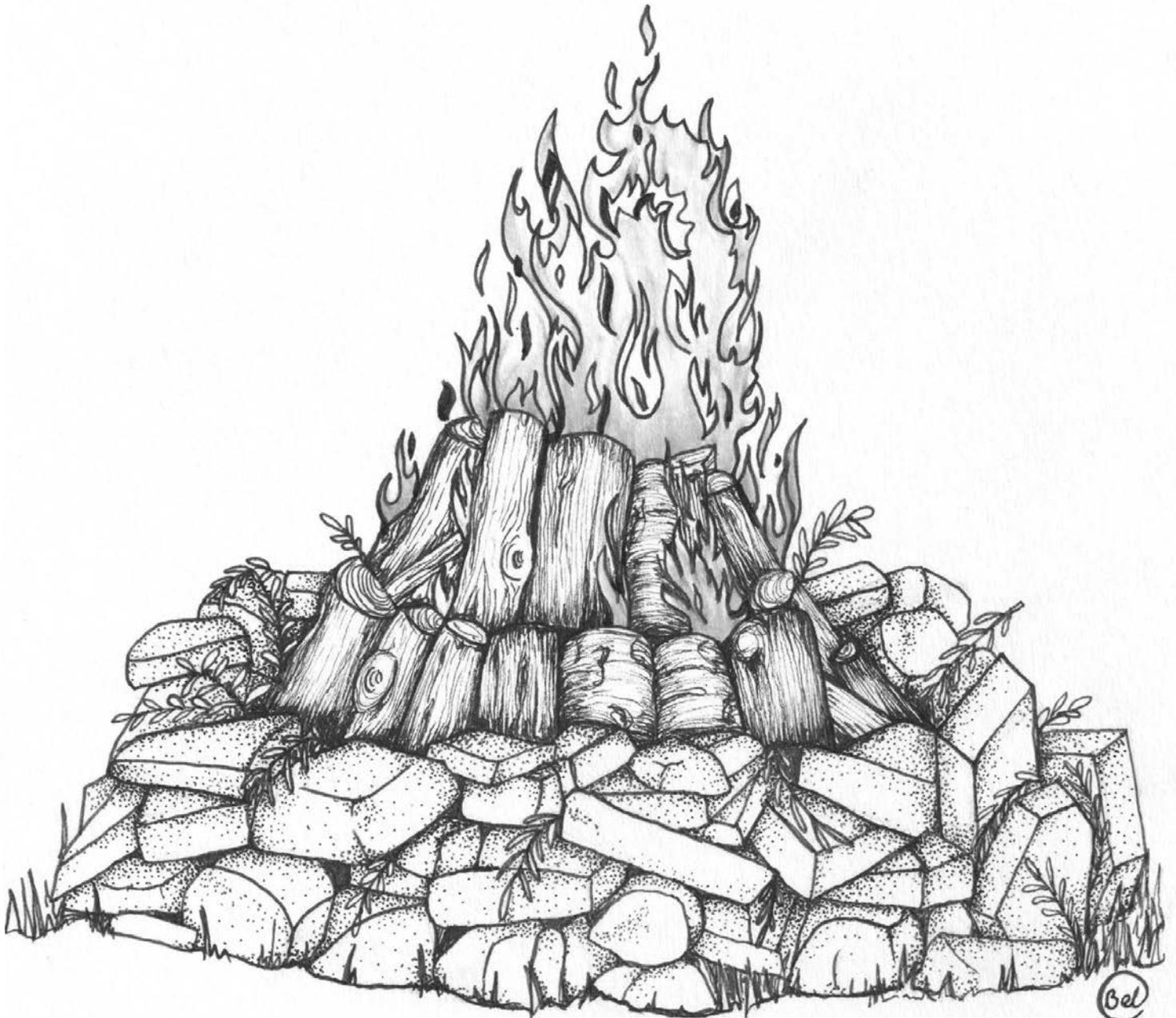
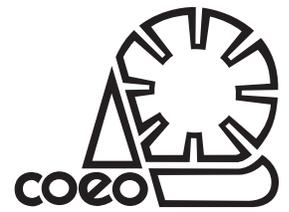


# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION  
Spring 2018, 30(3)



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# Pathways

## COEO

Formed in 1972, the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that promotes safe, quality outdoor education experiences for people of all ages. We achieve this by publishing the *Pathways* journal, running an annual conference and regional workshops, maintaining a website, and working with kindred organizations as well as government agencies. Members of COEO receive a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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## *Pathways*

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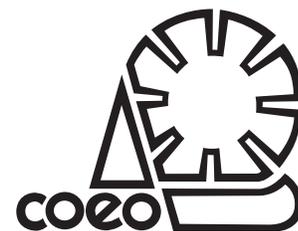
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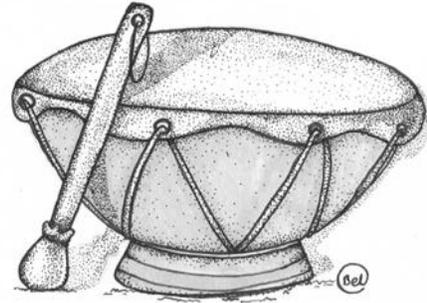
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I am pleased to present this latest issue of *Pathways*. It is an issue that was a long time in the making, and is one that features several unique collaborative contributions. Articles written for *Pathways* by multiple authors often take extra time to draft, but once complete, offer rich detail, varied perspectives and important messages for practitioners of outdoor education. Loyal *Pathways* readers are once again the beneficiaries of the passion, persistence and hard work of our many committed authors.

This issue begins with an important article that thoughtfully examines the process of attempting to reverse and respond to the Indigenous cultural appropriation that has taken place at Canadian summer camps for many years. Authors Taylor Wilkes, Jay Kennedy and Amanda Shore share their personal experiences and involvement in this process, as well as the ongoing efforts made by the Taylor Statten Camps to recreate camp traditions and foster new relationships with Indigenous community members. This article is accompanied by two valuable responses from Christine Lukasavitch and Mike Ormsby, which the *Pathways* Editorial Board was grateful to receive.

Chris Furgal, Kristeen McTavish and Robyn Smith respond to *Pathways* Resource Editor, Bob Henderson's call for articles detailing exemplary programs. These authors share the innovative and inspirational work of the TRACKS Youth Program, a year-round educational and leadership program that takes an Indigenous-and-environmental approach to science education. Max Csikos and Tim O'Connell describe the experience

of one new professional facilitating outdoor place-based learning experiences, while Ben Blakey presents some of his research around staff and caregiver perspectives on the role of nature and physical activity at summer camp.



I would like to take this opportunity to introduce a few new members of the *Pathways* Editorial Board: Peter Vooyo, Amanda Merpaw and Ryan Howard. Peter is a graduate student in the Queen's Faculty of Education and has been a regular contributor to the journal over the last year. Peter is now keen to further support *Pathways* as a reviewer. Amanda is a teacher at Bishop Strachan School and possesses a wealth of experience as a reviewer and editor of both literary and scholarly journals. Ryan is the new Director of Research, Risk & Innovation for ALIVE Outdoors and brings an academic background in the field of outdoor recreation. We are grateful to them all for offering to support *Pathways* as reviewers and thank them for this commitment.

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Kyle Clarke  
Editor

**Sketch Pad** – The art for this issue of *Pathways* was generously contributed by Annabel Hancock (cover and pages 2, 3, 4, 8, 14 and 15), Megan Nowick (pages 7, 13, 18, 20, 23 and 27) and Michael Greenberg (page 17). Annabel (Bel) Hancock is a recent graduate from Western University where she played varsity basketball and studied Kinesiology. Annabel is now following her passion for graphic design and illustration and can be found on Instagram @Bel\_Design. Megan Nowick is now a regular contributing artist to *Pathways*, and is excited to be starting her Bachelor of Education at the Lakehead University Faculty of Education this September. Mike Greenberg has contributed previous artwork to *Pathways* and is always happy to share his artistic talents with the journal when called upon.

Spring is here. The time of hibernation is over. Sunny skies and warm temperatures entice us to spend more time outside. On the muddy hiking trail or chilly water's edge, spring is a special time to reconnect with that biophilic part of ourselves that seems to perk up around now. As the forest echoes with songs of returning migratory birds, I encourage each COEO member to take some time this spring to introduce a young person to a special outdoor place or activity. The more staggering statistics I see about the growing number of hours children are spending in front of screens these days, I see our role as outdoor educators grow ever more important. I am reminded of the continued relevance of Rachel Carson's famous quote "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in." What better time is there than spring to reconnect with our newly emerging nature neighbours from the plant and animal world?

Over the last several months, members of the COEO Board of Directors have continued to spread the word about the organization to plenty of interested people. Thanks to our Secretary Ben Blakey and Vice President Emma Brandy for helping me represent COEO during these opportunities. Events attended already in 2018 have included UoIT Environmental Education Conference (Oshawa), OISE Eco-Fair (Toronto) and the Banff Film Festival (Toronto). While attending these events, it is not uncommon that someone approaches the table and tells a story from a COEO conference they attended long ago. I'm glad to report that these outreach efforts continue to expand the number of members of the organization each year.

Thanks to all those who participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Ontario Wilderness Leadership Symposium (OWLS) at Norval Outdoor School. COEO has sustained this relatively new event designed to support emerging professionals in the field of wilderness leadership. I look forward to seeing this

event continue to grow in future years!

Thanks also to David Spencer, a longtime COEO member who, after 10 years of pioneering social media leadership for COEO, has recently stepped down from this role. David Spencer corresponded with 1995 COEO President Glen Hester and encouraged Glen and the COEO Executive to register the web domain [coeo.org](https://www.coeo.org). On January 1, 2001 the domain was registered. We've come a long way since then! Thanks to David's leadership, COEO's first social media policy is now nearing completion. Find us, friend us, like us, tag us or follow us online:

**Facebook Page** <https://www.facebook.com/coeo.org>

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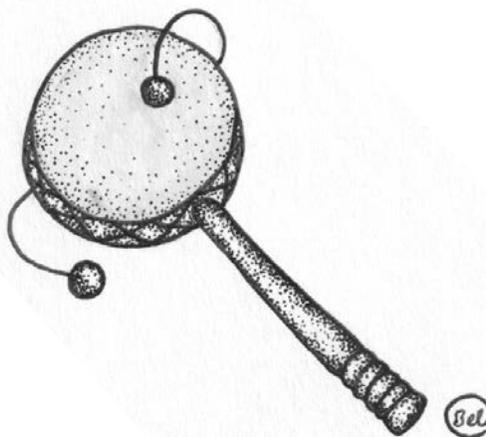
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Please enjoy another engaging issue of *Pathways*. If you haven't yet, I urge you to follow COEO through our various social media channels, but always be sure to keep the balance of screen time to green time in favour of green time!

Wishing you a wonderful spring season.

Liz Kirk  
President



## Transitioning Traditions Take Two: The Evolution of an Ontario Camp's "Indian" Council Ring—Eight Years in the Making

By Taylor Wilkes (Ed.), Jay Kennedy and Amanda Shore

### Historical Preface

By Amanda Shore

The forerunners of the Ontario camping movement built their programs—many of which continue to be practiced today—within a very specific sociohistorical context. The early programming of Boy Scouts of America (originally called the Woodcraft Indians) was based on what its founder Ernest Thompson Seton considered to be primitive human instincts: “hunter instinct, cave-man instinct, [and] play” (Seton, 1978). Boy Scouts programming relied on racialized role-playing, and encouraged young settler-American boys to idolize stereotypical traits of “Indianness.” In an effort to adopt a picturesque version of outdoor life, Seton describes that in the early days of the Boy Scouts, “Our motto, was ‘The best things of the best Indians.’ Whatever is picturesque, good, and safe in Indian life, that we used” (Seton, 1978). Seton’s early programming relied on a fictional version of Indigeneity—a romanticized construct associated with life in the wilderness, which exists in settler minds and not in reality.

Seton’s writing was widely circulated in Boy Scout publications and manuals, and Seton played a key role in the development of the Taylor Statten Camps Council Ring program. Taylor Statten pulled components of his program from the 1920 *Tuxis Boy’s Manual* (Lundell, 2000). Seton’s influence cannot be understated, given that he was hired by Taylor Statten to visit Camp Ahmek in 1922, where he “initiated Native Council Rings and showed the boys how to perform dances, construct sweat lodges, and make other crafts” (Lundell, 2000). The practice of “playing Indian” in Ontario is directly linked to the founder of the American scouting movement, and

racialized role-playing has a long legacy in outdoor education. Given this legacy, how do we begin to approach the topic of decolonial methods in outdoor education? What role do summer camps play in national conversations about cultural appropriation, educational reform and Indigenous sovereignty in Canada?

### Introduction

*But, Dad, if I had a teacher arrive in blackface to a class on African Canadian history you’d be outraged. So why is it okay that we still dress up and pretend to be “Indians” at council ring? Just because it’s at camp?*



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*Because, Honey, we did it respectfully. Council ring was designed to honour Indian culture, to honour nature and wilderness skills. It's a tradition at camp—one that I looked forward to every summer as a kid and as staff. I think it'd be a shame for kids to not have that kind of experience anymore.*

For eight years since participating in modernizing my camp's "Indian" council ring, I (Taylor) have lovingly argued with my father—the first generation to attend camp in our family—about the difference between camp traditions and cultural appropriation. I never intended to assign blame—his participation in council ring was not malicious; I wanted to provoke understanding and accountability. Each round, our conversations underscored how entrenched intergenerational traditions become when the magic of make-believe enraptures its audience. And over time, I realized what barriers cultural privilege and emotional attachment can be to meaningful change.

Imagine my delight when a 12-year-old family friend returned from camp this summer, regaling me with stories from this year's voyageur council ring and all the skills it inspired him to practise next summer on canoe trip. The joy in his face and the animation in his storytelling reminded me of my childhood accounts of playing those special games and pretending to exist in a different time.

The shift away from "Indian" council ring shows that change can occur even in the oldest, most entrenched summer camps—important educational institutions in Canada.

In "Transitioning Traditions: Rectifying an Ontario Camp's Indian Council Ring" (Wilkes 2011), I described how the Taylor Statten Camps' (TSC) council ring tradition persisted through time. I told the story of the intentional, Indigenous-informed process that led to the retirement of the tradition's racist props as well as the multi-generational resistance that accompanied the change. And I concluded by questioning council ring's design and responsibility:

"[C]an we keep the event appropriate... while maintaining such a powerful forum for outdoor [and Indigenous] education?... [S]pecial events at magical places leave big impressions on children." (p. 9)

As a settler Canadian learning to take responsibility for my privilege, I understand the importance of holding institutions accountable for their role in Truth and Reconciliation. It was encouraging to learn that the camp where I had frequently "played Indian" continued to redesign its tradition thoughtfully. Yet, I still wondered whether the leaders would harness the event's educative potential; whether they intended to account for the impact "playing Indian" has had by designing a tradition to rectify it. I wondered how the relationships between TSC and the Indigenous advisors had evolved since the process began.

Two outdoor education practitioners—Amanda Shore and Jay Kennedy—helped me explore these questions more deeply. We are three non-Indigenous professionals muddling through our cross-cultural work from points of inquiry rather than expertise. Below, Amanda provides research on "Indian" camp traditions, including the threats and opportunities they present. Then, based on personal experience and interviews with current TSC leaders, Jay provides an update on how the camp continues to progress its change. None of the contributions to this article represent TSC's administration. An invitation for their response follows.

### **Traditions of Play: Past, Present and Future**

*By Amanda Shore*

Tradition is considered one of the foundational characteristics of summer camp programming; it creates continuity from year to year and activates the thrill of nostalgia. The annual re-performance of songs, events and games encourages mentorship between older and younger campers, and promotes skill-development through experiential learning. Beloved

traditions become rites of passage for new campers, while ensuring that returning campers feel at home each summer. Ongoing traditions can create a continuity of experience between generations of alumni and campers, remaining constant despite changes in the social fabric of camp culture.

Recurring programs have a certain historical resilience; they are designed to persist. Given this tendency, it is worth asking whether certain dated ideologies have been dredged through history and exist in camp traditions today. What traditions have gone unquestioned in recent decades, and do they reflect current camp values?

To this day many Ontario camps continue to hold council ring gatherings. Some of these mock-Indigenous ceremonies have been performed annually since the 1920s. Coming to terms with this legacy is a complex process that demands vulnerability, patience and careful consideration of the history of cultural genocide and forced displacement of Indigenous peoples. Paulette Regan, speaking directly to non-Indigenous students, articulated that “we have to be willing to be uncomfortable, to be disquieted at a deep and disturbing level” in order to welcome “transformative learning” and “the kind of experiential learning that engages our whole being” (Regan, 2006). In the wake of decades of racial stereotyping, it is crucial that camp educators consider the long-term impact of racial role-playing on both the field of outdoor education and campers past and present.

The fundamental characteristic of a stereotype is its ability to persist; its power is in its reproducibility. A stereotype is a thing that is constantly in flux, vacillating “between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 66). The stereotypical figure of the “Indian brave” is only easily recognizable because it has been reproduced for centuries in

painting, cinema and popular culture. The figure that is already “in place” in popular consciousness only maintains cultural currency because it continues to be “anxiously repeated.” This homogenized figure is only reproducible because it is grossly simplified, failing to represent the multiplicity of culturally specific Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, each with distinct histories, teachings and artistic traditions. The racial stereotype—which continues to be performed in council ring songs, dances and games—only holds power because it continues to be re-enacted.

Traditions of racial role-playing can significantly impact a camper on a personal level. In education, it is widely acknowledged that role-playing games that encourage children to adopt violent personas or gender-normative roles can be harmful to long-term development. The harmful self-imagining that occurs in cultural appropriation can similarly shape a child’s concept of racial equity. As children enact and re-enact performances each year, camp educators are called to consider how council ring programs may have a deep, lasting impact on a child’s psychosocial development. The self-imagining that happens while playing dress-up can shape a child’s sense of personal identity. While many summer camps have histories of destructive racial role-playing, they are also sites for productive traditions of play. Games of make-believe can facilitate powerful imaginative interactions between a child’s reality and counter-reality. When children play “pretend,” they create a new social “pretense”—a whole order that they can visit temporarily (Goldman, 1998). For many campers, this can involve actualizing their gender identities, imagining themselves in their future professions, or creating their own social paradigms where they feel skilled, strong and valued. As educational spaces that encourage play, camps allow children to learn about themselves by testing out new identities. As fertile places where tradition thrives, camps already have the tools to develop

traditions of make-believe that promote productive self-expression and radical imagination.

Given that traditions of make-believe play such a key role in childhood development, it is crucial that camp educators continually re-examine how they can be improved or enhanced. There are evaluative processes built into health and safety policies and hiring procedures that prompt organizations to re-evaluate their strategies for efficiency and efficacy. It is crucial that this same spirit of self-improvement is applied to camp programming to consider questions of environmental ethics, gender equity, cultural appropriation and racial prejudice.

As a sector, Ontario summer camps are key players in national conversations around environmental stewardship, eco-tourism and childhood education. As a network of change-makers, this sector has the ability to set a standard that can inspire change in the broader educational sector, not to mention in the hearts and minds of thousands of campers. In 2017, as monuments to colonial figures were torn down across Turtle Island, institutions were being called to consider how they have been beneficiaries of a colonial system, and to boldly pursue new structural models that prioritize equity, honesty and action. It is time to develop traditions that are prone to evolve, reflect contemporary values and create space for Indigenous voices. This means encouraging productive traditions of play, and considering how outdoor classrooms can question the dominant histories put forward in indoor classrooms.

### **Taylor Statten Camps' "Indian Council Ring" Tradition**

*By Taylor Wilkes*

Evolving "Indian" traditions depends heavily on camp educators—specifically their understanding, capacity and willingness to implement program changes. Attitude shifts develop slowly through experience and detachment, often fueled

by social and political pressures. Camp educators must voluntarily undergo two processes in tandem: one, deconstructing and modernizing a prejudiced program while, two, acknowledging their previous involvement in it.

Council ring traditions foster deep emotional attachment and quasi-spirituality for their participants. Activating nostalgia, the feeling of "home," identity formation and rights of passage—each are mechanisms Amanda identified that keep campers enthralled. Many camp leaders have been long-term campers. Unless these leaders are willing to face critical self-reflection and conflicting social norms, their emotional attachment to and perceived ownership of "Indian" traditions will prevent meaningful change.

At TSC, the leaders navigated attitude shifts by balancing their willingness with their limitations. Decision-making took place within an ever-present tension between past and present: how to honour the Founder's original intentions while achieving modern expectations.



### **Detaching a Director from an "Indian" Tradition**

*By Jay Kennedy*

Beginning my first summer as director at Camp Ahmek in 2009 I had a palpable enthusiasm for the council ring program. It was a magical moment in every one of my summers. The costumes, the detail of the script and the spiritual atmosphere of the event were unparalleled in any other camp activity. I felt thrilled, honoured,

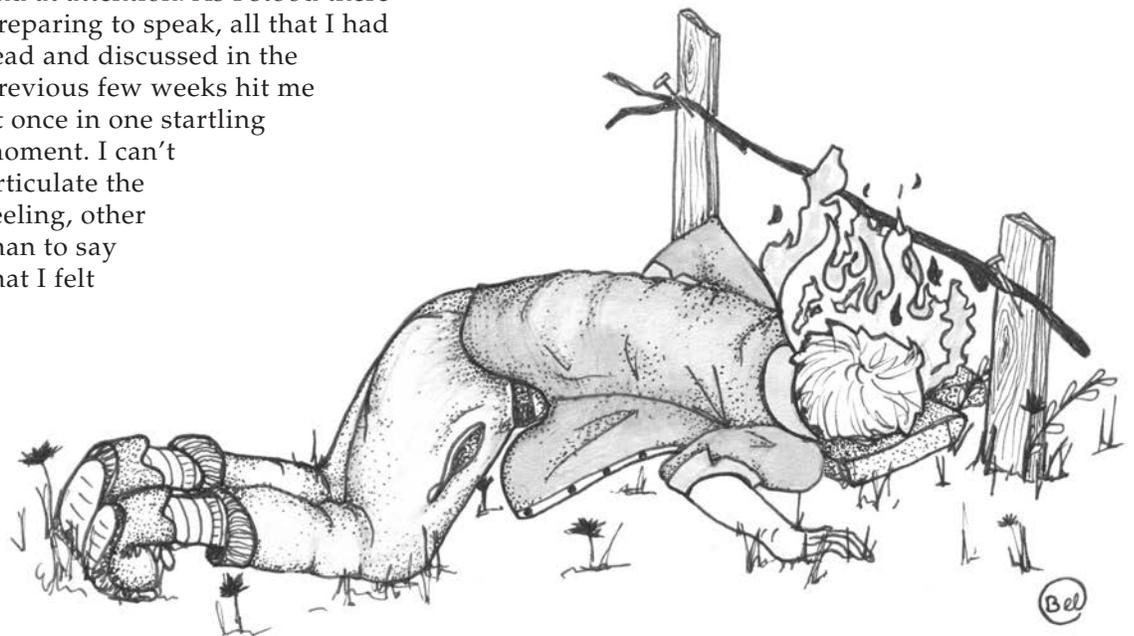
that I, as director, would lead it. However, among the new administration team, I was in the minority. All of my co-directors took time to talk with me about the inappropriateness of the council ring program, specifically about the use of Indigenous artifacts. Lex Scully, a settler outdoor and Indigenous education scholar and my co-director, deftly navigated all of my protestations and lack of reflection of privilege while patiently explaining the issues. When it became clear that no more progress could be made, she gave me homework: to read academic articles specifically questioning the council ring program. I dutifully did as I was asked, then quickly forgot the points that were made. Or so I thought.

Protest over the program wasn't new. A rumour abounded that visitors from the Golden Lake reserve (today known as the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation) had visited and been offended by the camps' program. Several people had tried to revise the program, including Lex, but had been rebuffed by the dominant discourse of camp cultures at the time: "we are honouring Indigenous culture." And that was what I thought as I walked in to conduct my first council ring, the crowd in the amphitheatre silent and at attention. As I stood there preparing to speak, all that I had read and discussed in the previous few weeks hit me at once in one startling moment. I can't articulate the feeling, other than to say that I felt

I was doing something morally wrong and I had a responsibility to the campers and the camp to change it.

We immediately removed what we felt were the most offensive elements for the next performance, such as the "peace pipe," any purportedly "Indigenous language" dialogue and face paint. The basic structure remained largely the same, however, due to our uncertainty about how to proceed. We invited Jim Adams, a storyteller and educator of Swampy Cree, Innu, Mohawk and English ancestry to visit as an Indigenous storyteller, a relationship that lasted several years. He guided our reconsideration of the council ring program, recommending we retire the headdresses as a starting point. He did so in a way that encouraged participation and discussion with everyone at the camp.

In the following summers, I was fervent in my belief in change. I looked for voyageur stories that could replace the "Hiawatha's Departure" dramatic piece that was the second act of the program, as they could engage francophone campers while also educating everyone about the fur trading history of the area. However, I found nothing that could relay the same lessons: valuing personal character over physical



strength and living in harmony with nature. I found that camp alumni, staff and long-time campers were not initially supportive of our attempts to modernize and did not understand the need for change. I was accused of ruining “our traditions” and of being too politically correct. Over time, many did begin to see the value in what we were trying to do. In retrospect, part of the negative response I experienced may have been the result of my own lack of communication skills and inability to conduct an informed discussion about cultural appropriation.

Overall, this was an emotional process. It was/is difficult for me to admit to a profound and damaging ignorance of history, politics and Indigenous culture. I did not immediately want to face how complicit we were in the reproduction of a colonial ideology, that something that was so loved and revered could do such harm. I can only thank those who took the time to educate me and to dialogue with me in a respectful manner. Lack of understanding about Indigenous issues and settler privilege remains an issue for me and, I suppose, many camp administrators. Having knowledgeable people on staff to educate administrators about the impacts of Aboriginal-themed programming and to eliminate discomfort with the topic was integral for making change. Personally, I wanted to do away with all Indigenous references. Unsure of the validity or appropriateness of any content, it seemed a sure way to eliminate harmful messages. Ideally though, organizations would develop lasting relationships—an Indigenous Advisory Panel, for instance—with Indigenous representatives who could participate in designing authentic educative programming.

On departure from the role, I was disappointed I hadn’t accomplished more. Other programming demands at camp prevented us from polishing the new program. Greg Albiesser, the new director, acknowledged the need for progress and seemed committed to moving forward. At that point we had mainly removed content,

and with it the excitement and the awe created by the original program. Council ring would need to be rebuilt.

Four years later, a great deal has changed. Greg remained a driving force for change in the camp administration. Where we had removed montages of painted warriors riding bareback, he introduced tableaux of voyageur and campcraft skill-building scenes along the path to the council ring area to build anticipation as campers approached the amphitheatre. Instead of donning a buckskin shirt, worn by directors since the 1920s, he dressed in khakis and a button-down Oxford-style shirt to emulate a portrait of Taylor Statten I that hangs in the boys’ camp dining hall. This shifted the role of “the Chief”—the leader of the council ring and the name the founder went by—from a fictional Indigenous character to an historic leader and outdoor educator.

At the same time, Greg worked with his senior staff to create historically accurate introductions to the council ring games. The original introductions were detailed tales of “Indian braves” doing battle; we had eliminated these and replaced them with general militaristic stories. The new versions as introduced by Greg and his staff told vivid narratives about characters from Algonquin Park, referencing raucous fur trader camp competitions, intense logger rivalries at the local Gilmour Brothers’ mill, Canadian artists encouraging verbal dexterity, and original members of the Taylor Statten Camps’ staff engaging in playful pastimes.

Throughout the first three years of Greg’s tenure as director, he maintained a desire to replace the Hiawatha story. Its content, dancing and dialogue were the most offensive elements remaining, as well as being somewhat hard to follow for younger campers. He was conscious of the heightened social awareness of Indigenous issues in Canada’s popular media and was concerned about the perception and pedagogy of the tradition. However, he also anticipated resistance from his staff and alumni if changes were implemented too

quickly. Despite keenness for change, efforts at replacement were hampered by a hectic camp schedule and a desire to maintain the dramatic and emotive intensity of the original story.

This past summer, having two additional change-makers on staff finally enabled Greg's plans. Braedon Pauze, a UBC English Literature major, student journalist and drama enthusiast, joined the administration team. Braedon was a long-time camper at TSC and was fond of the council ring program. However, recent experiences at university, such as meeting peers with different backgrounds and perspectives, as well as exposure to Aboriginal authors in his classes (some directly critical of Ernest Thompson Seton's work) made him uneasy about participation in the camp's council ring program. Aware of ongoing efforts at revision and wanting to be part of a solution, he offered his help. The same summer, after several years' absence, Lex Scully returned to the camps as staff, bringing with her a knowledge of Indigenous issues, good relationships with local Indigenous educators, and a long-held passion for improving the camps' program.

After multiple discussions amongst the administration team about possible topics to replace the Hiawatha story, Greg suggested creating a mythology specific to the camp and its founder's vision of "living in harmony with nature." Braedon took these themes and applied them to the existing plotline, using characters from the camp's history. Reflecting on his role in reforming the program, Braedon found the writing process quite daunting. He was aware of the centrality of the program and the emotion and nostalgia tied to it. His script was an effort to restore the revered dramatics of the council ring program from his youth—an effort that was appreciated, as the new version was reportedly received well by both campers and staff.

Throughout the process, all parties were conscious of respecting Indigenous cultures through engagement. Lex collaborated with visiting Indigenous educators

including Kim Wheatley, Anishinaabe from Shawanaga First Nation and Brian Charles from Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. These educators held discussions with TSC staff and campers, sharing teachings and responsibilities concerning fire and water. Their visit inspired the addition of fire and water keeper roles to the council ring program, highlighting traditional relationships to nature and adding excitement in the buildup to the event. The inclusion of these elements was not specifically sanctioned by the Chippewa and Anishinaabe visitors, but was considered by staff as ways to show respect for local Indigenous knowledge and lifeways.

Weaving together contemporary Indigenous concepts with a renewed focus on bushcraft skills was done carefully. The fire keeper role began with a collective bow drill fire-lighting the evening before the council ring. One staff member was selected to maintain a fire for 24 hours in a central part of Camp Ahmek. Carrying a torch, this person followed the silent procession to the council ring and lit the council fire from the central fire. As part of the procession around Camp Wapomeo, collecting the staff and campers to travel across the lake to the council ring site, water was collected from each of the four gathering places on the main island of Wapomeo. To begin the program, a land acknowledgement was included, which situates the camp; TSC has unceded Algonquin territory to the east, Anishinaabe territory to the west, and is within the territory of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty.

In another change, the closing scene, which used to be a "young brave" standing beside a blazing fire on a nearby cliff top reciting the "Omaha Tribal Prayer," was replaced. Council ring now culminates with a young version of Taylor Statten I reciting a poem translated by Chief Yellow Lark, a Sioux leader in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, imploring those in attendance to respect the natural environment.

Older members of the camp community who fondly remember and identify with

the original “Indian” tradition have become stronger proponents of change. During alumni camp, which follows the summer session, Braedon reported the vast majority of alumni voiced support for the revision efforts. When Jim Adams helped make the original changes in 2010, the annual alumni council ring remained unchanged, and in 2016 some incremental changes were made. In 2018 there is talk of eliminating the alumni camp council ring altogether.

The need to learn more about Indigenous issues and cultural appropriation is recognized at TSC. All camp staff approached for this article are committed to continued reflection and critical thought about program elements. This team was lucky to have a knowledgeable staff member with strong Indigenous contacts—an essential yet rare educational resource at camps. However, with consistent staff turnover and a tightly packed programming schedule, administrators will have to remain engaged, carving out time and resources to ensure continued progress.

### Conclusion

Eight years’ effort drove several positive changes. The most offensive elements of the council ring tradition, defended as showmanship, were replaced with ones relevant to the camp’s history. The leaders created space for local Indigenous educators to inform campers over the course of the summer. The authors of the new council ring maintained the tradition’s original intent, using elaborate performance to enliven campers’ relationship with nature.

The evolution isn’t finished, though. Educators at TSC need to continue fostering attitude shifts around Seton’s “Indian” stereotype. Unrecognized privilege and emotional attachment continue to stymie meaningful change.

Beyond council ring, efforts to retire other entrenched “Indian” traditions have largely failed. Campers have been encouraged to replace “how how” exclamations with applause. Leaders have advocated removing

mock-Indigenous symbols from the dining hall and renaming the tribal titles for camper groups. Totem poles in too poor condition were removed with request for no replacement. These initiatives each met strong resistance and remain components of TSC culture today.

Trying to reverse cultural appropriation at camps is complicated, collaborative, cross-cultural work. Camp educators at TSC have different levels of understanding and different desired end results for the program. Lacking confidence in collaborating with Indigenous people seemed to prevent some camp administrators from wanting to try.

This echoes the discomfort even we, the authors, voiced while writing this follow-up article: Who are we to be commenting on privilege, decolonial initiatives and “appropriate” programming? How accountable should we hold these institutions? But if part of reconciliation is learning how to live well together (Root and Dannenmann, 2009), then non-Indigenous Canadians will feel growing pains in forming new relationships. We need to have the courage to keep making mistakes and continue asking difficult questions.

*What capacity do camp educators have to design programming with Indigenous content?*

*If they choose not to include Indigenous content, how do we ensure they do not erase Indigenous histories?*

*If they choose to include Indigenous content, what relationships should they have with local Indigenous communities? Do they see these relationships as a healing between Peoples?*

*After indoctrinating non-Indigenous children with a romanticized and homogenized Indigenous stereotype for a century, what responsibilities do Ontario camps have to Truth and Reconciliation?*

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*Taylor Wilkes is a listener, inquirer and catalyst currently based in Peterborough, Ontario. She is a capacity-builder for the Indigenous Environmental Institute at Trent University and the coordinator of Trent's Beyond Duty to Consult and Accommodate professional training program. She holds a MES from University of Waterloo in water governance and environmental psychology. The dissonance between her identities as a Canadian settler and a long-time Taylor Statten camper triggered these "Transitioning Traditions" articles.*

*Jay Kennedy is a primary teacher and outdoor educator currently based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He is a PhD Candidate at Lakehead University studying masculinities in outdoor education. He was Director at Camp Ahmek (TSC) between 2009 and 2013 and Head of Outdoor Education at St. George's School Vancouver from 2014 to 2016. His experiences and interactions in these roles led him to question both his responsibilities as a white settler and as a man in contemporary education.*

*Amanda Shore is a writer, curator and art critic currently based in Montréal. She is a Master's degree Candidate at Concordia University in the Department of Art History, where her research focuses on the colonial visual culture of the North American camping movement. She studies decolonial pedagogy in outdoor classrooms, and the mechanisms that enable cultural appropriation in outdoor education. Her undergraduate thesis "Notes on Camp: A Decolonizing Theory" received the Canadian Camping Association's Research Award of Excellence, and her art criticism has been published in Canadian Art, Visual Arts News, and C Magazine.*

**When offered the opportunity to provide a statement that outlines the work the administration was planning to accomplish in the next few years, the following response was submitted:**

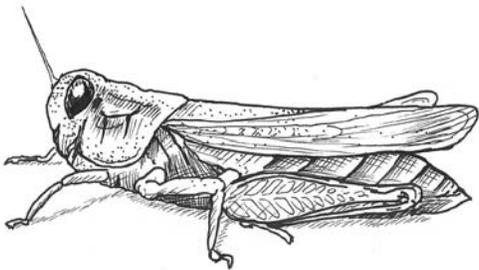
The Taylor Statten Camps (TSC) has been operating summer camps on the shores of Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park for nearly 100 years. We cherish our history and strive to maintain a continuous and open dialogue with all our neighbours in Algonquin Park and surrounding areas, and we strive to maintain the utmost respect for our natural surroundings. TSC has an important history of relationships with Indigenous peoples in the area and cultural programming at our camps. Indigenous worldviews have influenced the values and are reflected in the identity and traditions of our camps. TSC respects the creative input of our community and staff. The camp community is a large and diverse set of voices that provide valuable input into the camp culture. We have seen many changes over the years to such programs as "council ring" as a result of our staff's leadership. In 2017, Generation Seven Consulting, an Indigenous-owned company, held an education session and an activity for our campers and staff meant to inspire the TSC community in a process of renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples based on mutual understanding and respect.

## A Necessary Movement: The Creation of Culturally Appropriate Summer Camp Traditions

By Christine Luckasavitch

Growing up, it was extremely rare for me to be able to experience ceremony within my own Algonquin community and territory, other than our traditional powwow that is still held every summer at Whitefish Lake in Algonquin Park. It was the same for my father's generation, and for his mother's generation, and for his grandmother's generation.

The traditional territory of the Algonquin People is delineated by the Ottawa River watershed and its tributaries in both Ontario and Quebec, including the Madawaska River. The traditional territory of my Algonquin family is the land of the Madawaska River headwaters, including treasured Algonquin Park lakes such as Lake of Two Rivers, Whitefish Lake, Lake Louisa, Rock Lake and Galeairy Lake. When Algonquin Park was established in 1893, and later when the boundaries of the park were expanded, we were forced to leave the lakes our families had inhabited for thousands of years. Generations of Algonquins in this area were not "allowed" to express their Indigenaiety. And as such, we lost touch with our cultural traditions and ceremonies.



Canada was established as a country in 1867 with the passing of the *British North America (BNA) Act*. The *BNA Act* provided the basic governing structures for the new country, including the ways in which the Crown was to interact with the Indigenous people of Canada. Under

the *BNA Act*, Canadian Parliament declared legislative authority over Indigenous people and our traditional territory, though not with our consent. There would be no nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples.

The *Indian Act* was passed in 1876, forcing us into a colonial-based system geared toward Indigenous assimilation into settler culture and away from our traditional systems of governance. In 1880, the *Indian Act* was amended, and the Potlatch Law was added. This law attempted to abolish all cultural practices, including speeches, gift-giving, dance and ceremony. The Potlatch Law remained in effect until 1951 (it was abolished after findings related to court proceedings on acts of genocide in WWII). During this time, it was a criminal offence for Indigenous people to practice our traditional culture; the ultimate goal was to completely erase our Indigenous cultures. However, during the time when it was illegal for us to practice our own culture, unauthentic versions our culture were being presented through programs at children's summer camps, including Camp Ahmek in Algonquin Park.

Camp Ahmek was established by Taylor Statten in 1921 at Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. Statten's own camp philosophy was a result of his 1905 role as Boys' Work Secretary for the Toronto YMCA and his role in organizing a YMCA summer camp near Orillia. It was during this time that Statten recognized how the "Indian Lore" program captured the imagination of the campers, establishing his enthusiasm for Indian lore and the principles of the Woodcraft League of America, developed by naturalist and author Ernest Thompson Steton.

In 1922, at Statten's request, Ernest Thompson Seton spent the summer at Canoe Lake, creating Ahmek's own Indian

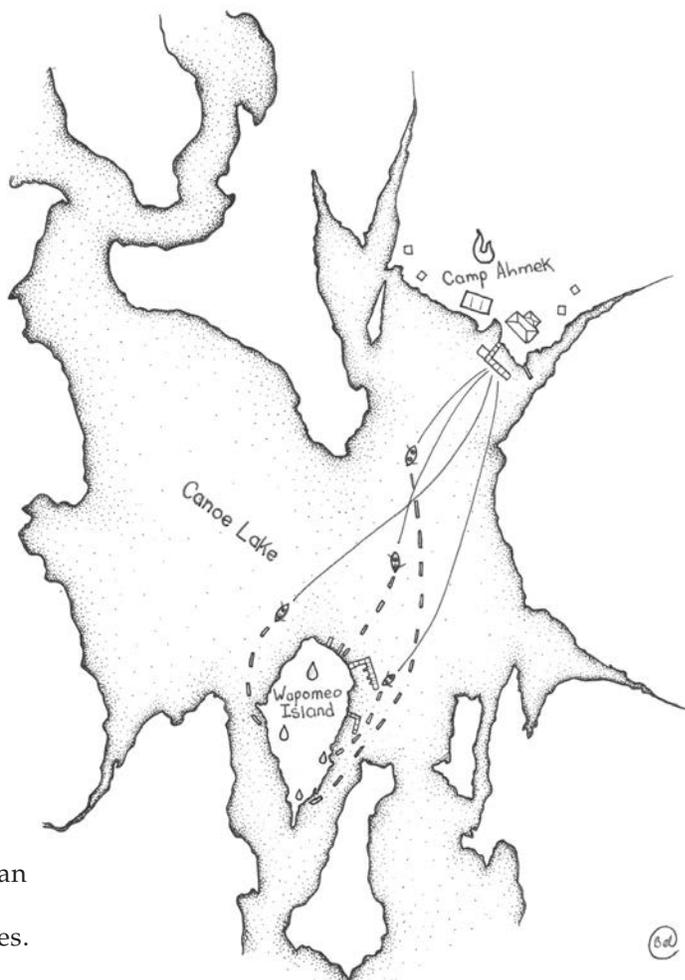
Lore program that featured the Indian Council Ring. Seton was also responsible for teaching the boys how to perform “traditional” dances, conduct sweat lodges and make Indian crafts.

The Indian Council Ring has been described as “participatory theatre,” where the Chief (Taylor Statten), counsellors and campers would dress in “traditional” Indian clothing, complete with headdresses and painted faces, to tell stories, play games and conduct “traditional” dances around the fire. The stunning artwork that can be found throughout Camp Ahmek is based on Indigenous artwork, particularly that of West Coast cultures, but was not created by Indigenous people. At Taylor Statten Camps, campers were separated into groups denoted by the names of different Indigenous tribes and cultures.

It is very difficult to reconcile with the fact that the Indian Lore program, the basis for modern camp traditions, was established during a time when Indigenous people were facing the threat of cultural genocide. During the time when campers were making such incredible, special memories at camp through Indian lore programs and at the Indian Council Ring, it was illegal for us to practice our traditions and ceremonies.

Learning through both conversation and research, I do not believe that the adoption of practices such as the Indian Council Ring and the Indian Lore program were done out of disrespect to Indigenous peoples. Quite the opposite. I am under the impression that Taylor Statten, like so many other summer camp founders, wanted to establish a program that would encourage all campers to embrace the wilderness and establish respect for the outdoors while promoting personal growth in the spiritual, physical, intellectual and

social sense. The concept of an “Indian Lore” program was an intriguing means by which the woodland lifestyle could be brought to life. For the children attending camp, camp traditions became treasured memories. Concepts such as the Indian Council Ring were a normal part of camp life that no one thought to question—until recently.



There is deep value and pride in tradition. However, there may come a time when traditions must be modified, particularly if those traditions are culturally inappropriate or offensive. The concept of promoting an understanding and appreciation for ecology, woodland, and so on that is based on Indigenous knowledge is fantastic, but it does not require cultural appropriation.

To those camps, organizers, administrators and educators who are looking to reformat camp traditions so they do not appropriate Indigenous culture, I encourage you to seek guidance from a group of Indigenous knowledge holders living in communities closest to your camp. Better yet: hire Indigenous knowledge holders as staff members, or invite them (with pay) to visit camp share their knowledge on a regular basis. Though I cannot speak for other Indigenous communities or individuals, I am confident that most would be very happy to work with you to create a program that will honour Indigenous culture and traditions (without appropriation) while instilling a deep respect for the land. This is a time when both Indigenous and non-Indigenous can work together to honour and create better understanding of our histories, create new traditions that honour the Indigenous people of our respective territories, and, most importantly, leave cultural appropriation behind. It is time for us come together to foster knowledge and skills that will help protect the land so that our future generations can continue to enjoy these places as we have for so many generations. Perhaps they will be able to enjoy the land together.



Chi-miigwetch (thank you) to those who worked so hard and to those who are taking the first steps to put new traditions

in place that are not based on inappropriate representations of Indigenous culture.

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*Christine Luckasavitch is an Algonquin Anishinaabekwe of the Crane Clan, and a lifelong resident of Whitney, Ontario. She is the owner of Waaseyaa Consulting, an Indigenous culture and heritage consulting company. An archaeologist and researcher, she is writing her first book, Ondjitiigweyaa Madaoueskarini Omamiwiinini Anishinaabeg (Algonquin People of the Madawaska River Headwaters).*

## Cultural Appropriation is Never Appropriate...Even at Summer Camps

By Mike Ormsby

Cultural appropriation describes the act of adopting aspects of a culture that are not one's own. A deeper understanding of cultural appropriation also refers to an unequal power dynamic wherein members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group.

Considering all of the attempts to eradicate our culture, especially through the residential schools (literally in far too many cases where they tried to "beat the Indian out of the child") that Truth and Reconciliation Committee Chairman Murray Sinclair described as 'cultural genocide'—the loss of our culture and traditions; the loss of our languages; the loss of our connection to the land; the continued effects of colonization and attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples—why wouldn't we be concerned about any form of cultural appropriation? Not so long ago, our cultural ceremonies were outlawed.

The *Indian Act* of 1876 ushered in the era of colonization and enforced cultural assimilation. True assimilation could only be attained through the abolishment, by law, of all cultural practices. Hence, under the *Indian Act*, the Potlatch Law, which included ceremonies other than just the Potlatch, such as the Sun Dance, Mide'wiwin lodges, and even sweat lodge ceremonies, came into effect in 1880. It wasn't until the mid-1950s that this law was stricken.

Our cultural ceremonies and practices are ours. They are not to be borrowed or emulated. I remember "Indian" days at Camp Kandalore. I recall being at an Ontario Camps Association Conference and seeing a workshop on "Native Ceremonial Dances" put on by a non-Indigenous facilitator. Both caused my stomach to knot up.

Simply, "Indian" council rings at camps do not work, nor do wearing "headdresses"

at raves or donning shirts and caps that depict "Indian" team mascots.

*"If you don't have relationships with Elders, storytellers and Indigenous communities, then I don't know how you can ethically tell Indigenous stories."*

—Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Anishinaabe author, musician and academic

We need to refloat or right the canoe that is Canada, especially as we work towards reconciliation. This is both a hope and challenge for us: We strive towards a real possibility for a shared future, reminding Canadians that we're all in the same canoe and that to make this country work we should all be paddling together. The canoe had a pivotal role in our collective past; it also has a significant role to play in our future.

The Two Row Wampum speaks of friendship, respect and peace. The belt is fashioned with two rows of purple wampum (traditional shell beads) alternating with three rows of white. The white wampum represent peace, friendship and respect while the purple ones depict the paths of two vessels traveling together on the river of life.

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*Mike Ormsby is an Anishinaabe artist, craftsman, writer, storyteller, outdoor educator and canoe builder. He builds birch bark and wood canvas canoes. Mike signs his work as W' dae b' wae, the Anishinaabe name given to him by the late Elder Art Solomon. The meaning of w' dae b' wae is "he or she is telling the truth, is right, is correct, is accurate." He hopes his artwork speaks to that same truth. Through his art, he tries to share Anishinaabe culture, teachings and traditions. Mike's family is from Curve Lake First Nation.*

## TRACKS Youth Program

By Chris Furgal, Kristeen McTavish and Robyn Smith

It's a rainy Monday morning during a particularly wet July, but inside the tipi a small, crackling fire is keeping cozy and dry both the space and a growing group of people. Later in the week, giizhik, or gizhiikandug (cedar) tea might be steeping, or the weather might clear and there may not be a fire at all, but on this first morning of camp campers are still trickling in and haven't yet gotten to know each other.

The fire provides a first point of contact and focus for new or shy children. Some, more seasoned campers know each other from the community or from years past, and are chattering about their summer plans, or favourite camp memories. Some brave souls have noticed the collection of stuffed birds (hard to miss!) piled at the feet of the Monday morning instructors, and are asking questions. Instructors are turning the tables; rather than giving direct answers, they are asking questions right back to the kids.

"Do you recognize any of these birds?" "What are their names?" "Why do *you* think its claws are so long?" "What differences can you see between these two?" This gives the opportunity for campers to start the day by showing what they already know, and all sorts of information is already being shared, from English and Anishinaabe names of birds to their habitats, stories about them and personal anecdotes.

This is just the first of a week of mornings at TRACKS Youth Program, an award-winning educational program based out of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. Operated in partnership with Trent's Indigenous Environmental Studies/ Sciences degree program and the Kawartha World Issues Centre, a community-based resource and educational centre, TRACKS offers year-round educational and

leadership programming that takes an Indigenous and environmental approach to science education. Curriculum is inquiry based and learner led, offering youth of all ages the opportunity to share what they know, identify what they want to learn, and act as mentors and teachers not just for those younger than them but for the staff and volunteers who work alongside them.

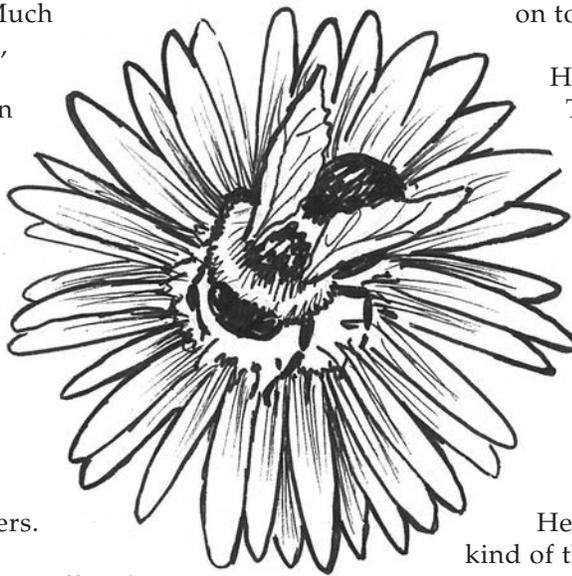
This particular week of camp is a fee-for-service day program open to all youth, but TRACKS also runs a series of year-round programs with First Nations partners in local communities and with urban Indigenous organizations. The youth at this week's camp come from a variety of backgrounds: urban and rural, some well-versed in their cultural teachings and some first-time learners, some Indigenous and some non-Indigenous. Some are children of Trent professors; others come to TRACKS through partnerships with community organizations and agencies. One child has come all the way from British



Columbia; his grandparents had heard of the program and timed their visit with friends in the region so that the young boy, who is Cree, could access culturally responsive science programming during the summer visit. The 10 or so campers and handful of staff, volunteers and youth leaders don't all yet know each other and are quiet this Monday morning, but by Friday they will be actively engaging, sharing experiences and thoughts on the things they have learned including Indigenous language, knowledge and skills in biology, experiences they had in the lab, the traditional games they played, the songs they sang, and the cultural practices they were introduced to or had a chance to reconnect with. Much of the curriculum, like with any outdoor education program, is dependent on the skills and knowledge brought by the instructors, with the day and week's programming informed by and responsive to the interests of campers. This year, with a forensics expert on staff and a youth leader eager to hone her skills in curriculum writing, the campers are excited to experience a new fingerprinting workshop.

The children at TRACKS Youth Program's summer camp, even those on their third, fourth or fifth summer, haven't yet met the taxidermy birds, on loan from the Trent Biology Department. The campers are excited for new programming as well as the classic games and activities that keep them coming back each year. With the day's participants huddled around the fire, lead instructor Heathyr Francis begins. "*Aaniin, boozhoo, mno*

*gizheb, Heathyr n'dizhinikaaz, wabska kwe n'daaw,*" she welcomes the group, greeting them and stating her name and heritage in the local Indigenous language of the territory. Heathyr is self-described "educational vagabond," a graduate of Queen's University's teacher education program and a recent recipient of a Master of Science degree in Plant Physiology from Trent University. Whether leading a TRACKS workshop or at a meeting of environmental science students, she always introduces herself this way. Heathyr explains, "As a person of settler decent, I feel it's my responsibility to acknowledge the territory, the land in which we live and learn on and with, and share the knowledge that has been passed on to me."



Heathyr has been with TRACKS for five years, learning from her Indigenous coworkers, traditional teachers, fellow participants and the Elders she's worked with. She has participated as an instructor in the program, sharing her own knowledges and understandings of the local environment and land.

Heathyr is exemplary of one kind of thinker the program strives to nurture: a non-Indigenous scientist who works from the heart in approaching environmental science, learning and thinking from multiple perspectives and applying a wide variety of tools informed by cultural knowledge as she strives to address environmental issues in her community.

Dr. Dan Longboat is the Director of the Indigenous and Environmental Studies/Sciences (IESS) program, an academic undergraduate program at Trent University. Dr. Longboat developed the program in 1999 to foster environmental leadership and science skills in Indigenous students, and also to promote a deeper understanding of

Indigenous science and cultural knowledge (which are often thought of as inextricably linked) among non-Indigenous people, particularly environmental scientists, policy makers and industry professionals who often work closely with Indigenous communities. A primary goal of the undergraduate academic program, and of TRACKS as an extension of the program's philosophy for younger ages, is to bring together different knowledge systems and knowers from a variety of cultural backgrounds to share skills and knowledge that will better prepare us to work together in addressing environmental issues facing us all.

Dr. Longboat inspires staff and participants alike by describing our duties to the Earth and to each other: "IESS and TRACKS provide an outlet for students to be immersed in other ways of knowing and thinking, where the authority of Indigenous knowledge is valued and, coupled with science and technology, leads to innovative problem solving for the environmental issues facing our world." One favourite image he often shares is that by learning from multiple perspectives and taking different approaches, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike are adding more, varied implements to the tool belts we'll use to address environmental issues.

TRACKS was developed as a way to expand upon and enhance the curriculum delivered by the IESS program, and to creatively respond to some of the challenges the program faced in reaching its goals of promoting knowledge interaction, or the bringing together of different ways of knowing. Among these challenges were the disproportionately low rates of Indigenous representation in post-secondary math and science programs, with studies showing documented disengagement by Indigenous youth as early as middle school. Another was the need for greater understanding and cultural responsiveness among non-Indigenous environmental science students and professionals, particularly those working in

communities. Students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were entering the IESS program and courses as young adults with fixed ideas on how they would or would not approach the subject matter. Certainly, Dan and his colleagues believed that it would be easier for people to think from different environmental perspectives — which can be a rather paradoxical practice as we attempt to equally recognize and value theories or practices that have long been considered at odds — if they are developing this way of learning, and openness to multiple perspectives, from an earlier age.

The earliest incarnation of TRACKS was developed in 2010, a labour of passion and commitment by affiliates of the IESS program including Dan, Dr. Chris Furgal, Associate Professor and primary TRACKS program Faculty Supervisor, and Kristeen McTavish, a University of Ottawa graduate with a degree in Biomedical Sciences and extensive background in science education, first with the University of Ottawa's Adventures program and then with Actua, a nationwide science education network working closely with universities and Indigenous communities across Canada. This team was soon joined by Dr. Brigitte Evering, a former educator and then PhD candidate in the Indigenous Studies Program who was exploring the interactions between Indigenous and science knowledge systems for the purposes of addressing environmental issues as the focus of her dissertation. Along with the first program and curriculum developers, this team worked tirelessly toward a model that would eventually be led by youth mentors from within the university community, highlighting different ways of knowing through hands-on learning, long-lasting relationships with communities and families, and interaction with knowledge holders including Elders, scientists and practitioners working in the environmental field.

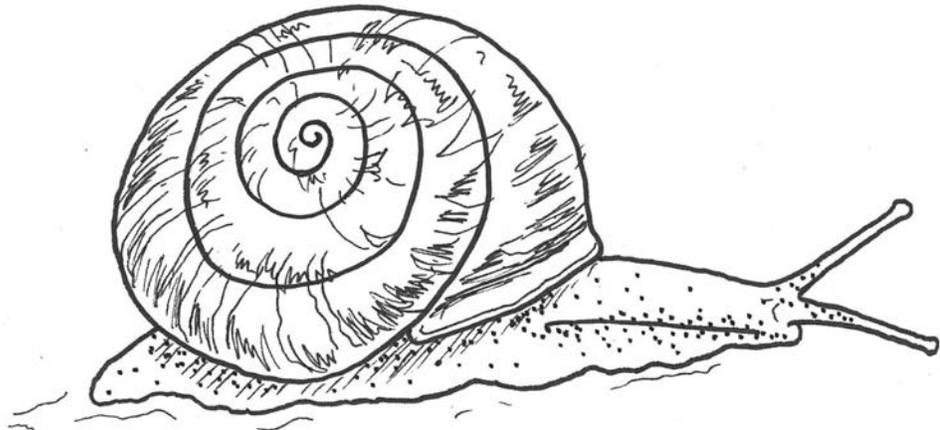
TRACKS has grown exponentially since its beginnings in 2010. It started with

curriculum development and several one-off workshop and outreach events and then leapt into full summer camp operation in 2012 thanks to an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant and initial partnerships with Hiawatha, Curve Lake, and Alderville First Nations. Today TRACKS runs between six and eight summer camp programs, PA Day and March Break programming, hundreds of in-school and community-based workshops and outreach activities, and educators' training sessions. It reaches over 5,000 youth annually. TRACKS hosts placement students from teacher's college and undergraduate programs at the university, helps facilitate research projects for university students, works with dozens of volunteers, and is a partner on community projects including things such as TEACH Outside the Box (a social justice teachers' education program) and the Flint Corn Community Project, a Haudenosaunee Three Sisters garden operated in partnership with local community organization Farms at Work.

In 2014 TRACKS was named one of five winners, and the only Canadian recipient, in the inaugural UL Innovation in Education Award program, administered through the North American Association of Environmental Educators (NAAEE). In 2015, Program Director Robyn Smith (OCT), two young Haudenosaunee staff members, Master's degree candidate Erin Hayward (BSc) and first-year computer science student Zach James, travelled to the NAAEE's annual conference, where

they participated in the gathering of award recipients to share experiences and growth in their programs since receiving the award. At this event the team also enjoyed a private, 45-minute conversation with David Suzuki.

TRACKS' newest opportunity to expand leadership programming has come through a grant received under the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF), which provides funding to youth-led initiatives. In 2017 TRACKS piloted the Oshkwazin Youth Leadership program. *Oshkwazin* is an Anishinaabe word invoking the idea of lighting one's fire, rising up and taking on the work we are meant to do. Within the Oshkwazin program, TRACKS continues to engage high-school aged youth who are transitioning out of the summer camp programming. Similar to a typical camp model where campers could look to become leaders, then counsellors in training, with the end goal of becoming paid staff, Oshkwazin allows TRACKS to continue training and fostering skills development in youth, particularly Indigenous youth, who may later join us as senior staff. One significant difference is that, thanks to partnerships with both the Catholic and secular school boards (Peterborough Victoria Clarington Catholic and Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Boards) the seven youth who participated as Oshkwazin Youth Leaders were fully employed through the Ministry of Education's Focus on Youth program,



administered by school board staff. Through this program, seven Indigenous youth gained valuable work experience rooted in culturally responsive leadership and outdoor educational training and mentorship. Three of the youth had been involved with TRACKS prior to their participation in Oshkwazin, while the four others were new to the program and some found themselves exploring cultural programming for the first time. Through mentorship and skill-sharing, Oshkwazin is a natural extension of TRACKS' overall approach, which is cyclical and non-hierarchical in nature. TRACKS is driven by a staff of talented and passionate educators that include among them language holders, graduate students, scientists, community leaders and certified teachers. Despite the diversity of backgrounds and career paths represented among the staff and youth involved, our foundational belief is that we are all active learners in the process of knowledge engagement and activation, and we all learn from and alongside one another. Elders, professors, environmental technicians and traditional skills holders are among the guests who join us, training our staff and volunteers as they share knowledge with our youth. However, perhaps those with the most to teach are those that speak the least: our youngest participants, the animals we encounter, and the plants and trees that do not speak but that certainly, we have learned, have a voice.

The youth leaders, and those growing into their own leadership roles, will soon be the curriculum developers and programmers at TRACKS in the future. As environmental educators, we are filled with gratitude to learn from and with the exceptional young people in our program.

In the tipi this Monday morning, programming has not officially started, yet campers are already connecting with the fire, igniting a spark within themselves that will be fueled through knowledge and nurtured by all those around them. It is with a sense of gratitude, curiosity

and wonder that campers, youth leaders, staff and volunteers embark upon another week here at TRACKS. They will sing songs, build structures, make messes and learn from mistakes in the woods, fields, tipi and labs here at Trent University. Most importantly, they will follow tracks that will help them build relationships with each other, the natural world and themselves, creating connections through all that they learn to forge their own new path in a swiftly changing world.

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*Robyn Smith is an educator and artist of settler descent, living and working in the Nogojiwanong/Peterborough area for the past 13 years. After graduating from the Indigenous Environmental Studies stream, Robyn went on to complete her BEd (Intermediate/Senior, French and Native Studies) in 2012 and worked for several years in a variety of not-for-profit roles, including five years as Program Coordinator and then Director of the TRACKS Youth Program. Now working as an occasional teacher in the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Robyn continues to be involved in TRACKS, primarily in grant writing and fundraising.*

## Experience with Place-Based Learning

By Max Csikos and Tim O'Connell

Finishing university is a big step into the unknown. I've been reflecting on how that experience has influenced my direction in life. After graduation I jumped into the world of work and responsibility by finding a job with a rafting company that offers experiential education through both floating and hiking classrooms (i.e., guided trips) on the Grand River.

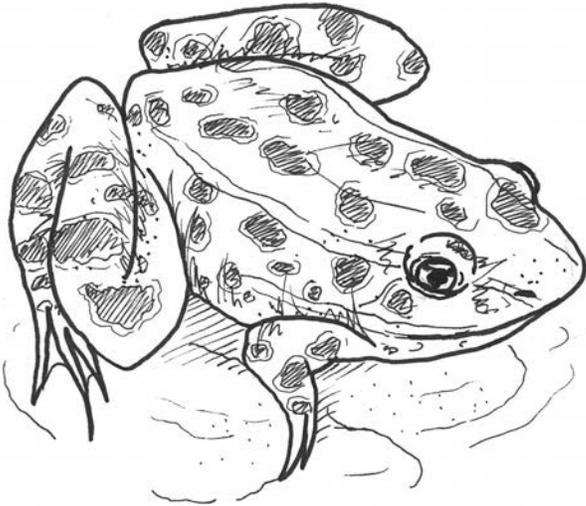
My first experience heading down the river was eye opening. I found a beautiful space and a variety of wildlife and I was humbled by how much I didn't know about these plants and animals. Having the privilege to have graduated with a degree in outdoor recreation from Brock University has given me seeds of knowledge in the field, such as an understanding of leadership and group management, but it could not have fully prepared me for this job. During my training period, I learned so much that was helpful and confidence building about practicing experiential education in this setting. It allowed me to take the seeds of knowledge I brought with me from university and water them into beautiful flowers like the ones I now see along the river bank where I pass along my own knowledge to my clients.

As time passed, I connected to the Grand River—a truly fitting name. How did I connect to this place? How does anyone form a connection to a place? Beery and Jonsson (2017) suggest that place attachment is enhanced by building a connection with the biosphere. I've found that this job has made me understand that the importance of a place is derived from the meaning and knowledge of the natural surroundings. My connection to the Grand River has grown by understanding the importance of this natural space from past to present day. From this job, I have learned about the history of plants and animals along the section of the Grand River I frequent. This information, combined with time in this special place,

makes this connection that much stronger. Experiencing my boss painting a picture of what the Grand was like when he was a kid to seeing what the river looks like now with so much wildlife has helped form that connection. As I refined my skills as an experiential educator, I learned what makes this job so rewarding. The more I learn, the more connected to this place I become. It is a thing of beauty to see other coworkers and clients alike feeling these effects of the Grand River.

My perception of this place has changed due to the amount of time I've spent here and the knowledge I've gained in direct relation to my setting. The combination of these two factors has heightened my relationship to this place. This is place attachment, or when a person develops an internal connection and bonds with a set place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). For me, this has happened with the Grand River, and knowing that this is a place with so much history and beauty has helped foster my connection with it. I feel that knowing the history of a place really hits home and brings that much more meaning to it. For instance, I found that understanding the local First Nations people and how they live, and may have lived, heighten the connection to and beauty of this place for me. I believe that understanding a place's history strengthens our bond to a location, as well as instills a sense of respect for the land. For me, respect is a key element of the beauty of this place, or any place for that matter. Another important factor of my connection to the Grand River is comparing how dirty the water was in the 1950s to how clean it is now. Imagine piles of garbage floating down the river in such abundance you could use it as target practice and comparing this to the present day where there are over 92 species of fish, as well as lots of plants and animal activity. The river is quite literally alive and in my opinion it is how it should be. Life is flourishing along the Grand. And like the many creatures that call the river home as I

do, we both have a very special connection to this place. The river helps them, and it helps me in so many ways. In fact, several clients have said things like, "Wow! I can't believe this is all here. I feel like I'm somewhere removed from civilization. Truly remarkable!"



My experience thus far, guiding school groups and other trips, is that it matters to see where people's interests lie. Being able to connect with the client will help you connect them to the place through which you are travelling. Because I am excited about the natural world, it typically sparks an excitement to learn in my clients. Plants and animals are all around us and affect us more than we may think or give them credit for. Giving some information on flora and fauna can affect our perception of our surroundings. For instance, on one of our training days, we were examining and taking notes about the fauna and flora as well as the history of the river. I found that connecting how all these factors were affecting each other and the interrelation of each one to another to be of utmost importance. For example, the microclimate in which we were working was formed by the interplay of the hill protecting us from the wind and the sun warming our cold bodies in that space. It's a beautiful synchronized dance of these numerous factors that work together to create this amazing climate. I am learning about

different edible plants that are abundant around this area and I can see why the Neutral Nation people, an Iroquoian-speaking North American indigenous group, had chosen this area. This must have been quite the find for the Neutrals. It supplied food, water and farmland—everything you would need to survive. The wildlife rises and falls with the rain; life is drawn to this river. In just one day you may be lucky enough to see deer, beaver, river otter, blue herring, osprey and even bald eagles. They are all thriving because of the river.

Floating classrooms offer some people the special opportunity to see these amazing creatures at work on the river. It is special because you have a group of six to eight people floating in a raft down the river together. A group this small is one you can manage and on which you can focus your time in a good way. It allows an intimate environment in which you can give one-on-one learning experiences. You also have the flexibility to direct your attention to what, at the time, is desirable and to take advantage of the magic of teachable moments. This gives a personalized learning experience and helps further connect people to a place. Floating can give you the opportunity to see the beautiful landscape and animals without scaring them off. As participants paddle, I can talk about the history of the area and the wildlife around us. I can teach them about the great flood, and the first long-distance telephone call made from Paris to Brantford, Ontario. This can help paint a picture of what the river was like from the 1930s to 1970s and to present-day. I try to relate my experience as well as stories told to me by others to help clients realize how far this river has come and the impacts that we can have. Kulczycki (2014) suggests that understanding place meaning and building place attachment will result in the better management of resources such as lakes, rivers and forests.

Hiking classrooms are something special, but present different obstacles and challenges than floating classrooms.

Being able to manage diverse groups while teaching them about the place is a challenge in itself. The connection comes from not only the information and the area, but also from the guide and activities that engage the clients. My goal while guiding a hiking classroom is to present the natural place as a learning environment with which they can interact. I feel the need to pass on respect for the natural world and help clients understand how they can impact their natural space. Hiking offers people something different from the floating classroom. For example, it allows participants to take more time in one place and this helps them truly absorb what is around them. Tan and Atencio (2016) suggest that a place-based approach where the individual is faced with different and challenging environments promotes a deeper engagement in the client or students. I try and integrate this idea into my practice in all my classes.

I have seen immense progression in my skills guiding a trip. Being able to connect with this place through my job is something special. While training did not fully prepare me for leading groups on my own, my fellow co-workers and the connection I have developed to the Grand River helped immensely. Recognizing that many of these clients have never really been in this type of environment made me wonder how I could help a city dweller feel comfortable with these surroundings, while at the same time taking in the information presented. Meeting clients' basic needs and making them comfortable with their surroundings allows them to focus on what is at hand. Either on land or on the river, one should be able to recognize when a client is unfocused and help them meet their personal needs, whether it be to eat lunch, take a hike to warm up, or stop in the shade to cool down. I have found the lack of attention to personal needs to be the largest distraction for clients when working with them.

Over the summer, I've gained a connection to this place, and from this relationship I gained a new job—to educate and pass on

my knowledge and love for this land so that generations after can look back and say, "The Grand River used to look like this, but now it is even more beautiful." I hope that people who experience the Grand River for its beauty and history gain a connection and work to protect this place as their own, as well as other places to which they are connected, whether it is a local park or something on a grander scale.

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## Staff and Caregiver Perspectives on the Role of Nature and Physical Activity at Camp: An Ecopsychological Study

By Ben Blakey

In the past several decades there has been a dramatic change in individuals' lives in relation to nature, described in depth by Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), where he coined the term *Nature Deficit Disorder* (NDD) to describe children's alarming disconnection from nature. This term has been useful in particular as research suggests that spending time outside helps with symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD; Taylor & Kuo, 2009). NDD is seen most prominently through decreases in physical activity, time spent outdoors, and ecological knowledge, along with increases in media use, physical health problems, psychological diagnoses and prescription medications.

Theories describing the positive effects of contact with nature include Wilson's (1984) Biophilia hypothesis, Kaplan's (1989) Attention Restoration Theory (ART), and Ulrich's (1983) Psycho-Evolutionary Theory (PET), but it is only recently that a surge in research supporting these theories has become available (Louv, 2005; Selhub & Logan, 2012; Williams, 2017). Research also suggests that proximity to natural areas encourages a greater degree of physical activity in youth, an especially important finding when considering recent developments in neuroscience that have shown profound benefits of physical activity to mental health and learning (Ratey, 2008; Ratey & Manning, 2014). In addition, there is a growing body of research suggesting that "environmental sensitivity" or an emotional attachment to the environment may be a necessary component to engender stewardship in adulthood (Chawla, 1998).

Summer camps have had a tradition for connecting youth with nature and physical activity as well as creating spaces for many positive developmental experiences. Research shows that summer camps help develop positive eating habits, improve

overall well being, and allow for an abundance of outdoor activity. Campers often leave with increased self-esteem, independence and social competence, new friendships, and a heightened sense of exploration. Many summer camps help develop leadership skills, environmental awareness and spirituality, often engendering strong values as well as decision-making skills (Fine, 2007).

One of the largest issues with understanding the disconnection from nature has to do with the reductionist lens typically used in modern scientific approaches. As Capra (2008) explains, there is a need to go beyond reductionism to systems thinking, and start thinking of problems "in terms of relationships, patterns, and context." Qualitative research provides a more integrated, contextual approach to the scientific method that attempts to explore and describe phenomena rather than being predominantly hypothesis-driven.

Camp Kirk is located in central Ontario, and provides specifically for youth with a diagnoses of ADHD, Learning Disabilities (LD), or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The summer includes four camp sessions, each lasting from 10 to 14 days. Each year there are approximately 30 staff members and approximately 35 campers. Seven staff members and five primary caregivers of campers from the summer of 2011 were recruited by email for research interviews conducted in the winter of 2012. Audio recordings were transcribed, and an iterative process involving interpretive phenomenological analysis was used.

### Results

Four meta-themes emerged through a detailed analysis of the transcriptions, each containing three to five themes that help to organize and explain the data (see table).

<b>Meta-theme #1:</b> Encouraging mental and physical benefits and fostering a connection to the environment for youth from the city through outdoor activity				
The natural environment for youth from the city	Mental and physical effects of outdoor activity	Connection to nature and interest in the environment		
<b>Meta-theme #2:</b> Promoting greater levels of physical activity at camp to encourage a healthy lifestyle, reduce frustrations and control behaviour				
Levels of physical activity at camp compared with home	Physical activity improves sleep and eating habits	Reduction in symptoms of ADHD through physical activity		
<b>Meta-theme #3:</b> Promoting social skills development for youth with social difficulties through a supportive environment and group experiences				
Participants' views of campers' social difficulties	The supportive environment at camp	Campers' development of social skills	Activity with the cabin group and wider camp community	
<b>Meta-theme #4:</b> Encouraging youth with exceptionalities to learn by trying new things, discovering strengths and challenging themselves in physical and artistic activities				
Learning at camp for youth with different learning styles and fears	Experiential learning at camp in comparison to school	Trying new things, discovering strengths and challenges	Physical activities and challenges at camp	Artistic activities and creativity at camp

1. Encouraging mental and physical benefits and fostering a connection to the environment for youth from the city through outdoor activity

Staff noted that most campers were from the city, and that many campers weren't accustomed to being in the natural environment. While a few campers remained uncomfortable outdoors, the majority of campers warmed up to the natural environment and became more appreciative of nature during their time at camp. Compared to urban environments, participants described the natural environment as more calming, as well as allowing more options for physical activity. Most caregivers discussed positive changes regarding their children's appreciation of nature, and some caregivers mentioned increases in environmental knowledge attributed to the camp experience. As one staff member described,

*Eighty to eighty-five percent of our campers are from cities or towns or suburbs of a large city like Toronto or Ottawa, so a lot of them have either never been exposed or have had very little exposure to nature. To come to camp... is a major thing for them.*

2. Promoting greater levels of physical activity at camp to encourage a healthy lifestyle, reduce frustrations and control behaviour

Staff described campers' high level of physical activity at camp, while most caregivers mentioned that campers engaged in significantly less activity during the school year. Many participants described better sleep as a direct outcome of increased physical activity at camp. Physical activity was also seen by some staff to contribute to better eating habits, as well as by some

participants for being able to self-regulate frustrations and control behaviours. Several staff noted that campers were more happy when active, and that they were easier to handle when they were engaged in regular physical activity. Staff noted their goal to keep campers active during the day to allow everyone at camp to sleep better. As one staff member described,

*You read a camper who on their teacher reports or their family reports is that they are fidgety and all over the place and inattentive during the school year but we see that they are being at camp and able to run around and play and be physical that suddenly they're not considered hyperactive they're just considered active... they're more focused generally and you see that they can engage in a conversation without being distracted because they're getting that energy out running around... it helps kids regulate themselves a bit more if they have excess energy... whether that's dealing with people socially or focusing on listening to instructions.*

3. Promoting social skills development for youth with social difficulties through a supportive environment and group experiences

Participants mentioned social skills as one of the most important benefits campers gain from their camp experience. Participants described how many campers had social deficits and felt that the camp encouraged social development through a supportive environment. Participants discussed how campers gained a variety of social skills including self-confidence, relationship building and cooperation, and several described strong changes in social development as especially important. Social skills were seen to develop through cabin group activities, morning activity groups and interactions within the wider camp community. As one staff member described,

*Camp is a place where kids make friends and they're away from their*

*parents. It takes a lot of independence and for kids who attend Camp Kirk I think they don't get those things as much in typical society as other kids might. It's more special for them to receive that at Camp Kirk. I think that those things can have a really big impact on kids' confidence and their level of independence.*



4. Encouraging youth with exceptionalities to learn by trying new things, discovering strengths and challenging themselves in physical and artistic activities

Participants described the importance of campers being able to try new things and learn at camp for children with exceptionalities. Several staff described how camp promoted experiential learning that was child-driven and informal as well as comparing learning at camp to learning at school. Participants described how camp encouraged campers to try new things, discover strengths and challenge themselves, which served to develop self-esteem and self-confidence. As one mother described,

*She's always had a fear of heights: "I don't want to do that. Don't make me do that." Well, she got up on the ropes and she was doing the rock climbing and was the first one to finish the old course on the ropes and to do the rock climbing....Bringing it home she's willing to try new things and test her limits at how far she's willing to go now, which is a big thing for her because normally she likes her little box and she stays in her box and that's just the way she likes it....She loves wildlife but from a distance...but she was the only one to catch a huge snapping turtle that session and she was so proud of it. I was so proud. Normally she won't touch things because of her tactile sensitivities. But she did it. I thought it was awesome. Now she is trying new little things.*

## Discussion

### *Meta-theme #1*

Results from this study support the notion that the natural environment has a restorative capacity linked to attention as described by Kaplan's (1989) ART, though most participants described cognitive benefits from nature in terms of stimulation and calmness. DeLongis, Folkman & Lazarus (1988) suggest that many individuals in modern urban industrialized societies spend most of their time in a state of "fight or flight," a human capacity traditionally intended to allow quick reactions to rare but highly dangerous situations. The numerous stressors present in urban areas release more neurochemicals and hormones into our brains than the para-sympathetic nervous system was ever designed for, increasing arousal in "an evolutionary regression to a more immediately life-threatening existence" (Tsigosa & Chrousos, 2002). This regression has many negative implications for youth, especially those at Camp Kirk who suffer from diagnoses such as ADHD and ASD, as they may be especially sensitive to modern stressors as well as having a greater need to escape the overstimulation of the city.

Several participants made reference to campers spending a large amount of time at home with electronic media. An article by Stevens (2009) discusses the fields of ecopsychology and bio-electromagnetics, which deals with the interaction between electrical fields and living organisms on relevant frequencies. There are many small natural electrical fields that impact us, along with many artificially created electrical fields present in modern society that vary in strength from approximately 0.5 micro-teslas ( $\mu\text{T}$ ) to 2,000  $\mu\text{T}$ , ranging in frequency typically below 100 Hertz (Hz). The strongest of these fields includes power lines, electric trains, household appliances, lighting and mobile phones. Urban magnetic "noise" has been found to be operating usually at a strength of 0.5  $\mu\text{T}$  or above and frequencies of 50 to 60 Hz, while natural environments have

noise of less than 0.1  $\mu\text{T}$  with frequencies of less than 20 Hz. Studies involving bio-electromagnetics would suggest that urban environments may be more appropriately described as detrimental to mental health and cognitive functioning rather than natural settings being described as restorative (Stevens, 2009).

Evidence is accumulating on differences in performance on tasks of attention during the presence or absence of 50 Hz magnetic fields (a regular frequency for power lines). The scientific understanding for this phenomenon is that these magnetic fields stimulate regions of the frontal and parietal cortex, specifically during tasks of executive functioning. Other studies involving bio-electromagnetics have shown affective changes in response to different electromagnetic fields interacting with human functioning (Stevens, 2009). These bio-electromagnetic studies on attention and mood align with the results of the current study in that the natural environment was reported to be more calming, as well as the urban environment seen as over-stimulating.

Findings support Ulrich's (1983) PET, in which stress is conceptualized as a physiological response to situations threatening one's well-being. As the urban environment was seen by several participants as being "overstimulating" and "overwhelming," perhaps the natural environment allowed recovery from the stresses of daily social interactions as well as the overstimulation of both the urban environment and technology. Many campers were seen to have difficulties with social skills and stimulation, which highlights the importance of PET in understanding the impact of contact with nature for children with exceptionalities such as ADHD and ASD.

Gibson's (1977) Theory of Affordances views interactions between "environment" and "agent" in terms of opportunities afforded for events, describing the mutually interactive development of both as a holistic system. If individuals'

physical and socio-cultural attributes have developed over millennia in mutual interaction with the natural environment, it is only reasonable to expect that a sudden change to an industrialized urban environment over the last 150 years (a blink in the evolutionary time-scale) would heighten problems within human culture and physiological functioning. In the Gibsonian understanding, organisms (such as youth with ADHD, LD and/or ASD) are best situated in environments that create less stress. The present study suggests that the camp environment affords many opportunities for contact with nature as well as consequent reductions in stress and stimulation. The natural environment of camp also affords opportunities for developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.

Many participants described the increased physical activity that campers participated in when outdoors, which is in line with existing research suggesting that teenage youth engage in more regular physical activity when living in closer proximity to safe parks and natural areas (Babey et al., 2008). These results are particularly important as many modern youth have been shown to participate in lower levels of outdoor physical activity than previous generations (England Marketing, 2009). Additionally, the profound mental benefits of regular physical activity are better understood through insights gained from neuroscience (Ratey, 2008; Ratey & Manning, 2014).

Participants suggested that many campers developed a greater awareness and appreciation for nature during their time at camp, which had particular relevance in terms of wilderness tripping experiences. Although childhood experiences in nature have been linked to environmental preferences (Wells & Lekies, 2006), studies have to date been unable to show a direct link between childhood experiences in nature and environmentalism.

### *Meta-theme #2*

Most caregivers indicated that their children engaged in much lower levels of physical activity at home than the level of physical activity experienced by youth at camp. This result is particularly important for mental health in the context of new understandings from neuroscience of the impact of exercise on the brain. According to Ratey (2008), regular physical activity has profound benefits for individuals of all ages that have been strongly linked to improvements in learning, anxiety, attention and mood—a topic that is particularly important to Camp Kirk considering the significant needs of their campers to develop these psychological capacities.

Many participants discussed the impact of physical activity on children's sleep, suggesting a link between improved sleeping habits and having better self-control of socially inappropriate behaviours. While there are many potential influences on sleep at camp including medications, eating habits and contact with nature, the influence of sleep remains important to understanding the phenomenon of camp. A recent study by Noble, O'Laughlin & Brubaker (2011) investigated parental reports of children's sleeping problems and symptoms of ADHD, finding that the establishment of a regular routine for sleep may be especially important to mitigating inattention and impulse control. As the sleeping schedule is highly structured at camp, results from the current study support the notion that physical activity helps to improve sleep, which in turn helps to alleviate symptoms of ADHD.

As described in Ratey's *Spark* (2008), for educators one of the most profound implications of recent discoveries in neuroscience is that regular physical activity boosts capacity for memory, and consequently improves learning by means of a major growth hormone Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF). Ratey describes BDNF as "miracle-gro for the brain" as it helps build neuronal connections and increase cerebral blood

flow, an effect that translates to benefits for attention, anxiety, mood, learning and memory. It is not until regular cardiovascular physical activity has been established, however, that the full effects of BDNF and similar hormones including insulin-like Growth Factor (IGF-1), Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF), and Fibroblast Growth Factor (FGF-2) can be experienced. As the opportunities for physical activity at camp are such that participants describe campers as “always moving” and spending most of their waking time engaged in physical activity, and as participants described a great amount of learning at camp, the potential of camps to boost learning capacity and form more solid memories is profound and in need of further scientific exploration.

### *Meta-theme #3*

The ability of summer camps to promote the development of social skills for youth with exceptionalities may be especially significant as many of these youth have a stronger need for such development. Many staff discussed strong changes in campers’ social skills observed during their time at camp, a change that caregivers reiterated and suggested was one of the most important parts of the experience to their children. Many participants also suggested differences between camp and school in terms of social situations, highlighting the more supportive environment of camp. As many youth with exceptionalities face issues of exclusion, bullying and other forms of negative social contact, the camp environment may be especially helpful to these youth for learning social skills and establishing friendships.

Many staff expressed the strong value placed on creating a supportive environment and developing constructive relationships. These were strengthened by fostering positive reinforcement techniques while also refraining from the use of critical learning strategies. As many youth at Camp Kirk have exceptionalities that include self-esteem and self-confidence issues, the use of such strategies may be an especially

important component of the social environment. Several participants also mentioned the small size of the community and the high staff-to-camper ratio as being particularly important to the supportive environment, allowing campers to form strong bonds as well as to learn from older role models.

Participants’ discussion of campers’ social development in the present study makes sense in light of Wilson’s (1984) biophilia hypothesis, which suggests that humanity has evolved a genetic predisposition to seeking out and interacting with other life, including other people. The ability of the camp to encourage social interactions between campers enables the development and expression of such proposed genetic traits. This may be especially pertinent for youth at Camp Kirk as they often could really benefit from an evolutionary trait encouraging them to seek out social interactions.

The results from the present study may also make sense in terms of Gibson’s (1977) Theory of Affordances, which describes the mutually interactive relationship between organisms and their environment. The camp environment provided many opportunities for social interaction in a wide variety of contexts, enabling campers a strong degree of social skills development. As many of these youth face barriers to sociability, the camp environment may be especially important in allowing a variety of options for development of social skills, providing an opportunity for youth who struggle with more common forms of social interaction.

Participants discussed the role of the small cabin groups in social learning, suggesting that the group bonding occurring was much like familial interactions, which were important for teaching campers about cooperation. This sense of family may be especially important for those who lack the benefits of positive familial interactions in their home life. Several staff mentioned that some campers needed to learn how to share and cooperate, which suggests that the ability of cabin groups to foster such

learning may be important; many situations in later life require the ability to work with others to accomplish shared goals.

The camp was seen to provide many opportunities for group interactions involving children of different ages and sexes, which was useful in promoting social learning. As schools and many other organizations tend to organize youth by age and sometimes sex, a divide that has not been traditional for most of our species' evolution, the ability of the camp to foster situations where youth learn together may be especially important. Along with gaining insights into individual differences, this type of mixed group learning may also engender an interest in heterogeneity within a circle of friends, as well as tolerance of people with different abilities and backgrounds. This ability of the camp to promote campers' awareness and acceptance of others may be especially important in light of trends in the modern world towards inclusivity.

Participants suggested that the camp promoted a sense of community, something many individuals lack in an increasingly individualist and competitive industrial economy such as Canada. According to a study by Shields (2008), the role of feeling connected to community and having a sense of belonging has many implications for both physical and mental health outcomes over the lifespan. The study found that those with a "very strong" sense of community had approximately double the odds of having "very good" or "excellent" physical health, as well as mental health. Additionally, in 2005 one in four Canadians described feeling a "somewhat weak" or "very weak" sense of belonging; the lowest rates across Canada were from large urban zones. In Ontario, the lowest indicators of feeling connected to community were from Toronto and Ottawa (Shields, 2008), where most of these campers resided.

Several participants mentioned the importance of music to youth with exceptionalities; music allows for a medium of connection even for those with language

barriers. As Levetin (2007) describes in *This Is Your Brain on Music*, anthropological evidence suggests that humanity evolved the ability to make music before language, and that consequently we derive many levels of meaning from music as a communication tool. While the origins of music in humanity are not clear and there are competing hypotheses as to why it has been naturally selected, it is evident that it has an adaptive function highly related to speech and communication (Levetin, 2007). The results from the present study are in line with several hypotheses suggesting that music has a vital role at camp, especially for youth with exceptionalities, in helping to communicate ideas and encourage group interactions.

#### *Meta-theme #4*

As the camp provided for youth with ADHD, LD and ASD, it is important to discuss the difficulties some of these youth have with their education. While there are many such youth able to do well in school, often taking advantage of existing supports, some of these students find school very difficult and may even drop out. Unlike the traditional classroom norm, a large proportion of these youth do not learn the same way as others. As a result, many develop fears and aversions to trying new things and require a great versatility of instructional methods. The social environment of the classroom can be an especially difficult place for these youth, who tend not to be given recognition owing to their strengths but rather to their weaknesses. The participants in the current study described the process of learning at camp as being particularly well suited for the campers, owing to the variety of opportunities for learning and the natural environment.

Many participants described learning at camp as fun and informal, as well as mentioning it in contrast to the more "forced" learning of school. While it may be obvious that all children would rather learn through fun activities than traditional rote techniques, perhaps these particular youth

*need* that element of fun in order to quell their anxieties and frustrations. As many experience anxiety with learning in school, it may be important to disguise learning through more fun activities to offer less-pressured learning experiences. Indeed the concept of play is gaining support in research literature owing to advances in neuroscience, and has long been seen as being especially important to cognitive, emotional and social growth (Ginsburg, 2007).

A study by Mastropieri, Scruggs, Mantzicopoulos, Sturgeon, Goodwin and Chung (1998) used qualitative and quantitative methods to compare a lesson involving experiential learning to a lesson involving traditional instructions for two grade four classes. Their results showed that students in the experiential category outperformed those in the traditional category on both written tests and performance measures, and that those in the experiential group said they enjoyed the science lesson. The results from the present study align with this study on the importance of experiential education, suggesting that those with learning disabilities and other exceptionalities may benefit greatly from fun experiential learning.

The experiential nature of learning at camp was seen to be particularly important to educating campers about the natural environment. Many participants mentioned the need for campers to be surrounded by nature to both gain a connection to it and care more deeply about protecting it. Several staff mentioned the importance of allowing children's natural curiosity to take over in guiding their learning of the environment, a concept in line with the innate connection to nature described in Wilson's (1984) biophilia hypothesis.

Many staff mentioned the importance of challenging oneself in building self-esteem, self-confidence and trying new things. The element of challenge was viewed as especially important at camp, both in terms of physical and

artistic activities. Participants discussed the importance of wilderness tripping experiences, the rock wall, the ropes course and the zip-line as being especially useful physical challenges in helping campers discover their strengths while improving their self-esteem. As some of these youth have aversions to challenges and may lack self-confidence, the ability to challenge campers safely within a supportive environment is likely a highly valuable aspect of the camp experience.

Several staff described situations in which campers would express their creativity through artistic activities, and several caregivers saw these traits continuing into their children's everyday lives at home. Perhaps there are aspects of the camp environment, such as in being supportive, surrounded by nature, or encouraging of physical activity, that aid in developing the creative expression of campers. As creativity is increasingly important in a quickly changing world, these artistic activities may have a very important place in preparing youth for the future.

### Limitations

While many results have been identified, there are also several limitations that must be taken into account before drawing conclusions. Firstly, while the strength of the approach lies in collecting participants' views through open-ended questions, such that participants may more accurately describe the phenomenon in their own terms, there were only 12 participants and so generalizing results becomes problematic. Secondly, while approximately one-fifth of the potential staff participants gave an interview, it is possible that only those who enjoyed their camp experience or felt comfortable divulging information about their experience participated. Thirdly, the potential participant pool for caregivers was much larger than staff; only five in likely hundreds of potential caregivers gave an interview, which involves a greater potential to only have sampled from those who felt their children had a

positive experience at camp. Finally, the methodology requires an understanding of subjectivity, and as such this study does not attempt to be objective; within the phenomenological paradigm “objectivity” is merely a poorly understood concept linked to the socio-cultural and economic bases of an industrial class society.

While the interpretive phenomenological method requires an acknowledgement of the impossibility of objectivity, it approaches subjectivity transparently and drives the involvement of both personal and epistemological reflexivity. Personal reflexivity refers to the nature of a participant’s own experiences influencing researcher biases. To this end, the researcher had been a camp counselor for 12 years at seven different camps prior to undertaking the study, and he believes wholeheartedly in the camp environment being a profoundly positive experience for youth. Epistemological reflexivity refers to the researcher’s theoretical bias in approaching the study. To that end, the researcher believes that the biophilia hypothesis and nature deficit disorder offer solutions for understanding the impacts of the apparent disconnection from nature, as well as the larger global issues of environmental destruction and climate change.

### Conclusions

The results from the current study must be taken as a description of a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants, and as such does not have a hypothesis-driven design. The study aims to open the box of scientific inquiry to help aid future avenues of potential for research. Those working within the social sciences, and particularly those working with youth or in the field of education, may find insight and ideas with which to better allow camp experiences to help change children’s lives, and perhaps more specifically those with exceptionalities, who may struggle with social skills or a connection to community.

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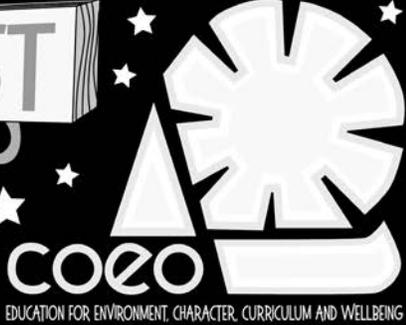
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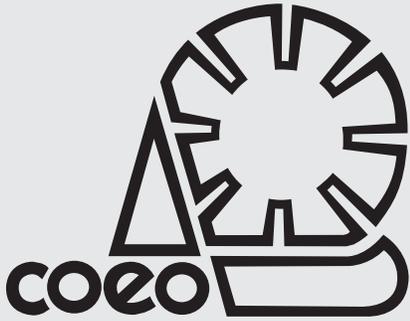
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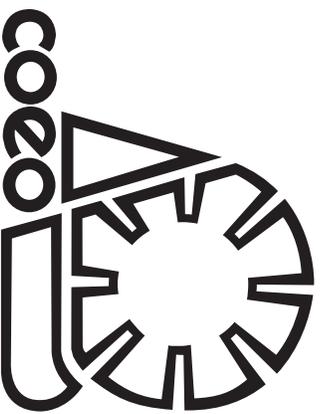
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