mold of what a potter was and what it wasn’t. I didn’t want to be part of that vision. But I am a potter. I am a person that makes pots. I love looking at them, I love making them, I love the feeling of them and I love the hollowness inside... What I thought was

interesting is that at Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD), it was the ceramics studio whereas at Kootenay School of the Arts it was the clay studio. Once you fire clay – it becomes ceramics but for me it was the clay that really interested me. Once you fire clay there is this glowiness and this super magic that goes away and then you have to figure out how to put the magic back in. Often people use wood firing to put this magic back in but you can't always do that and that is where the artistic part comes in to figure out that other part. (Laura Sharp)

I consciously chose to use the terms 'potter' and 'pottery' to represent this relationship and the process of working with clay; the creative process, the interaction, the inspiration of ideas, imagination and a holistic approach to the craft rather than focusing on the finished ceramic product.

There are some basic aspects to the creative process that are sometimes referred to as "the four Ps": process, product, person, place (Creativity, n.d.). There are many parallels between the creative process of pottery and that of writing this thesis. As I explore the four P's of pottery, I also explore the process of writing (methodology), the product (findings and discussion), the person (my own reflections and contributing voices from other researchers) and place (an exploration of the current conversation and thoughts on how this piece can contribute to that). Pottery is a fascinating artistic endeavor that is unique because of its reliance on the four basic elements of life: water, fire, Earth and air. The relationship between the clay, these elements, and some basic techniques of a potter shape the story of each vessel. The foundational elements of this process are the same, yet as each potter mixes, centers, shapes, glazes and fires clay, the uniqueness emerges. Just as for a thesis, there are basic elements of creativity (an introduction, methodologies, literature review, findings and conclusions) that help form a thesis. It is my

intention to move through this thesis mirroring a few standard elements of the creative process: invention/motivation; connection/discovery; and critical thinking/solution. Of course – the specific journey is still unfolding.

[T]o *explain* is not to present a set of finished reasons, but to tell a story. That is what I have attempted in these pages. It is an unfinished story, told from various angles, sketchy in some parts, complete with gaps and questions and unrealized characters. But it is a story, nonetheless, not a wholly determinate set of facts... how can we discern whether one telling of events is any better or more worthy than another? The answer is this: a story must be judged according to whether it *makes sense*. And “making sense” must be here and understood in its most direct meaning: to make sense is *to enliven the senses*. A story that makes sense is one that stirs the senses from their slumber, one that opens the eyes and the ears to their real surroundings, tuning the tongue to the actual tastes in the air and sending the chills of recognition along the surface of the skin. To *make sense* is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one’s felt awareness of the world. It is to make the senses wake up to where they are. (Abram, 1996, p. 265)

As I explored each element of this thesis, it was my intention that they would not stand alone or in isolation but that they would be a work in progress towards creating a new vessel. When I think of a vessel, I think of something that has taken a specific shape, but that also has space to hold something. The etymology of the word vessel shows that *vessel* (n.) refers to a container and it comes from the root words for a small vase, urn and ship. It showed that in all languages there is an association between hollow utensils and boats (Vessel, n.d.). It is my hope that this conversation may incorporate both the structure of a pot and the movement of a ship.

This thesis seeks to draw on existing research - the work of others and my own observations and experiences - to form, shape and construct ideas about how we come to know through embodied experiences. In doing so I hope that it propels this conversation into an exploration of its relevance to our approach towards EE, holding space for both structure and movement. I hope to highlight that the value of a vessel comes from a relationship between both the structure and empty space. The function of a vessel is derived from its ability to hold a fluid or unstructured entity. Thus, the structure and the hollowness both give way to the depth of its value. May this thesis have both enough structure and hollow spaces to support the exploration of how we come to know through embodied creative experiences and expressions.

Methodology

Although a typical thesis format might include a literature review at this point, the emergent nature of my methodology begins by entering into a phenomenon and drawing out emergent themes from which to create a literature review. In keeping with this, I have included the methodology prior to the literature review to reflect the research process that I outline in this section.

I began by asking the question, what is being shaped – the potter or the clay? This led to an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic study of the interconnected relationship between the potter, clay, community, self and material world as depicted by the lived experiences of five independent potters. This research is also an epistemological study that moves beyond science and explores other ways of knowing. Guided by my curiosity and inner hunches that potters maintain a unique relationship with time, space and matter, I embarked on a series of observations and interviews as a means to compose narratives of their lives with clay. The intersection between their experiences and my own personal reflections served as a fertile meeting place from which to read, interpret, draw out emerging themes and explore the ideas of current academic writers. These stories bring life to my research question: How do we come to know through embodied creative experiences and expressions?

Pots are containers. They affect their contents just as their contents affect them, and so they participate in the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of eating and drinking in such a way that holistic integration of body-mind is encouraged. (Beittel, 1990, p. 114)

Whether it is viewed from a functional, aesthetic, or contemplative point of view, pottery offers an opportunity to observe a human relationship with the Earth. This research was designed to explore the concepts and experiences of working potters so that I may tell stories from the

hands of potters as an exploration of the question, what is being shaped – the potter or the clay? Semi-structured interviews, observations and reflective journals were used to help gather the stories of the relationship between potters and clay in order to inform my research of how we come to know through an embodied creative experience. This thesis is an epistemological ethnographic exploration of potters' relationships with the Earth as they are developed, shaped, and expressed throughout their participation in the creative process of pottery.

Our Narrative, My Narrative

Moustakas (1990) writes, “The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one’s senses, perception, belief and knowledge” (p. 15). Using a first person narrative approach, I drew from my own senses, perceptions, beliefs and knowledge of my own experiences creating with my hands, to juxtapose these experiences with a case study of potters. These narratives of the potters and my own personal story became the foundation from which I looked for patterns and drew out emergent themes. Many scholars (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2002; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) promote and accept the personal voice as an important tool. A strong personal voice engages the reader in the research so that the researcher’s presence is visible (Richardson, 2000).

My own philosophical assumptions presume that immersing oneself into a research setting minimizes the separation between a researcher and what is being researched. I believe that this provides for a rich research context and lends itself to an emergent design (Creswell, 2007). Ethnography as a method of inquiry into the lived experiences of potters inevitably cultivated a self-reflective auto-ethnography into my own lived experiences. “Ethnographic writing is always a construction of the self as well as the other” (Stacey, 1991, p. 115). I cannot remove myself from this story in order to tell that of another; however, in telling that of another I

become more aware of the meta-stories that have shaped my own relationship with the environment. Selecting to write narratives of the lived experiences of potters is intended to create an invitation to readers to enter an alternative story as a mirror for beginning to investigate their own relationships with the material world. The stories that we tell ourselves, experience and live into, significantly shape our interactions with all of the systems that we are involved with and participate in. I believe that stories construct our reality and perpetuate, intensify and reproduce social, environmental problems.

Environmental problems...are produced, reproduced and intensified by the ways in which people in modern industrialized societies experience and interact with the world – by the ways in which we live our ‘storied lives’. To conceive of research in environmental education in terms of narrative inquiry is, therefore, to seek solutions to our problems where our problems lie. (Gough, 1993, p. 193)

However, I also believe that stories have the capacity to heal and shift existing relationships. “Narrative is a fundamental human way of giving meaning to experience. In both telling and interpreting experiences, narrative mediates between inner world of thought-feeling and an outer world of observable actions and states of affairs” (Garro & Mattingly, 2000, p.1). Throughout this research process, the stories that shape me are being challenged. As the stories of these potters and their relationship with clay unfolded, they also began to shape my own understandings and perspectives. In this way, my role as a researcher was fluid and transformative. I was shaped by these stories and self-reflections.

Choosing a Methodology ~ Constricting or Expanding

It is tempting to tell of how I chose a methodology and designed my research to fit perfectly into it like a well-fitted mitten. In hindsight, I might be able to knit the story to do just

that. However, I explored elements of a variety of methodologies and merged these with my own natural curiosities to nurture the emergence of a suitable methodology. Does a methodology frame my work or fence it in? I was butting up against this, feeling limited by it and unsure of whether it was still possible to capture the essence of what I was seeking. I desired an intimate perspective of the potters' lived experience.

Qualitative research is a means to, “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Creswell’s ideas resonated with the strong assumptions I hold about research. I am aware that regardless of what inquiry path I chose, I bring my own worldviews and beliefs to this study and a desire for them to be visible. Creswell (2007) notes that, “good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (p. 15). I began this process by writing a journal reflection of my intuitive desire for how I wished to conduct research.

The kind of research I hope to achieve is one that breathes life into the work that I am researching. I hope to evoke a deeper understanding of what I am researching by involving myself in the process and allowing for human engagement to be an integral component of the research rather than a barrier to objectivity. I wish to explore the meaning within my research and allow myself as the researcher to participate within this realm. I recognize that each of us is shaped uniquely and we hold biases and perspectives unique to the lens that we bring to our world. I want to allow for these perspectives to be present, valid and a great part of where the meaning emerges. Because of this, I wish to clearly present my biases, allow for my worldview to be stated and give freedom to fully

engage in the process and create space for these to shift, move and grow. Throughout this journey, I wish to present a meaningful piece of research that evokes significance, understanding and emotion. I wish for my research to invite others into the experience and for this to be an entryway for others to capture the essence of this experience. I want my research to be personal and yet capture a greater audience by way of the relationship they are able to form with the writing, and in return hold the potential to affect them personally. By capturing the essence of potters, I wish for the lived experience, relational element and human immersion to enhance the credibility and validity of my research because of the power it holds to impact, shift, change and expand our understandings of the world. (Kaeli Benoit, Journal Reflection, September 30, 2010)

After determining that a qualitative inquiry matched both my personal inclinations towards research and the desire to explore the lived experiences of potters, I began to explore research methodologies to gain a greater understanding of the theory behind these approaches. This is where the emerging methodology began to take shape. I was influenced by a Grounded Theory approach that applies to qualitative studies of phenomenons. It begins the research process with an inquiry and data collection followed by a systematic coding of the text to draw out emerging themes or patterns (Morton, 2008).

This tradition stresse[s] the need to get into the field to understand what is happening, the active role of people in shaping the worlds they inhabit, the centrality of change and process, and the importance of the perspectives of the participants. (Morton, 2008, p. 4)

Reflecting on some of the potential implications of five philosophical assumptions (Ontological, Epistemological, Axiology, Rhetorical, Methodological) on a research practice

(Creswell, 2007) helped bring some of my own assumptions to the forefront so that I could see the implications of these assumptions on my research.

In researching potters lived experiences, I believe that each person has a story to tell that is uniquely shaped by their experiences, worldviews, values, beliefs, context and perspectives that I will never fully understand but that I can appreciate through my own perspective. Given the individual nature of each story, I will use a narrative approach to create a venue for each potter's voice to be present while also searching for relationships between their stories. As I embark on a study of embodied knowledge and lived experiences, I believe that being present in their workspace and with them is essential for narrowing the gap between interviewer and subject and moving towards observation from within their context and story. As I begin to make observations and reflections of my experiences with them, I wish to use my own personal voice to highlight my own assumptions and lenses of interpretation in order to engage the audience into conversation and create space for them to engage in each potter's story from their own worldview. Using my voice and an informal writing style will be an intentional design to engage the audience and participate in the craft of storytelling. Through conversation, and as I spend time in the presence of each potter, I anticipate that my own understanding and appreciation of pottery will emerge and inform the next interview. Just as stories unfold and characters develop, I anticipate that each interview and observation will shape the next interaction. (February 19, 2012)

As the narratives of the potters that I interviewed emerged in story – it is evident that they each came to pottery on a different path. Investigating my own assumptions highlighted the cyclical nature of this process in which each time around, brings new layers and understandings.

We shall not cease from exploration
And at the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (Elliot, 1944, p. 43)

The Potters

Because I am a potter, I take my image, ‘centering’, from the potter’s craft. A potter brings his clay into center on the potter’s wheel, and then he gives it whatever shape he wishes. There are wide correspondences to this process. Such extensions of meaning I want to call attention to. For ‘centering’ is my theme: how we may seek to bring universe into a personal wholeness, and act into the rich life which moves so mysteriously and decisively in our bodies, manifesting in speech and gesture, materializing as force in the world the unifying energy of our perceptions (Richards, 1989, p. 3)

With their permission to use their names, I would like to introduce the five potters who participated in this research. Cumulatively, these five individual potters hold 120 years of experience in their craft. As I wove these stories into the pages of this thesis, both the individual and collective experiences offered insights and intersections from which to notice patterns and emergent themes.

Vic Duffhues is a potter from Ladysmith, BC. He and his wife Jo are both potters and work together to run and operate JoVic Pottery studio where they create and sell their pottery. My experience was defined by the welcome greeting that I received when I arrived. He has been working as a potter for over 30 years and in his own artist statement he describes himself in the following way:

As a potter, I feel deeply connected to our planet and its rich human history. Clay vessels always contribute not only to culture, but spiritual rituals, and even simple sustenance. Working in my studio allows me to strive to fulfill my own goals and life purpose in a way that not only fulfills my creative needs, but is spiritual for me as well. (Duffhues, n.d.)

Mary Fox is also a potter in Ladysmith, BC. She has transformed her home to be a shop and a gallery for her pottery. Upon entering Mary's home and studio I was welcomed into order, simplicity and beauty everywhere from her gallery to her workshop floor. Mary describes herself saying:

Creating beautiful vessels for people to use or contemplate is a thoroughly enjoyable way to spend one's life. I have been potting since I was 13 and have never grown tired of any aspect of my job. I love to go out to my studio every day full of creative energy to create anew. My focus is on expressing the beauty and strength of pure form. I delight in the challenge of creating contemporary vessels based on classic lines and have a keen interest in developing original glaze effects for my works. (Fox, n.d.)

Julia Schumacher is a potter living in Canmore, AB. Indicative of Canmore, where space is hard to come by, she works out of her partner's business workshop. Julia welcomed me into her studio and even volunteered her time to teach my kindergarten students a bit about working with clay. Below, she describes herself as a potter:

I view clay as a limitless medium that begs to be explored. I create with clay in order to feed my passion for beauty and to inspire, in the lives of others, an intimate affection for their personal surroundings... During the beginning stages of a new series I work very intuitively. I employ many production techniques including throwing, altering, slab and

hand building. I also use moulds, sprigs, and coils and will often utilize all of these techniques together on a single piece. I appreciate clay's responsiveness to my spontaneous thought processes, which allows me a full range of experimental opportunities. I throw a form and cut away at it, then add coils and slabs, push and expand the clay, paddle it to refine contours, carve back and subtract, then add more coils and patterns, continuing to subtract and add until I feel the composition has reached a comfortable balance. My intuitive process ensures each piece is unique. (Schumacher, n.d.)

Laura Sharp is a potter in Calgary, AB who also works out of her home. She has a studio set up in the basement and relies on local artisan markets, shows, and online sales to sell her pottery. Laura welcomed me into her home, served me toasted seeds and passionately shared her journey as a potter while maintaining her role as a mother as her youngest boy continued to play superheroes. Laura does not have a website but relies on etsy.com to sell her work. Her pottery is defined by the detailed etchings and drawings that she does on the clay when it is leather hard and a majority of her work is distinctly recognizable with its bold black and white designs.

Caleb Speller is an artist who works with ceramics, drawing, painting and several other mediums. He lives just outside of Victoria, BC with his wife. Upon biking up to his home to meet Caleb, it was evident from the moment of arrival that his creative studio was not limited to four walls, it was everywhere around him. One gallery describes him as follows:

He lives with his wife in a small house with a big deck; the kind built for rocking chairs and beat up guitars. In the mornings woodpeckers screech from the trees, snakes slither in the grass and the sun glows through the wet mist. It is here in this setting where he wakes

up to draw and collage before heading out to take some photographs, walk down to the shed to paint or bike out into the mysterious day... Caleb views his artwork as a visual biography made from inspiration in his personal life, legendary stories told by friends and family and fictitious visions of what the future could unfold. (La Petit Mort Gallery, n.d.)

Tools

All of the potters that I observed, interviewed and spent time with spoke about the tools that shaped their work. Vic Duffhues spoke candidly about how the tools really personalize and define a potter. As he spoke, he carefully handled individual tools that he had created to shape his work; some were made from broken compact disks, or old forks that were bent or re-shaped to be just what he needed. These tools were not replicable – each one was unique and individually created to support a specific part of the process that he created. However, there are also the more standard tools, such as the Kiln and the wheel that are so fundamental to any ceramic artist's work. The idea of tools began to give me a lens for how to view methodology. It did not need to be a specific mold that dictated the outcome of my research, but rather I began to view it as a tool that enabled the research to take shape. Much like a wheel I suppose. Rather than limiting a potter's possibilities – it expands what is possible to create.

Gathering Stories and Voices

I wanted to capture a glimpse of the lived experiences of the potters and approach the opportunity with curiosity, wonder and in appreciation of the work that they do. As this study began to unfold, it became evident that quantity would not be an indicator of quality. I was not looking for repeatable lived experiences but rather an appreciation and invitation into them. I began approaching methodology as the search for the tools that would expand possibility and support the process. Engaging in a qualitative research approach lent it self to expanding the

opportunities to seek out the lived experiences of an intimate group of individuals. It opened doors to my participating in the research and expanded my opportunity to live the questions, absorb the experience in some way and explore beyond what I knew I was looking for. I wasn't sure *who* I was looking for, but I was ready to begin searching.

Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.

Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. (Rilke, 1987, p. 34)

Approaching the potters that I selected with this lens, that they were living the questions, shaped the way in which I interviewed them as well as the way in which I selected them. I did not assume to know who would be the best candidate for these interviews; I simply began inviting.

I began the selection process by searching for individuals that identified themselves as full time potters or ceramic artists. I debated whether or not to seek out potters that seemed to have an explicit environmental bent to their work. However, in the end I decided that I did not want to judge a book by the cover and limit my selections based on any preconceived ideas of what type of connections each potter might hold with the clay, the Earth and themselves. Instead, I wanted to explore the deeper layers of their relationship with creating, working with their hands and clay. To gather participants, I contacted potters directly with an e-mail letter of invitation to participate in my research project [see appendix A]. Since this was an intimate qualitative study that would require observation and interviews I had decided to interview a total of five participants. As I heard back from potters about their interest or availability, I began arranging interview times and continued sending requests as needed until I had gathered five participants.

In total, I sent out 20 requests. As the interviews began, the emergent design also unfolded. This included re-shaping interview questions, unearthing new curiosities, as well as introductions to new potters as recommended by the participants that I was interviewing.

As anticipated, each interview served as the groundwork for the next interview and an emergent design began to unfold (Creswell, 2007). As each potter began to tell his or her story, new questions emerged that informed my curiosity for the next interview. I established from the onset that immersing myself into each workspace would be part of the interview process and I looked forward to what I would gather through observations and interviews. The interviews were designed to create starting points for the artists to tell their stories and begin to delve into the inner workings of their embodied experiences as potters. I coupled these interviews with elongated journal reflections, photographs and observations recorded in a field journal as a method to develop competencies observing and to, “become a self-reflective ethnographer of [my] own affairs” (Reimann, 2005, p. 89).

Ethnography informs my work both theoretically and methodologically. By seeking to describe the culture of potters from within the natural environment of their workspaces, ethnography becomes the theoretical framework from which I collected, interpreted, and contextualized my data. As a methodology, ethnography supports a holistic approach to observing and understanding the potters that I studied. This methodology supported explorative methods for collecting data from lived experiences. Selecting and designing a methodology created a foundation for how to conduct research; what tools to use; how to analyze it and how to communicate the experience. Embodied writing offered itself as a complimentary approach to compile this thesis.

Atkinson & Hammersley (2007), define a list of five methodological features of ethnography suggesting that although it is a rather open ended methodology; it still maintains a common set of features. They suggest that it is a study of people in their everyday contexts in which data can be gathered from a range of sources, particularly observation and informal conversations, and that data is collected and generated through the analysis and interpretation of meaning.

The task is to investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves. (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 3)

I immersed myself within the artists' creative spaces to reflect this desire to conduct research within natural settings. Since pottery is a creative process that requires an established workspace it was a natural progression to conduct my interviews and observations from within this vantage point. This setting allowed me to make observations of how the potters interacted with their spaces, their craft and the materials. The interviews were part of the data I was collecting, but observations about how they set up their spaces, where they lived, where they worked, how they organized their lives to support their creative process were all unspoken. It was through simply being present that I was able to weave together elements of the embodied experience of being a potter.

Initially, I envisioned being able to participate in a creative pursuit with each potter, centering clay, shaping a simple pot, wedging it and so on. I wanted to get my hands dirty right along side and feel the clay in my hands as we spoke. As part of my research, I wished to immerse myself within the process of creating. O'Neill (2004) describes an artful inquiry

research project in which she participates in the creation of lanterns with a group of women. This study emphasizes that we are all active and responsible participants shaping the world, and that just knowing this gives one a source of meaning for life. My desire to study and participate in the creative process of pottery is supported by O'Neill's sentiments that the creative art process is a means of transformative learning where we can see how we are constantly evolving in relationship to self, others, and the Earth.

However, this process did not follow my plan. Each potter interpreted my request to share a teaching moment with me quite differently. Working on a wheel and conversing was not necessarily how s/he envisioned it. My desire to work with clay along side the potters exposed one of my underlying assumptions that I was unaware of. I had limited and reduced the meaningful work of a potter to be only in relation to when they were working directly with clay and a wheel. Working with the clay was a critical element of being a potter, but it was still just a part of the process at large.

I resonate deeply with the writings and experiences of others. I am moved by poetry, inspired by authors, artists and stories of other's experiences. The interviews with the potters moved me, called me and caused me to react and to respond. I felt myself being shaped and molded by these stories and yet, the piece that was still missing was my own voice. I was keenly aware that a qualitative study shaped by this methodology needed to include the voice of the researcher with an acknowledgement that the researcher's worldviews and understanding play a part in shaping the interpretation and retelling of these lived experiences. I was searching for a way for this to be expressed as an embodied experience in itself rather than just a cerebral articulation of embodied creative expressions and lived experiences of others. One potter that I

interviewed offered reflections on her journey towards finding her own style as a potter and this resonated with my experience of finding my own voice as a researcher.

I stopped looking at other people's work years ago. Looking at other people's work is something that some people do all their lives because they are interested in it and for other people it is because they are searching. When I did that when I was younger, it was because I was searching. Because I was self-taught, I had to learn from what I saw around me. I learned from looking at other people's work, feeling other people's work and studying other people's work and then your ideas slowly start to come from what you are observing, but there comes a point eventually when you realize that what other people do doesn't matter any more; it is their work, other people's work. It is then that you realize that you do have your own style and here it is and this is how I got here. (Mary Fox)

I recognize that my life up to this point has directly shaped the way in which I view, participate and engage with the world around me. Richardson (2000), recognizes this foundation and suggests that I, "consider a part of [my] life outside or before academia with which [I] have deeply resonated. Use that resonance as a 'working metaphor' for understanding and reporting [my] research" (p. 943). I have deeply resonated with the do-it yourself process in which I participate in fixing, re-doing, making, and figuring out how things work. This directly impacts my approach to writing and researching and also provides a context for a working metaphor of creating. This also shapes the lens from which I explore the lived experiences of the artists.

The inner desire to be able to fully express the depth of my emotions, dreams, thoughts, desires, abilities, interests, relationships, creativity and personal potential weighs heavy with me as I approach creating anything. I noticed this with the clay tonight...I so badly wanted to produce a well crafted bowl, a pot or something with finesse, and yet it looked

just the same as all of the other beginner students: a bit heavy on the bottom, inconsistent thickness to the sidewalls and slightly heavy. I have been observing, writing and reading about potters for the past few months and yet, my ability to work with clay is no different than any other novice participant. With my focus still resting on the final product as the visual expression or voice for all that I do not seem to be able to express in other ways, I felt disappointed. I wanted more. It is here that I find myself wondering again about the creative process...just because I am 'doing' something creative – does it necessarily ensure that I am 'being creative'? Does using my hands actually necessitate that I am engaged in an embodied experience? What would it feel like to just feel the clay and find joy in that? Nothing created, nothing produced. Just focus on the process I tell myself, but I already know that it is easier said than done! (July 28, 2012)

During the interviews, I sought to establish a tone of appreciative inquiry (Cooperider, Stavros & Whitney, 2008) in which the potters themselves would sense that I was seeking to glean the positive attributes of their existing practice, relationships and lived experiences. As each potter's story began to unfold through a rekindling of memories and inquiry, I attempted to retreat from the driver's seat, allowing what already is to exist. By doing so, I wished to let the experience with the potters emerge as naturally as possible. During these interviews, I recorded them in order to transcribe and then reflect on them post-interview. However, during the interview, I maintained a field book in which I jotted down comments, insights, highlights, sketches and doodles as my way of engaging with what they were sharing with me.

Shaping and Forming the Narratives

I gathered a small collection of mugs, one from each potter, and these mugs became an important visual representation as I wrote. I immersed myself in pottery: I read about pottery,

observed pottery, interacted with potters, used pottery metaphors for describing thoughts, worked with clay in a pottery workshop and drank from pottery mugs. These were just a few of the experiences that I intentionally chose to include to enrich these written pieces. My writing was further inspired by Anderson's (2001) framework for embodied writing.

Embodied writing brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing. Relaying human experience from the inside out and entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world, embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives. As a style of writing, embodied writing is itself an act of embodiment. (p. 83)

As part of my methods for compiling and analyzing the data that I collected from each interview, I transcribed each one, read and re-read each one individually and colour-coded them to develop a running list of emerging themes. After doing this, I re-wrote each interview using a narrative approach to not only include the words that were exchanged but also the observations and personal reflections that occurred throughout each interview. These narratives brought life to the interview and conjured up new themes for reflection. After transcribing each interview, I sat down with the transcript, a cup of tea or coffee in the mug made by the individual I had interviewed, and my notebook filled with doodles and observations in order to write a narrative that wove all these elements into a composite and holistic reflection. The creation of these narratives became a foundational method from which I was able to draw out emerging themes.

In particular, embodied writing does not assume that there is any essential nature of experience to be found or reported, in the sense that van Manen (1990) uses the term essential nature referring back to Martin Heidegger. There may be an essential nature to experience, but embodied writing does not assume so... What can be known is interpretive, ever changing, and

creative... the experience of one person is sufficient to itself, worthy of itself, particularly if he or she says it's so... Over time, if an embodied account wins an audience, something about the telling is important to others too. The writing "rings a bell" for the reader. Sympathetic resonance occurs, however fleeting. (Anderson, 2001, p. 6)

Boundaries For the Data: Limitations, Delimitations, Trustworthiness & Credibility

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, there were important delimitations from which to draw my research participants. I wanted to ensure that they met the following requirements: a) self-identified full time established potter in Canada b) willingness to be interviewed and observed in person in their workshop or studio c) willingness to be identified by name in this thesis.

There were also limitations to this study. Time was one constraint. This study speaks to the data that I was able to gather within a one-hour interview and observation with each participant. A time constraint limited the opportunity to participate in pottery alongside the potters as well as the inevitable data that could continue to be gathered through extended time and exposure to the potter at work.

To enhance the trustworthiness of this data, I sought to maintain an unbiased approach during the interviews by asking open-ended questions that prompted the participants to reflect on their own experiences. The personal nature of this research limits the study to a scope of resonance with the audience and readers. I also used an appreciative inquiry approach to establish trust with my participants and make them feel comfortable having me in their space and sharing their work with me. The credibility of this data is interpreted through my own worldview and juxtaposed against my experiences. I attempted to make my opinions visible to the reader to provide clarity of my opinion, other research and the data itself. I offered each participant the

opportunity to read the interviews once they were transcribed and add any other insights or thoughts that they deemed relevant. None of the participants chose to add or change anything as they felt comfortable with what was recorded within the interview time.

Literature Review

It is good to be a potter. At work, the potter manages the transformation of nature, building culture while fulfilling the self, serving society, and patching the world together with pieces of clay that connect the past with the present, the useful with the beautiful, the material with the spiritual. (Glassie, 1999, p. 116)

Roots of Pottery

Pottery and its origins have been crucial tropes in cultural histories since ancient times.

Pots and the raw materials and tools of their manufacture contributed rich imagery and metaphors for the ineffable experiences of humankind, including the Biblical creation of humans from clay, birth, life, death, and sexual experience. (Rice, 199, p. 2)

I feel it is necessary to acknowledge where pottery comes from. The origins of pottery can be explored from a number of different lenses and perspectives. This may include where, how and why it originated. What was its original purpose? What did it represent to the people of the day? However, it is clear that, “there was no single evolutionary path of development or adoption of fired pottery. Instead, it is far more likely that...multiple paths were followed in different environments, among people with different subsistence strategies, at different times” (Rice, 1999, p. 47). The origins of pottery are significant in that they are the story that has shaped this art, craft, technology and, therefore, society throughout history.

Pottery, as tool and as technology, represents a sophisticated merging of previously separate domains of human knowledge and experience: resources, technological processes, and needs; or, more specifically, clay, fire, and containment. Discovery of the changes wrought in clay when fire was applied has been recognized since the late nineteenth century as a significant technological leap... [It lead to] a new epoch in human

progress in the direction of an improved living and increased domestic conveniences.
(Rice, 1999, p. 3)

As we continue to experience changes and advances with technology, we see the direct impacts on our social and cultural interactions. However, looking back to how technologies originated can be very helpful for understanding what motivated and drove these changes as potential ways looking ahead or understanding where we are now. Rice (1999) defined three major components necessary for pottery to come into being: knowledge of the clay itself, knowledge of fire, understanding that these two elements combined could create containers. Bringing together understanding and experience highlights the merging of ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’ in the example of pottery.

However, as I dug down to unearth the origins of where pottery came from, I was challenged by the notion of looking at *why* pottery originated rather than when, where or how? Hayden (as indicated by Rice, 1999) suggests that exploring why pottery holds significance above and beyond other types of containers gives us a great insight into the human relations with material culture and the “evolution of material systems” (Rice, 199, p. 45).

As Hearn (2007) reflects on both his functional and artistic journey with clay, he recalls that, “[c]lay’s permanence means that everything ever made – shard or not – is still with the planet somewhere. Curiously, handmade ceramics and my useless ceramics, assemblages where function is purposefully denied, fit together again...and both are therefore about time and the human condition” (pp. 43-44). He played with shape, form and function of clay and used his pots to challenge the norms of functional pottery by denying them a functional form. Regardless of its evolutionary path, the permanent relationship between clay and fire continues to create meaning on this Earth in both aesthetic and functional purposes. It is this longstanding tradition of craft,

the exchange between humans and the Earth and the permanence of this art that causes me to be intrigued by the relationship between the potter and the clay.

Both fire and potters wheel [were] among the earliest of technologies. Fragile but permanent, clay is one of the most significant of cultural indicators, for clay is ubiquitous, is and always has been at the heart of our daily lives. (Hearn, 2007, p. 40)

How is a potters' worldview shaped through the experience of focusing one's attention on working with clay and creating pottery? My perspective and research interests are influenced by the thoughts, writings, and literature from the field of ecopsychology. Sewall and Swift (1999) explored the foggy line between the 'self' and the 'other' and described the interplay between them. They suggested that our worldviews are "shaped by experience...and that one's worldview largely influences, if not determines, behavior. By extension, attention constitutes our being in the world" (p. 79).

Being

Heidegger, a post-Kantian philosopher, is known for his studies on Being and specifically human beings in relation to the physical world. Heidegger (1996) explores what is meant by 'Being'. He suggests that our tendency is to interpret this as *being in* something and often we understand this in relationship to the world or another entity that has similar kinds of properties. Although Heidegger is a controversial figure, his influence in the 20th century is profound. Steiner interprets Heidegger's work (as cited in Hornsby, n.d.) to assert that:

A human being cannot be taken into account except as being an existent in the middle of a world amongst other things...., that Dasein is 'to be there' and 'there' is the world. To be human is to be fixed, embedded and immersed in the physical, literal, tangible day-to-day world (Steiner,1978). (Hornsby, n.d.)

Whether it is philosophy, theology, science, education, ecology – there are many indicators of the necessity of seeing ourselves as part of our physical and material world and thus establishing a relationship with it. Van Manen (1997) refers to the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes' attempts to prove that, "a human being is not just something you automatically are, it is something you must try to be" (p. 5). Does this '*trying*' refer to our participation, connection and integration with the physical world in order to express our selves and become fully human? Personally, I believe that it does. As suggested by Steiner (1978), this trying can be expressed through the tangible, daily interactions with our physical world and that these interactions manifest the human experience that defines a human being.

A Narrative of Environmental Education (EE)

As EE seeks to explore ways to forge significant connections and relationships between humans and the Earth, my curiosity about how we engage in this type of education grew and I began to wonder about hands-on experiences as an avenue for shifting attitudes and behaviours in relationship to the Earth. I began to look for the underlying assumptions about how we learn, relate and engage with our physical world that are shaping the direction of these educational pursuits and seek out the dominant and emerging perspectives. Living in a culture that emphasizes cerebral knowledge, I grew curious about the human history of and with craft, working with our hands and what that might offer to the conversation of EE.

I think art is essential to being human and making art expands who we are and how we connect to ourselves and the environment. I often worry that creativity is an essential that is getting lost in our children's programmed lives, and it is something that becomes increasingly important as they have to navigate a world that is exponentially becoming more complicated. Creativity is one of the only ways to respond positively to complex

problems. Besides that, and perhaps more importantly, I believe children should have fun, and what is more fun than squishing clay? (McClure, n.d.)

I do not see this as polarized discussion but rather suspect that we must be creative and scientific at the same time. However, the intention of this conversation is to bring balance to a current culture and discussion that has privileged the scientific pursuit and minimized the creative pursuit. As this thesis seeks to patch together connections between creativity and the tacit experience of knowing, I recognize the current research that is foundational to this conversation of how we come to know, and EE shapes the current dialogue and influences the place at which I can enter into this discussion. These are the foundations from which I am able to engage and interact with my own research so that I may add to the conversation at large.

And however much we may come to believe that "the real" is subjective and constructed, we still feel art is a path not just to beauty, but to truth: if "truth" is a chosen narrative, then new stories, new aesthetics, are also new truths. (Hirshfield, 1998, p. 5)

Many EE practices still rely on, "a linear progression of environmental knowledge leading to environmental awareness and concern (environmental attitudes), which in turn was thought to lead to pro-environmental behaviour" (Agyeman, & Kollmuss,, 2002, p. 241). However, Neilson (2006) argues that this type of change in which educators are required to teach people how to change is based on the notion that, "individuals [are] divorced from their own bodies, from relationships, ecosystems, and spirituality" (p. 174). This thesis also contributes to EE by shifting towards *being*. "Being leads to understanding and to doing, but it is respectful and receptive, not prescriptive. Being encompasses inner self, social relationships, ecosystems, and systems of spirituality; therefore complexity and ambiguity are lived unconsciously" (Neilson, 2006, p. 174). Can participation, interaction and intimacy with the material world propel us into

new relationships with the Earth? It is my hope that this exploration into embodied knowledge as a way of knowing will:

... refine our aesthetic senses, and in doing so, begin to feel a deepened sensuality and a relinquishing of boundaries that separate. We begin to care for that which we see, and ideally, we find ourselves loving the material world, our Earth. Because love alters behaviour, honouring sensory and sensual experience may be fundamental in the preservation on the Earth. (Sewall, 1999, p. 203)

Connection Through Clay

Pottery recognizes a physical connection to our material world, and speaks to a need for tangible interactions and involvement in our day-to-day lives. We are who we are in relation to others things:

Heidegger called attention to the fact that a human being cannot be taken into account except as being an existent in the middle of a world amongst other things ... To be human is to be fixed, embedded, and immersed in the physical, literal, tangible day-to-day world (Steiner, 1978). (George, 2006, p. 39)

Abram (1996) writes about the reciprocity of this relationship with that which we relate to with our senses.

As we touch the bark of a tree, we feel the tree *touching us*; as we lend our ears to the local sounds and ally our nose to the seasonal scents, the terrain gradually tunes us in in turn. The senses, that is, are the primary way that the Earth has of informing our thoughts and of guiding our actions. (p. 268)

Abram (1996) steers the conversation away from global initiatives, programs and 'top down' solutions and claims that, "it is only at the scale of our direct, sensory interactions with the land

around us that we can appropriately notice and respond to the immediate needs of the living world (p. 268)”. He claims that although this is a place based approach, it avoids the trap of being utopian in that it requires us to be present and in the midst of noticing and participating in the immediate needs of the Earth rather than creating ideas in our minds that are projected as potential future solutions (Abram, 1996). Beittel (1990) explored pottery from a Zen perspective and suggested that the practice of pottery is a tangible example of the interplay between committed practice and enlightenment, process and product. It is this place where myth and mystery are ever present between the potters’ hands and the clay that I wish to explore. Beittel gives a potters’ perspective of this place by inviting the reader into his experience of pottery as it mirrors the Buddhist practice of Zen.

Aesthetics ~ Beyond What We See

I cannot help but love the aesthetics of pottery. It is both the process and the aesthetics that draw me into this craft. The soft glazes that uniquely coat each piece, the soft lines and familiar curves – they just ask to be touched. Sure, there are potters that push these limitations, sculptors that transcend the flow of traditional ceramics, but the overall tone of this medium invites a hand to touch it, an eye to soften its gaze, a small moment of wonder. Although my practice and experience making pottery is minimal, when my eyes fall onto a piece of pottery or my hand holds it, a mini story of what its journey may have looked like begins to unfold. I can imagine the lump of clay being wedged, centered, thrown, shaped, trimmed, fired, glazed and fired again. I connect with its story in some way that I do not when I hold a factory made mug. Laura also explained this to me as we sat down at her kitchen table for an interview. She pulled two mugs out of the cupboard. One was a hand thrown mug and the other was just a factory mug – she held

them both out to me and simply said, “One is alive, the other is not”. I didn’t need to ask which one - it was obvious. There was a story living in one – the other didn’t even engage my curiosity. Although, if I think hard – I can try to imagine a factory; the mug being run through a chain of events and in that, I recognize that there is a story also. However, it is more distant and less alive. The uniqueness has been taken from it. This is where I get curious about my underlying beliefs. What is it that causes me to value and connect with handmade goods over factory made goods? I am willing to dig down at these assumptions and see what unearths. (June 30, 2012)

Verbeek (2005), explores the root of the word aesthetics and states that:

Aesthetics comes from the ancient Greek word *aesthèsis*, which means ‘sensory perception’. Aesthetics should therefore be located in the sensory relation of human beings to the world, a relation that is not solely visual but that involves other senses as well. (p. 211)

Following the lead of Verbeek’s (2005) work, this thesis recognizes the role of sensory and tacit experiences and how these shape our relationships to the world. He argues that we often apply a shallow definition to aesthetics and limit it to its visual qualities, thus ignoring the rest of the senses. Although it is often the visual attraction to shape, form and colours of pottery that draw individuals towards it, it necessitates touch to follow. Inevitably people place their hands on the pottery, searching for the mug that feels just right in their hands, cupping a bowl with two hands, tracing the lines of the potters hands as if recreating the form themselves. Verbeek (2005) argues that expanding aesthetics to include, “the realm of the sensual and not only the realm of the beautiful [suggests] the aesthetics of objects of use is potentially richer than that of many

artworks” (p. 211). This ignites my curiosity about the power of our embodied experiences and expressions.

Embodied Knowledge

In this thesis, I use the term 'embodied knowledge' to refer to knowledge that the body holds, a term is more commonly used in the studies of phenomenology and philosophy. Merleau-Ponty (1962) described this term as, “knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort” (p. 144). In keeping with this notion, I wished to explore it through the vantage point of a potter. Merleau-Ponty uses the description of a painter to express his ideas about embodied knowledge and differentiate them from the Cartesian influence that tended to make a distinction between mind and body (Tanaka, 2011). This type of knowledge that I refer to is often associated with experience, participation, process and procedure. Although holistic practices, integrated approaches and experience are making their way into conversations regarding education and EE, cognitive science is still the dominant discourse within North America at this time in history.

Although it is not possible to “think” only with our rational mind, much of our schooling and academic culture attempts to keep our bodies from getting in the way. Arts-informed methods help to bring our bodies consciously back into our knowing by using activities that our minds cannot grasp in a linear, rational fashion. Once we accept that our bodily responses to music, visual art, dance, theatre, and stories, are valid ways of knowing, we may find complex meanings that we can express more fully and move beyond mere linear discourse in our research. (Neilson, 2006, p. 45)

Although I believe the intention of holistic, arts based and experiential education approaches are to dissolve the mind/body separation; my experience as an Educator, Environmental Educator

and student have validated this cultural experience of using such approaches to enhance or support cognitive understanding by still trying to articulate an experience or distilling a rational understanding of an experience. I believe that an underlying story of cerebral knowledge and rational ways of knowing continue to shape our use of new approaches and perpetuate a separation between mind/body rather than an integration.

Barbour (2004) theorizes embodied knowing provides a capacity for individuals to: Creatively adapt personal beliefs and behaviours in order to resolve the tensions inherent in living in a Western context... In this process, s/he will likely experience tensions (intellectual, spiritual, artistic, physical and emotional tensions) arising from alternative perspectives and practices within dominant culture. S/he will need to be articulate and compassionate in their embodied self-expression. And s/he will need extraordinary passion and commitment to live out the solutions! This, I suggest, is an embodied way of knowing. (p. 235)

Does merely participating in tactile experiences necessitate that embodied knowledge is gained? Barbour suggests that there are so many ways that we interact with ourselves, others and the physical world in which we participate in embodied knowledge, but that we can train ourselves to pay more attention to these interactions so that,

We can then live creatively with these new understandings. And if new knowledge derived from our creative actions is to have any meaning at all, we have to be able to embody it, to live it, to discard knowledge if it is not livable. We need to realize embodied knowledge as useful in our living. To contribute to the development of new knowledge, to create artistically and to express our knowledge, we need to know ourselves. Moving reveals our worlds and ourselves. (Barbour, 2012, p. 12)

This thesis explores the knowledge that comes from embodied experience, the necessity of becoming immersed in the process of change and the benefits of participating tacitly in this change process. It is one thing for me to watch the potters interact with the clay, the pushing, resisting, pulling, holding, shaping. It is mesmerizing to watch and I could articulate some of the techniques, but it wasn't until I participated in this process myself that I could really even begin to 'know' what I was talking about. This thesis explores the embodied creative experience and expressions as ways in which we ground our knowledge and even begin to 'know' in ways that we can't articulate with our cognitive understanding.

Experiential Education ~ The Outside and Inside Environments

I wish to explore how embodied experiences and expressions can contribute to conversations about embodied education and knowledge as it relates to EE. Phillip Payne is currently one of the leading voices contributing to and guiding this conversation. As experiential education gains momentum in education in general (e.g., outdoor education, EE), Payne (2002) seeks to deconstruct how 'experience' is used and help educators explore the meaning that is implied in this term and how this informs their teaching and shapes their practice and pedagogy. He introduces the term, postphenomenology, to express a reinterpretation of phenomenology that recognizes the mutual shaping between humans and the world. He refers to this interaction of shaping between the material world and humans as mediation. Payne (2003) explores the lived nature of how an individual interacts in his or her environment and proposes that it is essential for Environmental Educators to engage in postphenomenological enquiry to dig at the roots of their assumptions about how, "individual and collective experiences of environments are constructed via various pedagogical, curricula, and research means" (Payne, 2003, p. 172). Payne (2003) commented that an:

Increasing number of environmental educators who are now acknowledging that the primary focus on “outer” environments, wilderness and other exotic/sublime versions of nature, although important for some purposes, serves also to reproduce the disembodied, demoralizing, disempowering, disengaged, and disenchanting human-environment and culture-nature dualisms that are part of the problem. (p. 50)

According to Payne (2002), educators often quote the Confucian saying, “Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand” to support experiential hands-on education as a pedagogy for curriculum areas such as outdoor education and EE. He challenges the idea of experience and dissects this to suggest that experience entails much more than just being *in* specific contexts. Dewey, in *Education and Experience*, wrote, “[t]he belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative” (1998, p. 13). It is a common practice to set up knowing as a relationship between subject and object (Steiner, 1978). Several academics refer to this practice as being potentially superficial, limiting and formal (Heidegger, 1996; Payne, 2002; Steiner, 1978).

Payne (2002) explores the nature of experience by examining the material conditions and social positioning of kayaking as an experience in critical outdoor education. He begins to explore the relationship with material in mediating our experiences. He uses the term ‘critical outdoor education’ to refer to the role that experience currently holds in outdoor education. It is often assumed to be purposeful in addressing the moral necessity for caring for the environment (Payne, 2002). The essence of it being critical is derived from the political and social dimensions that surround EE at this current time.

This study stems from a question and curiosity about the importance of tangible connections with our physical world. Capra (2005) writes that, “the web of life, the cycles of nature, and the flow of energy – are exactly the phenomena that children experience, explore, and understand through direct experiences in the natural world” (p. xiv). He continues by supporting that it is through direct embodied experience that,

We also become aware of how we ourselves are part of the web of life, and over time the experience of ecology in nature gives us a sense of place. We become aware of how we are embedded in an ecosystem; in a landscape with a particular flora and fauna; in a particular social system and culture. (Capra, 2005, p. xiv)

There are numerous ways to learn from nature’s wisdom including realms such as art and poetry (Capra, 2005). As several researchers examine what exactly is EE, they highlight the need for it to be more than merely education *about* the environment but rather, “an integration of place into education” (Orr, 2005a, p. 90). Orr (2005a) writes about the reciprocal relationship between the hand and the brain and elaborates on this notion by suggesting that, “in the reciprocity between thinking and doing, knowledge loses much of its abstractness, becoming in the application to specific places and problems tangible and direct” (p. 91).

Looking to the influence of Deep Ecologists such as Arne Naess, I am drawn to the creative process and how it shapes the way in which humans identify with nature and view ourselves in relation to our Earth. Naess (1995) refers to self-realization as the process of understanding what we mean when we speak about how we identify with nature (i.e. our ecological self). I am influenced to believe that experiences strongly shape the way in which I see and behave in the world. This perspective supports the belief that as our ecological self develops and we begin to see ourselves as part of nature, we can then begin to act from a place of

care rather than obligation. Diehm (2007) referred to the Kantian notion that, “our ecological self can act ‘beautifully’ but not ‘morally’ [and] rather than helping others because it is our duty, we help others because of the basic inclination to care for everything that is part of our extended self” (p. 5). I see the creative process and experience as extensions and expressions of beauty. How does this act of beauty in a potter’s experience connect with how they act in the world?

Artifacts ~ Mediating Our Daily Life

Verbeek (2005) challenges the views of Heidegger by suggesting that although technology might close us off from some possibilities, it does not detract from meaning and authenticity, but rather opens up new possibilities. He suggests that postphenomenology explores the role of objects in their environments. I drew parallels between Verbeek’s (2005) research and my own in that he focused on, “artifacts that play a large role in everyday life” (p. 204).

Although pottery is not always functional, all of the potters that I interviewed created a large body of functional ware and spoke to this experience. Verbeek (2005) argues that the symbols and functions of materials shape our choices, perceptions and interactions with our world because they influence how we think and we therefore construct ideas of how we should be. An approach to experiential education or embodied experiences that is informed by phenomenology might recognize that our interaction with the material world would necessarily mediate, alter and influence how we perceive an experience. However, as Payne suggests, a postphenomenological approach would see the ‘self’ as socially constructed and therefore acknowledges that we are also directly mediated by objects, texts, culture, nature and that our embodied experience includes all of these realms as influences not only on our perception, but direct influences on our experience and interaction with the material world. This notion of *material mediation* suggests that regardless of our cognitive choices, constructed perceptions, attitudes and responses to the

material – contact with our material world directly influences so many aspects of our relationship in the world and our state of being by affecting us on a sensorial level. Although his research focuses on the role of design, it suggests that our direct experience with the Earth consistently contributes knowingly and unknowingly towards answering the question, “How should we live?” (Verbeek, 2005)

Mander (1991) comments that “[we] are surrounded by pavement, machinery, gigantic concrete structures. Automobiles, airplanes, computers, appliances, television, electric lights, artificial air have become the physical universe with which our senses interact” (p. 31). This leaves me wondering about the direct impact of the environments in which we work, play and call home. I am curious about how physical senses perceive these interactions and inform how we think and behave in our world. Mander stated, “as we relate to these objects of our own creation, we begin to merge with them and assume some of their characteristics” (p. 31). This suggests to me that our environment does shape us, just as we shape our environment. Using a postphenomenological approach to foster this critical pedagogy of care for the environment, Payne (2002) suggests that:

[H]umble activities that enflame a 'low' technics in their design and structuring of individual and group experience embody a resourceful, craft-like material, social and symbolic production of minimally consumptive modes of environmentally attuned travel and living; and are more in keeping with the unfolding affordances of daily/seasonal time and presence of proximal spaces and places. Moreover, we might even let such experiences talk for themselves rather than process the experience in ways that (dogmatically) act to confirm the teacher/leader's other 'worldview' or different 'way of thinking'. (n.p.)

In “Reclaiming Gaia, Reclaiming Life”, Wheatley (1998) explores a worldview in which the creative process and being in relationship with others are fundamental to our human existence and she encourages us to tell our creative stories through our sense of being and community. These perspectives shaped the way I approached the potters that I interviewed and sought personal creative stories, collective stories and implications for the community at large. As I observed these artists at work in these creative spaces, Hirschfield’s (1998) thoughts guided the way I viewed this contemplative practice. “In the wholeheartedness of concentration, world and self begin to cohere. With this state comes an enlarging: of what may be known, of what may be felt, of what may be done” (p. 4).

A Paradigm Shift ~ The Environment is You

Public discourse, media and dominant perspectives of environmental resource management and sustainability draw attention to the need for a shift in how we view the physical world and our place within it. As resource scarcity (i.e. water, oil) and climate change gather more attention, they do not necessarily challenge us to re-explore our relationship with the physical world. Amongst various Environmental movements, these niche conversations are beginning to happen with hopes of spreading and gathering momentum towards a paradigm shift, but how to do this is still unclear - there are a variety of voices contributing to potential approaches. As I began to wonder about how to make the shift towards a new story emerging, I began to wonder how a potter’s relationship with the clay might shape his or her view and relationship with environmental issues in broader society. It is my sense that a hands-on interaction with clay on a regular basis would be a grounding experience in a potter’s life that would connect him/her to an intuitive understanding of shaping, process, time, reciprocal relationship and the constant flow between ourselves and the material world. I believe that the

intimate connection that a potter holds with the material of clay would lead to a deep and tangible understanding of holding and developing a relationship with the earth by participating with the earth.

As a call for a paradigm shift is gaining momentum (Kuhn, 1962; Mason, McConnel & Suzuki, 2007; Orr, 2005a; Wilson, 1992), we must feel the resistance, the pushing and the pulling so we can respond and participate in and with the change. We cannot simply talk about how we anticipate we might respond – we must actually respond and react. A potter cannot tell you exactly when to push and when to relax your hands when you are centering clay; there is no formula for this, but rather it is a constant intuitive response that offers immediate feedback when you are pushing too much.

I just got back from hearing David Suzuki speak with Dasho Kinley about Gross National Happiness Index. It was an interesting conversation. On one hand, Suzuki presented the current need for a paradigm shift and a shift in what we value. He called for a reconsideration of what we consider progress and the value that we place on experiences and relationships (with people, land and ourselves). In this conversation, Kinley admitted that he was intimidated by speaking to an audience about these ideas; he tended to repeat himself and he often went back to his notes and seemed challenged by responding to questions and answers about 'happiness'. At the end of the evening, several people were disappointed because it did not seem that he was speaking from his heart or authentically about the call for a global shift towards a Happiness Index rather than our current focus on Gross Domestic Products (the monetary value of goods and services produced in a country). However, this seemed to be the beauty and the crux of the conversation for me. He simply couldn't articulate it. He kept shuffling and looking nervous and stumbling for

words, and it didn't seem like he could speak from the heart about it because I simply think that it couldn't be put into words. The pursuit of 'happiness' (in the best interest of humanity, the entire biosphere and all of the systems that become that), is currently trying to be defined in focus groups at the United Nations and broken down into tangible steps. However, it appeared to me that it is something that is so deep rooted within the Bhutanese culture and that it cannot simply be articulated and cognitively understood. I believe the knowledge is within the embodiment of these values. He kept referring to the need to look inside oneself and how even the farmers, peasants, kings and scholars could all participate in this pursuit without defining it. Perhaps it was just language barriers or stage fright, but I would lean towards this notion that it is something that is known within his being that cannot simply be put into words, and that he knows this by living it, sensing it, interacting with it. It reminded me of a quote that I read by Lao Tzu, "One who knows does not say and one who says does not know". (November 1, 2012)

Hanh (2008), a Buddhist Monk, peace activist, teacher and poet challenges the distinction that we create between the environment and ourselves:

There is always an interaction between the two forms of retribution. In fact elements like air, water, Earth, fire are always going in and going out. When we breathe out, something goes out into the environment. When we breathe in, something goes into our body. So you are not only here but there...the environment is you. (p. 17)

To me, these ideas challenge the priorities of Western culture and the attempts that we make to compartmentalize and fragment our lives. What are the characteristics that we are assuming? What are the characteristics from nature that we want to be assuming as we look towards environmental responsibility and action? However, it also challenges the notion of

Environment. What exactly is this? Is it something external? Perhaps the paradox of mind-body separation speaks as a reference point to understand the same separation of human and Earth. Merleau-Ponty (1964), speaks to the paradox of the body and mind and alludes to the involvement in the natural world by saying, “[v]isible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself” (p. 3).

This blurring of world and self interests me in light of Cooper’s (2000) research that shows some types of environmentalists use the term *environment* to suggest separation between humans and everything else around us. Stibbe (2004) refers to this anthropocentric idea of the environment as shallow environmentalism and challenges the way in which EE is taught. Rather, he supports the ecological awareness that is steeped within the Japanese culture where, “Buddhist ideals of compassion and Taoist ideals of flowing with nature, converge in Zen and become manifest in poetry, calligraphy, pottery and other cultural practices” (p. 255). For me, pottery holds both the opportunity to develop ecological awareness as well as a venue for environmental action as a result of the tangible relationship that emerges between the artist and the clay. In searching for deep ecology and places where this is fostered, I look to pottery as a particular cultural practice where the line between creator and creation is grey. Suzuki (1970) responds to this intellectual separation of subject and object saying, “[t]here has never been any separation between subject and object, and all the discrimination and separation we have or, rather, make is a later creation...The aim of Zen is thus to restore the experience of original inseparability” (p. 359).

Defining a creative relationship as a separation between subject and object may suggest the interaction between the maker and the material is fixed in time and place. However, in the

book *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennet (2008) acknowledges that it is not only the product that is created but also the knowledge resulting from this creative experience. He refers to this as ‘material consciousness’ and leaves this definition open to interpretation of whether the knowledge remains in the human, the material or both (Sennet, 2008). Malafouris (2010), an archeologist, also has a similar notion to ‘material consciousness’; however, he refers to this space between maker and material as ‘material engagement’. He writes that in this zone there is always a constant flow of activity and it is where, “brain, body and culture conflate” (p. 22). This reminds me again of the potter and the clay on the wheel. They are all interacting, sending messages, responding and the knowledge of the hands is growing throughout these interactions.

Findings & Discussion

What makes a text, where it begins and ends, how it is to be represented – these are not simple questions... It is the ethnographer's temptation to reduce context to the observable, watching bodily motions while subtle meanings escape... Texts have limits, meanings do not, and the analyst on the hunt for meaning will gather as much information as possible to construct as many contexts as possible. Then as the text is located in the context after context, associations will assemble and multiply. The reading becomes rich. The artifact swells with meaning and accomplishes its mission. (Glassie, 1999, p. 48)

As an ethnographer approaching these potters, I was looking for meaning. In doing so, I recorded observations of movements, interactions, setting, place and anything I could take in. I sat with the text, I recalled my experiences with the potters, wrote narratives and derived my own perception of their experiences. The following is a discussion, through text, of the meaning that I gleaned from these experiences. There were numerous themes that emerged as I sat with the data and drew parallels between it. For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected a collection of themes that resonated with me and my own experiences but also one's that I hope resonate with a broader audience as well. These include:

- Cause and Affect
- Intimacy with the Material World
- Time
- Flow
- Preservation
- Permanence

- Grounding and Connection
- Beauty
- Tools

It is my hope that these themes are not concrete and limited, but rather hold space for the infinite possibility of meaning to be contributed to future discussions and conversations.

Cause and Affect

Prior to entering the space of the Potter's I reflected on the spaces where I create as an opportunity to make visible where my focus fell in their workspaces in relation to my own lived experiences. Inevitably as I began to explore the creative experiences of these potters, I reflected on my own creative experiences and my thoughts immediately turned to the space in which I dwell.

Looking around my home and doing a quick 360 degree scan, it is evident to me that the things and experiences that I value most have been the hand-made one's. My bathroom is filled with magazines called 'Ready-Made'; my wall décor is all homemade projects from friends or myself. I have a laptop case that I made from some scrap fabric and an old camping foam mattress; a chalk board hangs on my kitchen wall that I made from scrap wood and an antique dresser mirror frame; my furniture is all collected pieces from garage sales, relatives and kijiji; the bed is raised on wooden blocks that I got from the local lumber yard scrap pile and placed on casters so that it is extra tall and I can store hiking backpacks and a kayak under it; the stack of mail collecting on the end of the counter is filled with bills interspersed with a few handwritten letters both to be sent and received from friends; my kitchen table has been re-glued because it is too lovely to just get rid of, even though it was free and badly needs refinishing and a few bolts tightened

up; a hand-made canoe paddle that I built sits in the corner of the living room along side a guitar made from a cigar box; a handmade table lamp re-built from collected items; a cupboard filled with home-brewed beer; a second-hand hutch displays pottery I have made myself and those pieces collected by various potters that I have met over the years; and finally, the laminate floor that I jimmy-rigged to lay in my apartment was recovered by my dad from a building where it was being torn out. As I reach up to twist my ponytail into a bun to get it off my neck, I realize that even my pony tail elastic is made from cutting apart an old tube from a bicycle tire. As I am about to close this journal for another day of writing I remember that in the back of it the pages are filled with lists, sketches and ideas for projects that I want to make next. True – I could probably buy them and save myself a lot of time, but given that alternative I lose interest in even desiring them. It is the feeling I get from figuring something out for myself and/or re-purposing something that brings me great joy. Most of these things are ‘functional’ items and that too brings me great joy: To be able to use something I made myself or to be able to do it without going somewhere or buying something. Is it always cheaper? Not really, sometimes it costs, sometimes it costs time – but I rarely recall feeling that the time I spent to figure something out was a waste of time. (September 28, 2012)

What drives me to create by hand? From one perspective, my craftiness was encouraged and fostered out of frugality and familiarity. All of my grandparents were farmers throughout the Great Depression of the 1930’s and my father grew up in a farming family with seventeen children, which inevitably meant that they needed to be creative with their resources. This greatly shaped their relationship to the land as well as “stuff”. Waste was not an option.

Everything that could be was reused, repurposed, remade, sold, and adapted. But are there other perspectives that drive my passion for sinking my hands in and shaping my environment?

Last night I heard David Suzuki speak; he talked about the notion of home. As he told stories he recalled one day when he received a letter from a real-estate company suggesting that it was a prime time for him to sell his property in Vancouver and 'Buy-up'. He expressed his confusion about this idea and explained how the things he valued could simply not be exchanged for a monetary price value. This reminded me of the beautiful children's book by Byrd Baylor called, 'The Table Where Rich People Sit'. It is a story in which a family tries to put a value on their humble existence and determines that there is nothing that could replace the value of seeing a sunrise every morning, hearing the coyotes howl, smelling the fresh rain. David also spoke of trying to place a monetary value on the memories of raising his family there for 30 years and how every time he opened the gate he used a handle carved by one of his friends, how there was a little graveyard of pets and animals buried by his children over the years in the grove of trees...these were the irreplaceable and invaluable moments that could simply not be replaced by money. For me, this reinforced the value of embodied experiences as well as my own attachment to creating a sense of place and a home. I love creating a home that represents my values, my memories with things I have made or that are made by those that I know. I love building a relationship with where I live that speaks to how I live.

(November 1, 2012)

Although I can directly see and feel that my history has shaped my affinity towards participating in creating, the roots go much deeper and spread further than just a historical influence. Influenced by a post-modern constructivist approach to learning, I acknowledge that

my first hand experiences in the world builds knowledge based on experience and creates filters for understanding my environment and reality. I also resonate strongly with Thomashow's (1995) notions of how we develop an ecological identity. For him, "ecological identity refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self" (p. 3). As a result, this view necessitates that the Earth becomes an object from which to identify with and develop our identity in conjunction with. I can see that my ecological identity is continuously being constructed. Glassie (1999) writes about the relationship between humans and their material culture by exploring the meaning in artifacts. He states that, "coming into being, the artifact inevitably creates relations – relations between nature and culture, between the individual and society, between utility and beauty – and governed by desire, the artifact's construction answers questions of value" (p. 143). And so, looking back I can acknowledge that my culture, climate, time in history, family history, relationships with people, spirituality, exposure to attitudes, global events and direct experiences with the material world have profoundly shaped my ecological identity.

David Orr is an academic, environmental educator, ethicist and a writer known for his writings about Ecological Literacy (Orr, 2005) and Sense of Place (Orr, 2004). He writes from a hopeful perspective that humans can restore a relationship with the Earth that we belong to and that, "once in a lifetime we ought to give ourselves up to a particular landscape, to dwell on it, wonder about it, imagine it, touch it, listen to it, and recollect" (Orr, 2005b, p. 106). For me, these are the prairies. I have travelled to many places in Canada and around the world and each landscape fascinates me and leaves me in awe. However, it is the way in which I feel connected to the smells, the skies, the seasons, the memories, the sounds, the birds, the tall grasses, golden canola crops, the thundershowers and the smell after rain.

The environment that concerned me the most extended the length of one city block from my back yard to the schoolyard. It had four typical Alberta seasons and a handful of animals with which I became familiar. I began to explore within my reach and unearthed a few more treasures. In turn, I created many backyard games. I would stop every so often to trade my goods for other goods. Perhaps I traded a handful of pinecones for a stack of moss. Whatever it may have been, I circled the yard, I gathered goods, I traded, I used them, and I explored this new land over and over again. There were patterns I began to notice. I expected the baby squirrels to emerge from the rafters of our garage every spring. This indicated it was finally time for Dad to clear the lawn mower out of my playhouse so that I could begin my spring cleaning and make sure no little critters had made their home in there over the winter. Shortly after this – we waited for one more dump of snow – usually on my brother’s birthday at the end of May. Then it was time for the annual trip to the greenhouse to purchase seeds, bulbs, bedding plants and if Dad was in a good mood – one hanging basket for Mom. Marigolds were always planted next to the tomatoes, carrots and potatoes went behind the garage and sunflowers often just blew over from the neighbours yard – those were a wild bonus planting and I liked when they landed next to the play house. Lettuce, tomatoes and raspberries were signs of summer. The small red crabapples splattered on the deck every fall and in a flurry the kitchen was turned into a crabapple workshop. I remember waking to the smell of crabapples simmering on the stove, pillowcases of crabapples hung from cupboard doors with skinny streams of red juice streaming out from them while the counters and floors were overflowing with buckets of these ripe red apples. After a few days, the whirlwind would cease and a counter stacked with glass jars of glowing red jelly and juice

reflecting the sunlight denoted a finale. Now, I knew the seasons were changing...the leaves would start turning soon, and next it would be time to dig potatoes and carrots. The tomatoes would be covered in tablecloths and blankets to ward off the frost a little bit longer. I watched the magpies and began to develop a dislike for these egg-robbers as I rooted for the Blue Jays and the Robins hoping each year they would chose to live in my wooden bird house that I so carefully painted and built for them. I knew earthworms didn't fall from the sky but how did they always end up on the sidewalk after it rained? Where did they come from? Bees, mosquitoes, and wasps remained on my list of dislikes while ladybugs, butterflies and dragonflies stayed on my good side. In trying to understand my world, I had begun to categorize my environment. At such a young age, I had developed my own understandings of how things worked. Perhaps I did not have an understanding of the bigger picture or the interconnectedness and interdependent relationships in my environment, but this is what I knew. (July 10, 2009)

In my personal reflections, it seems evident to me that the way in which I have come to understand, know and articulate my understanding of my place in this world has been strongly connected with interacting, shaping and constructing my material world. Whether this is from the confines of a backyard as a child to establishing a space that I call home, I can relate these experiences to the push and pull of potters and clay. As I push, the Earth pushes back with limitations, confines and consequences until we fall into a rhythm and steady centre. It is through constant relationship with the material world that I was able to anticipate reactions, behaviours and responses and thus shaped my actions and interactions with it.

If the self-concept is shaped by social interaction, and if identities link individuals to a role in society, what exactly is an “ecological identity?” And how can ecological

identities emerge unless we can interact socially with aspects of the natural world? I conceptualize ecological identity as that part of the self that allows individuals to anticipate the reactions of the environment to their behaviour. (Zavestovsky, 2003, p. 299)

Intimacy with the Material World

Proficient practice is achieved through intimacy with the material world, not only repetition. (O'Connor, 2009, p. 15)

As I entered each Potter's home, studio, gallery or workspace there was a distinct sense of home. Their space around them served as a reflection of their creative inspirations and values. This piques my curiosity about how the interaction between a potter and the clay shapes their understanding of their environment by being directly involved in the cause and effect practice of pottery. The potters often spoke of how their understanding and relationship with clay evolved throughout the years. Throughout each interview, they all touched on the notion that through spending time with the medium, they developed an intimate understanding of the medium they were relating to and how it responded under various conditions. Some spoke about how in their younger days of potting, there was an element of guessing and hoping that the clay would respond in a certain way and yet, with time they were able to anticipate the response of the clay and the dialogue between potter and clay could begin. One spoke of how 'mistakes' were moments in which he was still getting acquainted with clay, a glaze, a tool, a posture, a shape, and with these changes unanticipated responses emerged. A few spoke of how a mistake could become a technique or personal style when it was repeated and the response was able to be anticipated – however, this required intimate understanding between the potter and the clay. A few of the potters spoke of their younger years with clay or working with novice potters, and

recalled being able to make, adapt, shape and change clay - and yet the gap in knowledge was the ability to anticipate how the clay would respond and react.

Anticipation carries practice beyond the moment of action and is the facility through which an envisioned piece can be realized...The anticipation that marks proficient practical knowledge is not a reflective forward-looking gesture. It is a non-reflective corporeal forward-going movement beyond adaptation. (O'Connor, 2009, p. 16)

According to Mary, as she sunk into a greater awareness and intimacy of the material that she was working with, the reciprocity of the shaping relationship seemed to unfold.

At first I was trying to impose my idea on the clay. I was trying to replicate things I had seen or envisioned but the more I got to know the clay, the more I realized it is similar to Michael Angelo bringing forth the statue that already exists within the stone. I am working *with* the clay to bring out a form. No longer was I guessing or hoping the clay would respond in a certain way; after long enough I began to just know how it would respond. It was predictable, but only through many, many hours in my hands. (Mary Fox)

Spending time with potters made me curious about my first encounter with clay? I have distinct memories of mud and clay. These define me. Spring, summer and fall afternoons were spent baking mud pies topped with pinecones and mountain ash berries. I remember teaching my sister how to bake these and serving them proudly to my brother or anyone that entered the backyard. Whether it was the garden behind the garage, the dirt under the skateboard ramp in the backyard or the garden plot that my parents rented each summer, there was plenty of dirt to be explored. Summer holidays, long weekends and festivals were also bookmarked by roaming in the mud. This usually involved picking rocks on my Papa's farm, digging potatoes with Grannie, or digging carrots with my

Aunt and Uncle. My job at various ages stemmed from staying out of the way and finding earthworms, to digging down deep in the Earth to find the carrots that had half broken off under ground. This felt just right. My parents encouraged us to play in the dirt and we were no strangers to entertaining ourselves this way. I remember the day we were all digging potatoes after a rainstorm and my Dad had to rescue Grannie from the mud as she had sunk all the way up to the top of her rain boots and could not budge an inch on her own! Clay came a little later. This was a fantastic discovery. When I was 6, I started taking a children's pottery class from Mrs. Eichner and was hooked. I loved rolling coils and stacking them carefully on top of each other to build a vessel. This was fun, but the most fun was discovering clay for myself. I remember it clearly. A common game that we played at recess was to dig down below the dry sand in the park and discover the wet, cool sand. We would carve out bowl shapes and pretend that we were making incredible creations. But it all changed one day, we dug deeper and we found clay. We began excavating the entire park for clay, rolling it into balls and storing it up for future creations. We built miniature animals, muffins, food, caves, sculptures and anything we could think of and let it dry in the sun until the next recess break. This entertained us for over a year worth of recesses! (October 1, 2012)

These reflections suggest a novice relationship with the clay. There is a sense of familiarity, there is shaping, emerging reactions and responses, intrigue and desire, There is still a newness and novelty to each experience and the true intimate knowledge of this material is far from being engrained in my being. The essence of separation between the material and me is still present, yet inevitably they shaped my experience in the world. Looking back, I can see that engaging my senses and my hands in these experiences contributed to an ecological identity in

which I see myself as part of nature and promotes the view of self to include nature (Naess, 1989).

Vic and Mary, as potters that have been involved in the craft for over 30 years, both spoke to the commitment and passion required to continue this pursuit of clay. Vic mentioned that at times there were sacrifices and humble beginnings to this work, but given the choice to chose anything else, he would without question still choose to be a potter. They spoke of the necessary commitment to the work, hours spent with clay, years spent turning cup after cup, bowl after bowl. A common thread amongst all of the artists, regardless of age or time with the craft, was the necessity of being passionate about what they do and building a life around it. One potter mentioned that it is a unique discipline in which the potter must surrender to the will of the clay and that only through time and practice can one really learn to work *with* the clay rather than act upon it.

Time

The visual of a potter holding, molding and shaping clay conjured up wonder about how this tangible relationship with the physical Earth on a regular basis affects a potter? In a world that is so fragmented by fences, obligations, buildings, timelines, clocks, how does a focused concentrated time in direct contact with the material world shape an individual's perspective and worldview?

The dominant culture and worldview I am immersed in often portrays materials as deployable resources and the media tends to propagate a throw-away culture. It is more common to hear the old adage that time is money and life experience suggests that it is often cheaper to buy a new "thing" than to fix an old one. Crawford (2009), writes about the old adage, "Time is

Money” as he illuminates the tension experienced when deciding on the opportunity cost of fixing one’s own stuff.

The idea of opportunity costs presumes the fungibility of human experience: all our activities are equivalent or interchangeable once they are reduced to the abstract currency of clock time, and its wage correlate...Economics recognizes only certain virtues, and not the most impressive ones at that. Spiritedness is an assertion of one’s own dignity, and to fix one’s own car is not to use up time, it is to have a different experience of time, of one’s car, and of oneself. (p. 55)

But what is it about the experience, knowledge and relationship with materials that is formed from participating in embodied experiences?

It happened again, my curiosity got the best of me. It was a beautiful day outside, the mountains were surrounding me with blue skies and yet I found myself fascinated by whether or not I could switch the handle and door of a refrigerator so that it would open the reverse way. It would simply make life in the kitchen a bit easier. So there you have it - three hours of a beautiful afternoon were quickly spent inside navigating my way through this hands-on problem. Why did it bring such satisfaction? These are the questions I begin to really wonder about when I find myself involved in other time lengthening, problem solving encounters. It makes sense to me when I am making something beautiful or practicing an instrument – but switching a refrigerator handle?! The real kicker is that it wasn’t even my own fridge! I don’t reap the benefits of this switch...but figuring it out felt so good. What is it about this kind of learning and doing that strikes a chord with something deep inside of me? (August 3, 2012)

Although this experience may seem unrelated to what drove me to seek out potters and explore their relationship with the creative experience, for me it raises similar questions: How and what do we come to know through embodied creative experiences? During an interview, Caleb Speller spoke about the emergent design of pottery and how the molding of one pot or vessel informed the shaping of the next one. He suggested that the knowledge gained from holding, molding and interacting with the clay was embedded in his hands and therefore expressed itself in the next vessel he built.

In “Above and Beyond Function”, Hearn (2007) comments on the depth of knowledge that is involved within craft and craftsmanship.

Once everything was made by hand but now hardly anything is... Time is money and few of us appear to have enough of either commodity. Globalization is about profits not people. Once this world and the next were held to be much closer together, and ceramics held an important place in both. Not just utilitarian, ceramics also spoke of intrinsic values – of spirituality, ritual and ceremony, both within and beyond function. (Hearn, 2007, p. 39)

These words really resonated after interviewing Mary in Ladysmith, BC:

There are lots of different workshops that people attend and there are lots of people saying all this bullshit that people are listening to and believing. One potter told a group that he doesn't bother trimming the bottom of his mugs because it takes too much time and he doesn't get paid enough. So, I said to my group, I am a pretty good potter and the potter that told you that is a pretty good potter. Let's say on a lazy day, in an hour how many mugs do you think we could make. Let's say it takes 3 minutes to throw a mug (maximum), 3 minutes to trim the mug, 3 minutes to put the handle on and a minute to

bang it into a ball, so that's 10 minutes and now we need to glaze it and put it into the kiln. So that's 15 minutes and I am padding the time. So that's 4 mugs an hour, at \$25 per mug, so that is \$100. Ok, so the cost is a couple of bucks and even if you wholesale it that is \$50. How is that not enough money? I couldn't stomach it to see something I was not proud of leave the shop. But people believe that crap that they are told and I am trying to tell them to get that shit out of their head. (Mary Fox)

It became evident through spending time with these potters that their lives as potters were very fluid. They created structure within their daily routines and allotted specific times to work in their shops. However, the distinction between work and home was a bit more blurred. As Mary reflected, "It is not part of my life, it is my life". Most of their daily lives revolved around pottery and therefore each task that they were embarking in was part of the process.

Vic was repairing the skylight in his studio during our interview. Mary was attending to her Gallery space; arranging it, finishing orders and serving customers who came in and out of her space during her defined Gallery hours. Julia was wedging clay and shaping it into evenly weighted balls in preparation for making a series of mugs. Laura was settled at the kitchen table organizing and cleaning up from a pottery show and sale that she had on the weekend. All of these actions were in fact part of being a potter and part of the meaningful work that they do.

When I asked Mary if there was a particular way that she started each day, she replied:

Well, I pretty much always like doing what I am doing because if I am not in the right headspace for one part of it, there is always another job. If I don't feel well enough to throw or I am not in that headspace then I do something else. There are always other things to do. You can clean up wax or mix glazes. There are always jobs that need doing. Once a pot is made, a pot is made. You can look back and you can tell if you weren't

feeling that great and it shows in your work. Then fine, do something else. It's not going to show in your accounting or mixing your glazes or scraping your kiln shelf or cleaning the floor. I am very conscious of coming from the right place when I do stuff and I think it shows in the work...happy pots! (Mary Fox)

Flow

One interview challenged my methods and my understanding of the self-imposed boundaries and limitations that human beings design for ourselves. I begin by retelling the experience of meeting Caleb Speller and stepping into a place where some of these invisible boundaries were challenged or non-existent. I had completed four interviews in my originally-intended approach of creating field notes during the interview and also elongated reflections after the interview. However, when I entered Caleb's workspace all of my pre-conceived boundaries were stretched. I was used to entering a specific space that was situated within four walls (i.e. a home, a studio, a workspace). When I rode my bike onto Caleb's property it was quickly apparent that his workspace and creative workshop was not limited to an enclosed studio space. It began the moment I stepped onto his property. He greeted me and before I could even put my bike down I was welcomed into his zone of creativity. Caleb's story unfolded with each step I took toward his house. It was a feast for the senses. Caleb identifies as a full time artist in many mediums, ceramics being one of them. It is obvious that he fully embodies these identities in all of his endeavors.

There was the garden that was an experimental project that was gated by a hand woven willow wall. Leading from the garden was a stone path built from all of the rocks picked on the property and old bricks from the house. Further down this path was a moss garden that was built from the moss that had built up on the cedar shingles for several decades. Beside the garden was

a rather dead looking pear tree that had been blown down in a storm but had one remaining branch with a single pear ripening on it. This had been propped up by another decorative twisted piece of wood that served as a tripod for the fallen branch to keep the pear out of reach from the local deer. On the side of the house hung a vintage tandem bicycle that led to a conversation about Caleb's project of restoring old and thrown away bicycles. Every observation, comment and step led to another story, another layer and another dimension of Caleb's interaction with the creative process. It was not a particular thing that he did but simply a lens from which he viewed his world, his place in the world and all things around him. He pointed out a wild thorn-less black raspberry bush that he had unearthed beneath some overgrown weeds. He had built a climbing fence for them from some recovered screen that he found under a pile of scrap wood. Further along the path was a tomato greenhouse built from salvaged windows and even the tomatoes had a story of being a gift from an eccentric lady who raised goats and gathered heirloom tomatoes. Eventually the stories led us around the property and it was only by the timing of the Earth's rotation around the sun that limited the visibility by dusk and naturally led us onto the porch of an old tiny house that housed Caleb, his wife, his drawing and pottery studio. By the single light hanging in the living room – the 600 square foot house was filled with an infinite number of stories. It was effortless. It was here that my emergent design took a drastic shift.

During this interview Caleb reflected that he was conscious of the time that he scheduled to attend social engagements or leave the property. Feeling very embedded in this place, he felt that what emerged was only possible by being present, noticing and not imposing a time restriction on it. When he spoke about time, he recalled having a different relationship with time and reflected that he did not feel that he operated on a 24-hour clock but rather operated in

relationship with the materials in which he was working. When creativity struck, he responded and mostly he watched and listened to what he was working with and what was around him. Creating space was one of the most important things he could do as an artist: slowing down, creating space and learning to respond to what presented itself.

Perhaps the slower pace that is often necessitated by interacting with the natural world nurtures creativity. Csikszentmihalyi (2008), developed a theory of these experiences in which an individual is fully engaged in something. He based this on the concept of *flow* which he defined as, “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (p.4). I have experienced those moments in which I lose all track of time and I am fully immersed in what I have dedicated my attention to. Visiting the potter’s offered opportunities to witness this experience of flow, hear about it and resonate with it. This state of flow also seems to be a foundation from which both patience and happiness are fostered. Several of the potters acknowledged that patience is one of the greatest lessons that pottery teaches them on a continual basis. Conversations with nature seem to necessitate shifts in action and support the notion that EE should change the way people live and not only how they talk (Orr, 1992).

Good conversation is unhurried. It has its own rhythm and pace. Dialogue with nature cannot be rushed. It will be governed by cycles of day and night, the seasons, the pace of procreation, and by the larger rhythm of evolutionary and geologic time. Human sense of time is increasingly frenetic, driven by clocks, computers, and revolutions in transportation and communication. (Orr, 1992, p. 91)

It is in these unhurried places, interactions and experiences in which the greatest sense of satisfaction are gained. Again, [Csikszentmihalyi](#) (2008) identifies art (along with sport and

hobbies) as the places in which individuals can achieve *optimal experiences*, which he defines as experiences that lead to, “a sense of participation in determining the content of life – that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine” (p.4).

Preservation

To preserve implies to keep something safe from harm and yet in my personal experience, I see a world in which preserving means to store and lock up. In interviews prior to Caleb's , I had found it easy to pull out my computer to record ideas. It had felt benign and inconspicuous rather than an obvious intrusion to a natural conversation between two people. But this time, it seemed like an invasion of this intricately ornate setting. I explained that I wished to record the conversation and Caleb seemed fine, so I placed the recording device on the floor between us. I did not want to create a wall between us. However, the recording stopped for an unknown reason after 37 seconds and I failed to notice this until the end of the interview. Panic set in when I realized that none of the interview was recorded and that I would either have to rely on memory, field notes, re-interview or discount the interview. This challenged my beliefs on what I considered to be valid research or data. I had still been present in the conversation and experience with Caleb and yet, I panicked thinking that it had all just vanished by simply not being recorded on my laptop.

I biked home with a mind full of stories that kept rolling through my head and perhaps more vividly than they might have if I had known they were safely tucked onto my laptop hard drive. I felt a responsibility to keep these alive until I could record them with pen and paper. I sat down immediately when I got home and scanned pages of my field notes, doodles and sketches to re-count the stories that had been shared. It was here that I found myself as a researcher more

engaged in the data than when I had it stored on a hard drive. I found myself reliving the interview with increased involvement and noticed a difference in my interactions with the data. I couldn't help but write it out from my own perspective and unearth themes, curiosities and understanding as an active participant in this story rather than as a translator simply transcribing it word for word. It also amazed me how vividly I could recall direct statements and comments that directly corresponded with the sequencing of my field notes. I felt like an active participant in this story unfolding. Looking back, the twelve-page document that emerged from processing, reflecting and recording the interview in this way meets all of the seven indicators of embodied writing that Anderson (2001) describes.

Caleb shared a story during his interview about the internal weight (stress) of trying to preserve his pottery collection. He spoke of wanting to be present in the artistic process and yet feeling pressure to preserve a portion of his collection as a safety net for the future, something to fall back on, a statement of who he was and a story of where he came from. However, one day, this entire collection that was stored carefully on a series of custom-built shelves came crashing down and he lost all of it to a pile of ceramic pieces on the floor. He spoke of how his instant feeling was shock followed by a wave of relief. He stated that preserving a permanent collection felt like such a contradiction to his beliefs of the creative process, why he creates and how he engages with art. He noticed that when it was all gone he felt as if a huge weight was lifted and that in the end he really had lost nothing. The knowledge, experience, joy, creative output, input and process remained alive in his hands. Although his individual pieces may have told a story of where he has come from – he shared that his hands still held this knowledge that was gained from every minute spent molding and shaping the clay and that was the relationship that

mattered. Caleb is who he is because of the interactions he has had with clay, just as much as the clay is what it is because of the interactions it has had with Caleb.

Verbeek (2005) also contributes to this conversation by introducing the term ‘mediation’ as a way of framing the relationship between humans and the material world and the impact they have on each other.

The relation between human beings and their world...[is] viewed as mutually constituting each other ... Thanks to their mediating roles *things* help to shape the way in which human beings are involved with their world and interpret it. Things—and in our current culture especially technological artifacts—mediate how human beings are present in their world and how the world is present to them; they shape both subjectivity and objectivity.” (p. 235)

It was here that I resonated with his story and felt a deeper sense of engagement in the research when the preservation of it was lost, and in fact it challenged me to rely on other ways of knowing rather than direct verbatim recording. I believe that this experience shaped a research approach that I would apply to future interviews for ethnographic research in this field. This highlighted my own beliefs about the necessity of storytelling and fostering other ways of knowing rather than the dominant ways.

This experience also highlighted the ways in which I am shaped by my current worldview. In hindsight, I had demonstrated little trust in the direct experience of participating in a conversation with each potter, and rather gave preference and trustworthiness to that which was captured and preserved on my recording device. I was trying to carry out research with depth and in pursuit of the knowledge that exists within the direct experience itself, while still relying on technology that captures the surface (recorded interviews and two dimensional photographs).

Crawford (2009), states that, “the things we know best are the ones we contend with in some realm of regular practice” (p. 163). I still maintain that I have a different type of relationship with this interview, and I believe it can be attributed to writing out my memory of it by hand and not relying on an exterior device to capture the information for me.

The theme of preservation, which emerged both from this process of writing out the interview by hand and from Caleb’s comments about preserving his pottery collection, challenged my thoughts on storing and capturing information so that I could learn from it later, backing it up and saving it. In all of those ventures and pursuits, I believe that the researcher, myself included, can sometimes fail to engage with it. What are we saving it for? How do we come to know through this method of learning? What is it nurturing? Is it guiding towards gathering information in a cerebral way of knowing, or am I invited to be changed, engaged, shaped and reflective with this experience? Perhaps it is not a clear line, but it does spark a few thoughts and questions.

We are so busy trying to preserve everything, back it up, save it for later that I believe we often miss out on engaging with it. This tension has emerged before with taking pictures. I wonder – why am I taking these? Is it so that I can enjoy something later rather than right now? My experience is that sometimes I feel more engaged by taking photos... I stop, I slow down, I listen, I watch. But other times, I interrupt these moments to capture something for later; I feel stressed trying to get a glimpse or feel disappointed when the photos get lost or deleted. As I write these reflections, I am brought back to where I live. I live just outside of Banff National Park. It is common to see signposts that remind you to stay on the trail, leave only footprints and take only pictures. The dominant message in these protected areas is that we should only look, but not touch. Nature is sacred – but

not for us to experience. I have a myriad of thoughts around how these messages shape our perceptions of ourselves in relation to our material world and reinforce the notion that we are separate from it. Of course it is a complex issue when dealing with protecting wild land and giving voice to the plants and animals that reside there along with great numbers of visitors and tourists. However, all of these thoughts weave together as I ponder the concept of embodied knowledge. (October 25, 2012)

Permanence

The notion of permanence emerged throughout the interviews in a variety of ways. During an interview with Laura, she shared sentiments of the intimidation of being part of something that leaves such a permanent and lasting impression and place in this world.

You can learn so much about cultures from their pottery because it stays around forever and ever and I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders in my early days of potting in that everything I did was so permanent. It was a time in my life when I was learning a lot about commitment.

Vic also alluded to his connection with clay and permanence. He spoke from a reflection of his recent, ‘adult’ years of potting rather than his ‘adolescent’ days and shared the significance of this permanence and how it connects us to a history and cultures before us.

I often think about the fact that when we die we go into the ground and if I was a potter in Greece now, who knows whose ashes and minerals I would be using to incorporate into the pot. It becomes the body of the pot. I love that, anthropomorphism, when you attribute physical features to an inanimate object. Pots have feet, shoulders, necks and bodies. It is quite remarkable. And someday, I will be incorporated into the ground and perhaps end up in someone else’s pot...

Recognizing this suggests that this connection with clay precedes our current time in history and indicates a connection to a history beyond the here and now. Glassie (1999) writes, “The pot creates relations—relations between nature and culture, between the individual and society, between utility and beauty” (p. 17). My personal experiences would suggest that this transcends to many areas of our individual lives and yet I believe that we must recognize that we participate in this process all the time. From my perspective, as a species we can be (and are!) removed from the direct source of impact and permanence in so many areas of our lives (e.g. killing our own food, extracting resources for building homes and technology). However, a mark is left, an impact is made and many of these have great permanence even if we are indirect recipients of these resources, skills and interactions. It leaves me wondering if human beings (in our given time in history) have developed a fear of being accountable for our actions and interactions. Are we afraid to make ourselves at home in the Earth? I believe that as a species, we are. We also participate in a virtual world and rely on technology from which we can change, delete and alter things without leaving such a permanent tangible impression. I wonder about our understandings of permanence when we spend a large portion of time relating to a non-tangible reality through technology, and an increasing amount of time away from direct relationship with the material world. There is no doubt that the human species is leaving some rather significant marks on this Earth (i.e. cities, mining, oil spills, dams, roads, pottery). I believe that all of these artifacts reflect culture, values and relationship with the material world. Arendt (1958) uses the term *world alienation* to refer to the loss of interaction between humans and the world. She speaks to the loss of experiences with the material world that directly shape our identities as human beings (i.e. farming, craft, hunting). She claims, and I would agree, that it is in these interactions that we can develop a sense of reality. I would argue, that a common pursuit of science and technology

tends to draw us towards a realm of overcoming boundaries and limitations. Arendt (1958) refers to this pushing of boundaries as *earth alienation* in which we try to transcend the boundaries of being in and on the earth. Although this is a creative pursuit, I am not curious about its impacts on how we live and perceive ourselves in relation to the earth. For me, these pursuits can lack the tacit dimension that Polanyi (1967) refers to. He is known for attributing the term *tacit knowledge* to suggest that, “we can know more than we can tell” (p.4). His contribution to exploring knowing beyond that that we can express with language or numbers offers great insight into my research of the potter’s experience of *doing* pottery by suggesting that it cannot always be articulated. Polanyi (2002), explains that:

Rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims which can serve as a guide to the art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot replace this knowledge. (p. 50)

Can participation in embodied experiences be part of teaching us how to be part of the world, act in it, on it and with it, and begin to feel and view it as home and where we belong? These ideas lead me to believe that the value of embodied experiences and expressions might also teach us to recognize that we cannot simply navigate a way through life without having an impact and cause us to consider the impact that we will have more carefully by participating more-fully in the process of changing, altering, acting and making permanent marks on our world and acknowledging that this is inevitable. By simply existing, we shape the Earth as it shapes us.

Grounding and Connection

I began to wonder about how to write about embodied knowledge without making it void of the embodiment? How could this also be embodied writing? Anderson (2002b) asserts that traditional scientific and academic writing is “parched of the body’s lived experience” (p. 40).

How could I keep the engagement of my hands and the lived experiences in this text in order to resonate with the type of research that I engaged in as I explored alternative ways of knowing? As this thesis began to form, I intentionally decided to include personal reflections about my experiences with the potters as well as my own experiences. In doing so, I also actively chose to incorporate my own voice, reflective thoughts, emotions and perceptions to evoke a somatic response from readers (Anderson, 2002a).

At the end of the day, as I analyzed my data, I found that the recorded transcripts and digital photographs did not seem to draw out emergent themes but rather my experience of riding my bike while re-playing the interviews and conversations in my mind and flipping through my field notes offered more obvious emergent themes. By reflecting on one interview in relation to another, I was able to weave threads and thoughts together to form common themes. It was the ones that I was actually engaged in immediately that resonated more with me than the ones that were recorded in an external device or realm. I experienced tension between what I believed would be received as valid data and ways of knowing for an academic institution, and what I was experiencing first hand as meaningful research methods that were less standardized. However, Dameline (2002) quotes Heshusius (1996) who pointed out that:

[W]e have learned to separate embodied from disembodied ways of knowing and have given epistemological precedence to the second. The significance of interior knowing has been severed. We have become detached from what we know, including ourselves. Western thought has liquidated all other ways of knowing: intuition, imagination, feelings, spiritual knowing, knowing through connecting, participating, identification, knowledge that the body holds. (p. 5)

In an interview with Laura, she spoke about the grounding experience of working with clay. She initially began by wanting to pursue writing; however, for her, the work of potting connected her to the present in a unique way.

[Writing] required me to be in my head and enter into that heavy writing state. I found I would get all wrapped up in my head, but with pots they ground me and keep me present. When I am writing it takes me way up there [pointing to her mind], but when I am with the clay [she rubs her hands together], I am nowhere but right here, right now. I love that.

Later, during the interview, Laura referenced a book by Carl Jung called *The Red Book*. She spoke of this in relation to how hands-on experiences can ground us in the present.

I was listening to a program about Jung on CBC Radio [Ideas Program on June 18th, 2012]. It was about a crisis he had in his late 30's. He had all these questions and ideas and he spent 16 years essentially drawing in his notebooks and working through all of his theoretical research and theories. I am paraphrasing this, but he was drawing and painting a ton and he said it was so necessary for him to do this because he needed to ground himself down because he was in a spiritual world all the time. It was a veil between the two worlds where he felt that he could easily disappear or descend into the darkness but by doing those things like drawing, it was bringing the unconscious to the conscious and bringing darkness to the light...Pottery continues to remind me of the need to be grounded. I cannot escape the reality of the process. I am reminded of it all the way along. You really cannot rush it, you have to go with the Earth and its own timing as it dries out. It is a great metaphor for life. It does teach you to slow down.

Mary spoke candidly during our interview about her experience in being separated from pottery and reflected on the essential nature of clay in her experience of being alive.

I got ill in 1980 and had to take several years off from doing pottery until I was able to start working again in 1994. When I came back to work, it didn't even seem as if there was a break. It took 6 months for my throwing to come back since my muscles were out of practice. I was still ill and the illness really affected my muscles, but aside from that it never seemed as if there was a break...I was just so thankful to be able to do it again. It was literally getting back to life. What was taken away was finally coming back

By embodying these actions and using our hands, can this help ground our existence in this world and act as an agent for change towards a paradigm shift?

Beauty

Knowing a pot as an individual increases the opportunity to develop a relationship with it, to see it as special. The object used in mundane activities, if special, holds the promise of elevating the mundane to sacred. (Moore, 2005, p. 5)

Beauty emerged as a common thread. The visual aesthetics of the pottery shapes, forms, textures and glazes made me wonder about the role of beauty in our lives. Given that I have probably thirty mugs on my shelf at home, why is it that I tend to give preference to only a few and why does this preference change, dependent on the day, my mood, the beverage? I began to wonder about the role of uniqueness and beauty.

During an interview with Laura she expressed, "beauty is so necessary. It is what guides us". She quickly stood up from the kitchen table where we were eating toasted pumpkin seeds to grab a quote from C.S. Lewis that she felt expressed her ideas on beauty better than she could.

We do not merely want to see beauty...[w]e want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. (Lewis, 2001, p. 17)

It was this uniting in beauty and the desire to become part of it that seemed to depict what I observed of the potters when they were at work. They were right in there with it, they were part of it. Prior to even interviewing or meeting each potter, this theme was already emerging, partially from the art itself and partially from how they described their work and process in their artist statements. Perhaps this dates back to the age-old question of the purpose or necessity of art? Artists that I interviewed spoke fondly about the joy that it brings them when people speak with affection of their favourite mug or bowl. They all expressed a draw towards wanting more time to commit to decorative or ‘artistic’ pieces. Yet, unanimously they spoke of the joy of creating functional wares. What they love about pottery is that it is functional and brings beauty to the everyday experience of living. Prior to interviewing Mary, I had read her website and was drawn to her thoughts on beauty. She writes,

Beauty is a wondrous and mysterious presence, one that can fill you with surges of overwhelming joy and delight. The perfection and fluency that comes from a deep knowing and connection to one’s work is, at times, awesome in its power to bring forth the vessel’s radiance. Beauty is everywhere in the act of creation and it is humbling to be encompassed by it... The pursuit of Beauty is a constant in my life. It infuses everything I do. When working on vessels created to adorn our tables I derive pleasure from knowing that, through the subtle intimacy that grows from their daily use, these pieces will become treasures in people’s lives.

Upon meeting her, this quote came to life in a story that she recounted about a family that was on vacation and came to visit her shop.

One of my favourite stories is this family that was driving down island one day and they all piled out of the car and into my shop. I was looking around making sure that they

were all somewhat in control as it is a small gallery. They were a rambunctious group of kids all restless and stretching their legs when all of a sudden one of the kids runs in and is yelling as she grabs a bowl and says, 'Look mommy, this is like the bowl that we all fight over in the morning!' You know, to me that said it all. Every morning, they only have one of those bowls and they all want to have breakfast out of it. How cool is that! That is one of my favourite comments... For myself, I have used the same mug for years and years now and I chipped it and glued it back together and I am still using it. People would tell me, you have hundreds of mugs, why are you still using that? But it's my mug. I have had it every morning for years...it is a whole different attachment and a whole different way of relating to something.

This memory captures the intimate connection that not only the creator but also the consumer or user develops with a piece of pottery. It speaks to the relationship as well as the simplicity of beauty in everyday things. I also believe that this speaks as a personal anecdote to Verbeek's (2005) comments about aesthetics, suggesting they are not merely visual but incorporate all of our senses and broaden the scope of experience. This story exemplifies the three ways in which people form relationships with pottery. Firstly, a human response to the form itself based on function (a cup and a bowl each serve a specific purpose); secondly, an aesthetic response (size, colour, texture, shape); and thirdly, emotional attachment (a connection with the potter, memories of events in our lives) (Moore, 2005).

In her artist statement, Julia also spoke to necessity of creating, building, incorporating and choosing beauty in the everyday elements large or small or even simply mundane.

I create with clay in order to feed my passion for beauty and to inspire, in the lives of others, an intimate affection for their personal surroundings. To quote William Morris

from his lecture entitled “The Beauty of Life” in 1880: *“Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”* (Schumacher, n.d.)

Each potter expressed a pride or sense of purpose in that they are bringing element of beauty to their lives, homes, communities, and the world through the process of creating and in the finished pieces. Each potter spoke about bringing beauty to the everyday experience of living, whether it was the mug you drink out of, a bowl for soup, a vase to hold flowers or a teapot. Wendell Berry (2002) contributes to these sentiments as he writes,

How we take our lives from this world, how we work, what work we do, how we use the materials we use, and what we do with them after we have used them – all these are questions of the highest and gravest religious significance. In answering them, we practice, or do not practice, our religion. (p. 315)

I believe that the way we reflect our values indicates the way in which we embody, act and respond to make decisions in life. Many examples I see around me would suggest that our society values abundance and productivity more than beauty and relationship. To me, this quote suggests that everything we do and how we do it reflects our values, what we believe to be sacred and our understanding of the sacred. To me, embodied knowledge is the culmination of all of our experiences that reflect beauty rather than a finished product or end result. It is not merely creating a product or articulating an experience that offers this embodied knowledge, but it is direct involvement in it and participation beyond the brain, just as Richards (1989) states, “It is the physicality of the craft that pleases me. I learn through my hands and my eyes and my skin what I could never learn through my brain” (p. 15). Mary speaks to the sensual experience of sinking into the creation of a large vessel and exploring alongside the clay to birth a pot. She writes, “The rhythmic pulse of creativity overwhelms body and soul, vulnerability abandoned as

my passion flows into the clay. Hours pass, I emerge, exhausted and overwhelmed by the beauty of what has poured out of me”.

Tools ~ An Extension and Acceptance of Our Limitations

The use of tools has been interpreted as a sign of intelligence, and it has been theorized that tool use may have stimulated certain aspects of human evolution, especially the continued expansion of the human brain... Precisely when early humans started to use tools is difficult to determine, because the more primitive these tools are (e.g. sharp-edged stones) the more difficult it is to decide whether they are natural objects or human artifacts... It should be noted that many species make and use tools, but it is the human genus that dominates the areas of making and using more complex tools. The oldest known tools are... 2.5-2.6 million years old, which predates the earliest known “Homo” species. (Human Evolution, n.d.)

Another theme that emerged throughout these interviews, observations and conversations was that of tools.

As Vic toured me around his workspace, he proudly showed off the different homemade tools that he had created to meet his needs. When he showed me a tool that he used for forming the handle of a mug, he was proud to show how he had created it out of a recycled object. It was here that it struck me - almost every potter makes mugs at some point in their potting life; they all are handed the same problem to solve and yet each potter approaches it differently. How they hold the clay, move their hands to form the vessel, shape the handle, glaze it, and even fire it become their own approach to problem solving the task of how to make a mug. As each potter approaches this task or problem differently, a unique style is developed. These can be ideas that they share, keep, teach or

maybe are not even aware of as they occur so fluidly with time and practice. Could I replicate these techniques exactly? I don't think so. I think I could learn tips, tricks and techniques to integrate into my own approach – but the subtleties would never be replicated. (July 19, 2012)

Several other potters spoke about how the tools and techniques that they made, created and used were what defined their style.

For me, the lithium work distinguishes some of my pieces. Nobody works with lithium and other potters that come in are quite taken with that. I wanted my work to look like it had been dug up from the Adriatic sea and so I was wondering how to make my pots look old, so I experimented with a bunch of minerals and the lithium seemed to give me the most interesting effect so I just started working with it until I really liked the result. I created it myself but I haven't written about it yet because I still don't feel like I know what I am doing. (Mary Fox)

Although they all interact with clay and create similar shapes, it is this individual interaction that defines their work and makes it recognizable and distinguishable from others. It is interesting to see each potter proud to leave their mark and wanting to be defined by the work that they did. This began to relate to notions of permanence and how they wanted to be recognized for the marks they were leaving.

Through direct participation with the clay, it appears that the potters understand the limitations of their skills and develop tools to bring their ideas to life, which they cannot do simply with their hands. “We will need a different manner of thinking about [the material world] that acknowledges forthrightly the limits of our knowledge and our inconsistency in using what knowledge we do have” (Orr, 2004, p. 68). Does this type of participation and interaction with

our material world (i.e. pottery) lead to the manner of thinking that Orr vouches for in which we understand the limits of our knowledge and how we use it?

In summary, let me invite you to step inside the wonder of a Japanese tea bowl through the words of Glassie (1999).

It is a thing of clay, dug from the Earth and still gritty. The sweeps of its maker's fingers run in the slow spiral of its raising. Its moment of dampness, when it stood in pliable uncertainty, lingers in the wobble of the rim. Scorches remember its time in the fire when it grew firm. The glaze that melted in the flame seems molten still, blistered and flowing. The footring, fine walls, and upright form speak of the scheme in the master's mind. The cracks fastidiously filled with gold lacquer hint of subsequent travail and caring. The bowl was filled with hot liquid and passed from hand to hand, filling the cup of the palm, warming the palps, joining the people in ceremony conviviality. (p. 42)

It is through experiences and descriptions such as this that we can see the connection between matter and mind and the relationship to nature. The meaning of the tea bowl is embedded within a context, and meaning extends beyond its structure. These research opportunities, experiences and reflections have had a profound shaping effect on transforming hunches that I had about the importance and significance of tangible, tactile, sensory, embodied experiences. In hindsight, I entered this conversation with a limited curiosity and a bundle of hunches that led me to believe there is deep-rooted significance to using our hands and getting right into an experience. My personal experience affirmed that that tacit experiences brought different kinds of awareness, satisfaction, engagement and joy to my own life, and I gained a sense of satisfaction from having participated in life. However, as I explored these conversations, interactions, existing research, and filtered it through my own experiences, the synapses seemed

to be firing at a rapid pace weaving together my lone wonderings, thoughts and curiosities. None of these thoughts were separate from the other and they all seem to garner increased support and evidence for the necessity of bringing these thoughts to the conversation at large for careful contemplation and inclusion.

Conclusion

We inhabit a world that is always subjective and shaped by our interactions with it. Our world is impossible to pin down, constantly changing and infinitely more interesting than we ever imagined. (Wheatley, 1999, p. 9)

Through the works of scholars, ecologists, potters, personal reflections and experiences I have been drawn to the necessity and inevitability of being in relationship with the material world. This study has affirmed both my inherent hunch that there is something life giving, satisfying and rich about tactile, hands on experiences, and it has drawn me into beginning to understand the depth of possibility of these interactions with the material world. Pottery is merely one example of a way in which we might heed the call to restore our relationship with the Earth, find our place in it and with it.

In his early essay *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson defined art as a blending of nature and will... the unity in things of mind and matter... In exchange with nature, men and women make things, tracks in the mud, scud missiles... Things are works of art when the act is committed, devoted, when people transfer themselves so completely into their works that they stand as accomplishments of human possibility. (Glassie, 1999, p. 41)

It is this distinction between making things and making art that overcomes me. I can admit to holding a novice interaction with materials as I venture from one creative project to the next. However, this intimacy that develops through relationship with a common material beckons me with interest. Wendell Berry (1981) writes that we must learn to inhabit the places in which we already live, “lovingly, knowingly, skillfully, reverently” (p. 281). Pottery and creating by hand offers a tangible image and experience from which I can begin to understand the depth of these four simple words and their potential for transformation.

It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings... The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. (p. 177-178)

Recent discourse in EE has started to focus on a call for a paradigm shift. Many scholars (e.g., Orr, 2005a; Suzuki, 2007; Wilson, 1992) suggest that the Earth is necessitating a shift and it has been set in motion long before we were aware of it. Throughout most of human history, change is episodic and stasis is the norm. However, it is in these movements of change that transformation occurs, often in unexpected ways. Paradigm shifts are really a change in the way we think, the transition from one way of thinking to another (Kuhn, 1962). Although it might be possible to shift our thoughts, it is difficult to truly live into and embody new ways of thinking and align our actions. My life experience continues to reinforce that the only way to really change thinking is to participate in doing, and through this experience the change becomes us. I can watch the potter's centre clay and pull pots, but I only really understand this by doing it. There are so many examples in life in which we learn by doing (driving a car, playing a musical instrument, swimming). In Exodus 24:7, the Israelites responded in the same way when they accepted the Old Testament Torah saying, "Na'aseh v'nishma" – we will do, and we will understand.

This calls for taking the leap, acting in a new way, and through this process of 'trying on a new way of being', one can really sink into and adopt it as something they 'know' fully with their being.

I am not a potter. I am a folklorist, a student of ceramics because pottery is a more universal and democratic medium than painting, a better place to begin the search for the world's excellence. I have become an admirer of the maturity of the sincere worker with clay, and I envy the options of the modern potter. Seizing upon the immanent artfulness of pottery, the potter can withdraw into isolation and ascend along the arc that ends in a transcendence of consciousness. Or, through the earthiness of technique and the compound significance inherent in the committed rearranging of the world, the potter can join the millions remaining on the earth whose daily work brings them, roughly, directly, into awareness of their position in the cosmos. (Glassie, 1999, p. 225)

As much as I hope that this research contributes to a greater conversation and in some way resonates with others, it in itself has affirmed, challenged and expanded my own hunches and curiosities in ways that I believe will shape and guide my role as an educator and as a human being. Conducting this research has led me to agree wholeheartedly with Cole and Knowles' (2001a) assertion:

We research who we are. We express and represent elements of ourselves in every research situation. The questions we ask, the observations we make, the emotions we feel, the impressions we form, and the hunches we follow all reflect some part of who we are as person and researcher. (p. 89)

This thesis is both an ethnographic and a philosophical exploration of how we come to know. It proposes the value of embodied, tacit experiences and suggests that these are critical human experiences for us to participate in and recognize that we are part of this Earth and fully alive. The research and the lived experiences of the potters and myself highlight the value of embodied creative experiences and expressions in ways that affirm, “[k]nowing arises through

moving, not only through perception. We move to perceive and understand” (Barbour, 2012, p. 70).

And if new knowledge derived from our creative actions is to have any meaning at all, we have to be able to embody it, to live it, to discard knowledge if it is not livable. We need to realize embodied knowledge as useful in our living. To contribute to the development of new knowledge, we need to know ourselves. Moving reveals our worlds and ourselves. (Barbour, 2012, p. 70)

I advocate for seeking depth with respect to ‘experience’ and champion embodied knowledge as a way of knowing that does not necessarily result or boil down to the ability to articulate its meaning. Based on the reflections from each potter and my own personal experience, I advocate for embodied knowledge as a means to connect with life. I believe that using our bodies to create lets us know we are alive. We see, feel, taste, hear, touch and respond to our material world by participating directly in it. For me, this leaves me with the undeniable impression that I am part of my world.

[T]he things most deeply embedded in us are formed by the combination of experience and doing with the practice of reflection and articulation... The cultivation of the sense of wonder, however, takes us to the edge of mystery where language loses its power to describe and where analysis, the taking apart of things, is impotent before the wholeness of Creation, where the only appropriate response is a prayerful silence. (Orr, 2005, p. 98-99)

In conclusion, this thesis offers a story of the connection between potters and clay. The intimate relationship serves as a possible narrative of how we might connect with, and in, our world. Embodied knowledge, as derived through participation in and with the Earth, serves as an

opportunity from which to develop intimate relationships with the Earth. Pottery serves as a metaphor for how a functional connection can forge a deep-rooted relationship between humans and the Earth. Will this conversation give voice to elements of our world that do not necessarily have an audible voice or language that is understood by humans? “The nearest kind of association is not mere perceptual cognition, but, rather, a handling, using, and taking care of things which has its own kind of ‘knowledge’” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 63). How could tacit, embodied experiences shape pedagogy of EE? Perhaps this thesis is a call to centering and a call to find our connection points and the intersections in which we converse with the material world.

Centering:

that act which precedes all others on the potter's wheel.

*The bringing of the clay into a spinning, un-wobbling pivot,
which will then be free to take innumerable shapes as potter and clay press
against each other.*

The firm, tender, sensitive pressure which yields as much as it asserts.

*It is like a handclasp between two living hands, receiving the greeting at the very
moment that they give it.*

It is this speech between the hand and the clay that makes me think of dialogue.

*And it is a language far more interesting than the spoken vocabulary which tries
to describe it, for it is spoken not by the tongue and lips but by the whole body, by the
whole person, speaking and listening.*

*And with listening too, it seems to me, it is not the ear that hears, it is not the
physical organ that performs the act of inner receptivity.*

It is the total person who hears.

*Sometimes the skin seems to be the best listener, as it prickles and thrills, say to a
sound or a silence;*

*or the fantasy, the imagination: how it bursts into inner pictures as it listens and
then responds by pressing its language, its forms, into the listening clay.*

To be open to what we hear,

to be open in what we say...

(Richards, 1989, p. 9)

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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation to Potters

Dear Potter,

I have identified you as someone that I would like to ask to participate in a thesis research project that I am conducting for the completion of a Masters in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University. I have selected you as a potential candidate because I admire your pottery and you identify yourself as a full time practicing potter.

Please read below to learn more about what is required of your participation. If you are willing to participate and give consent, please sign at the bottom and return this letter to myself, the researcher. You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

I would ask that you be willing to participate in this research in the following ways:

- An informal interview (approx 30-45 min)
- Allow me to observe you while you work/create in your workspace (approx 1 hour).

During this time, I will record observations of you in a journal and with photographs in an effort to capture the lived experiences of modern Potters.

- Engage in a teaching moment (i.e. pottery lesson) to experience the Potter as the teacher.
- The opportunity to review & provide any feedback on my writing as it reflects you.

The results of this study will be published in a thesis and may include personal experiences, observations and photographs. If you wish to have your name, personal identifying information, and photographs edited to protect anonymity, please let me know otherwise it will be included in the final thesis document.

Your participation in this research would be greatly appreciated and will contribute to the knowledge regarding artistic-environmental connections.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Kaeli Benoit (Researcher)

Questions or concerns regarding the research or participation should be directed to:

Kaeli Benoit – 403.xxx.xxxx OR Faculty Supervisor , Peta White – 306.xxx.xxxx

I have read all the information on this form, am at least 18 years of age, and consent to participate in this study.

Signature

Please print your name here

Date