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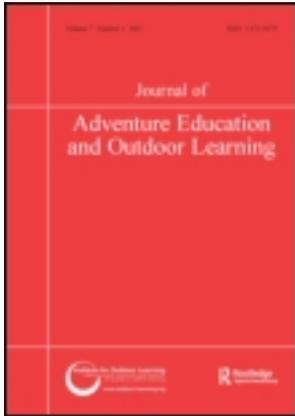
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# Indigenous ways—fruits of our ancestors

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In this paper the human-nature relationship is recognized as a major field of interest and a platform of ideas linked with it is explored. A ‘new’ source to inform an alternative paradigm for outdoor education is proposed; it is millennia old, has roots all over the globe and is a living, breathing, and evolving tradition—indigenous ways. While recognizing the diversity of indigenous people, the paper explores common characteristics of thought and practice within indigenous traditions. Indigenous ways are defined and their connection with outdoor education is explored. The author concludes that indigenous ways have the potential to inspire a fundamental change in outdoor education, while providing working models for theory and practice.

Keywords: *Indigenous; Outdoor education; Environmental education; World-view*

## Introduction

In his work ‘Outdoor education: Research topic or universal value?’, Robbie Nicol (2002a, 2002b, 2003) surveys the history of outdoor education (OE) in the UK. He explores the underpinning philosophy of OE, recognizing the field as a heterogenic entity lacking its own philosophy. He then proposes ‘deep ecology’ as a suitable match. The practice of *friluftsliv* in Norway closely follows deep ecological principles and employs outdoor experiences to create a connection with history, ancestry and environment (Tordsson, 2007). Nicol and Tordsson are not the only ones who have been challenging our relationship with our environment. Many authors have emphasized the human-nature divide and education’s role in addressing it: most notably David Orr (1994) and Nils Faarlund (1994). In the UK the discourse seems to be philosophical in nature; it is critical of the current position but unclear about how a newly adopted philosophy could translate back into practice.

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Nicol (2003) offers to marry OE with Environmental Education (EE) in recognition of their shared goals. However, how OE and EE are to come together and form a new practice in the UK is still an open question. It was David Abram who first turned my attention to indigenous peoples as a source for a possible answer. His remark that positioned tribal magicians or shamans as mediators between the human and ‘more-than-human’ world (Abram, 2006) first ignited my imagination. I later learned that in an indigenous society all individuals are engaged in keeping the human-nature relationship in balance as part of their daily life (Prechtel, 1999)—a life that experiences the natural environment as home. While I recognize the diversity of indigenous peoples and hence the problem of grouping them together under one title, ample evidence suggests that there are enough common characteristics to warrant a discussion of trends in indigenous thought and practice (Abram, 1996; Bruchac, 1992; Grenier, 1998; Ingold, 2000; Johnson, 1992; Terena, 1992; UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2006). The exploration of how indigenous peoples and their world-views and ways of life can inform and enrich OE thinking and practice is hence the focus of this paper, with particular emphasis on the ways in which indigenous thinking can offer a theoretical foundation for the marrying of OE and EE. For the purpose of this paper I will use the term ‘indigenous ways’ to describe the wholeness of the indigenous world-view, philosophy, value base and action.

The link between indigenous ways and OE is made self-evident by Ray Barnhardt, who has spent over 30 years working with and educating Alaskan indigenous people (and being educated by them). Together with Oscar Kawagley he explains that, among the Alaskan indigenous people:

Traditional education processes were carefully constructed around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plant and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. All of this was made understandable through demonstration and observation accompanied by thoughtful stories in which the lessons were imbedded (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 3).

This paper will present the practices and views that underlie indigenous ways, hoping to bring a balanced representation of indigenous peoples and their world. The aim here is to explore the potential application of these practices to OE. I suggest that indigenous practices may in fact provide the philosophical foundation that OE has lacked.

It is not this paper’s aim to idealize indigenous people, nor is it my intention to suggest that we reverse human advancement in favour of returning to a ‘simpler time’. In many places the environmental and social conditions that made indigenous practices possible are no longer a reality. In other places indigenous people have relinquished their special connection to the land. It is by learning about indigenous practices that we may develop our own, place-specific, culturally-appropriate practices, thus developing our own indigenous ways.

## A new framework

A strong link exists between indigenous ways and OE, as ‘Knowing, feeling and seeing the sacred text of the land has been the privilege of indigenous cultures’ (Gray, 2005, p. 9). The link was forged with education by the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, which, in reaction to the ‘age of enlightenment’, strived for a world-view that valued natural, wild and spiritual ways of being (Wilson, 1989). However, Romantic notions, such as ‘wilderness’ and the ‘noble savage’, are problematic and should be handled with care, as they have been partly the cause of injustices committed against indigenous people (Barron, 2003). A pristine ‘wilderness’ space is in contradiction to reconciling the human-nature divide and the acceptance of nature as home. The ‘noble savage’ is a non-realistic stereotype which inhibits true dialogue between cultures (Hamilton, 2003). Despite the problematic ways in which indigenous ways and natural environments were understood during the Romantic Movement, the recognition of the link between the natural world and education was laudable. In fact, it may be said that some OE practice is seeking to recover the pre-industrialized state that indigenous ways embody (Faarlund, 1994; Henderson & Potter, 2001; Humberstone & Pedersen, 2001; Wilson, 1989), and yet indigenous practices that may hold so much insight into OE have seen little attention ever since the very beginning of the practice in the UK.

Many emerging OE trends can be traced back to indigenous ways (Figure 1). Therefore, an exploration of indigenous ways and their links to OE is particularly timely and might provide us with insights into future directions for OE. Before describing the ways in which an understanding of indigenous ways can contribute to the further development of OE, it is first useful to identify the current OE trends that have parallel practices within indigenous practices: humanity as part of nature,

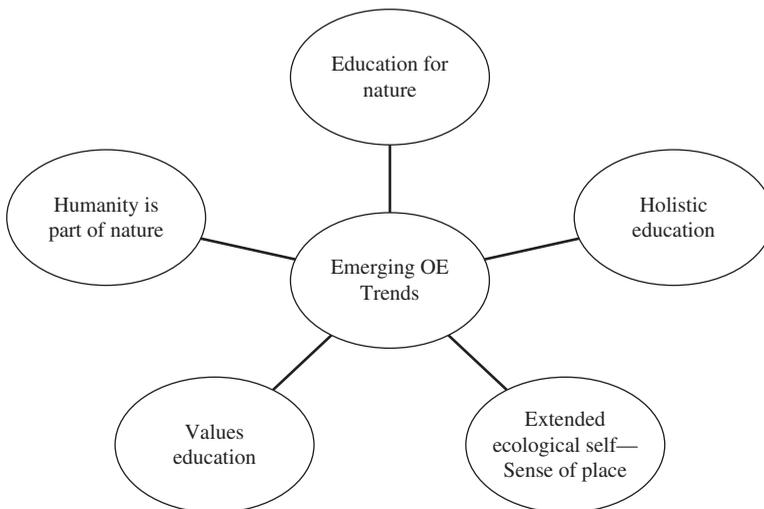


Figure 1. Indigenous ways encompassing OE trends.

education for nature, values education, the extended ecological self and holistic education. Each of these is described in more detail in this section.

### *Humanity is part of nature*

Many researchers have outlined that a need to understand participant experience is crucial to OE, but has not been adequately explored (Allison, 2000; Beames, 2004a; Davidson, 2001; Taniguchi, Freeman, & LeGrand Richards, 2005). The issue of participants' relationship to the environment is fundamental in understanding their experience since the environment mediates all that is experienced (Ellul, 1989). According to Martin (2005) the relationship can be understood on four levels: alienated from nature; travelling through nature; caring for nature; and integrated with nature. Martin researched OE students involved in a three-year degree programme, and defines the development of their relationship with nature as continuous. It develops in the order described above, with each one being a higher order of the previous one. Similarly, Nicol (2003), supported by the writings of Orr (1994), Abram (1996), Naess (1995a) and others, concludes that OE should adopt a view of humanity as part of nature. It follows, therefore, that deep ecology, with its value of flourishing and diversity of life (Naess & Sessions, 1995), should be the philosophy that guides OE practice.

### *Education for nature*

The physical environment in OE is considered to be a powerful educational tool (Beames, 2004a; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Miles & Priest, 1999). Recently, work in OE and Nature and Adventure Therapy has started to acknowledge the environment as an active participant in the process, in what is termed an 'ecocentric' approach (Berger, 2007; Beringer & Martin, 2003; Quay, 2005; Wattchow, 2001). Moreover, with the understanding that humanity is part of nature, the environment becomes an intimate component of all human activity, including education. OE's responsibility towards educating for nature has started to receive more attention in the UK as well (Higgins, 2003; Nicol, 2003; Nicol & Higgins, 2004). Takano (2004), in a study of OE programmes with an environmental message in Scotland, Alaska, and Nunavut, finds that the Scottish programmes fall short of their aims because they retain an instrumental and personal-gain narrative. She further finds that to address people's relationship with nature required a 'cultural, spiritual and ontological transformation' (p. 12)—a holistic change that affects all of life's domains.

### *Values education*

In OE the trend of a value-laden education is linked with the very beginning of the field in the UK and is still drawing interest (Davidson, 2001; Halliday, 2000; Higgins, 2000). For Dewey, like Halliday, education is concerned with the subject realities,

the ways in which we make sense of the world—our values (Davidson, 2001). As values are subjective ways of ‘making sense’ of the world, they are not definitive and cannot be simply transmitted from one ‘knower’ to another. Being subjective, values are negotiated between the individual and their changing environment. Outdoor Education is in a prime position to facilitate values development that is both individual and contextualized in its environment. To facilitate a deep transformation OE must accept that the social and the natural, and facts and values cannot be separated and a treatment of both actions and values is required (Humberstone, 1997).

### *Extended ecological self—sense of place*

Arguably all action is value-laden. A change of outcomes in OE necessitates a change of actions and hence a change in values and vice versa. The classic value base for mainstream OE in the past decades has been one of individuality—or the ego self (Loynes, 2002). Action springing from this base must be instrumental, that is, beneficial to the ‘narrow’ self. For a deep transformation of our relationship with others, the more-than-human world, and ourselves, that value base must evolve beyond the ‘narrow’ ego self to one where, ‘the ecological self is part of the transforming process’ (Devall, 1995, p. 104). Nicol (2003) hints at this shift in his proposition for adopting deep ecology as ontology for OE. Similarly to a ‘sense of place’ that incorporates all aspects of place (biotic, human, social, cultural), deep ecology proposes the ‘ecological self’ (Devall, 1995; Naess, 1995a). It is a self or identity that is not solely based on the limited, body-bound ego, but draws on all biological and cultural relationships that take part in creating the individual. Ecological self can be expanded further to include sense of place in what can be termed ‘ecological sense of self’, or as Naess (1995b) simply put it: ‘Self’ with a capital ‘S’. Deep ecology insists on the interlinked and interchangeable nature of the Self-realization of the individual and that of other life forms (Naess, 1995a). So much are they interlinked that one cannot be seen as separate from the other. Such a radical change of view would demand a new integrated approach that is not artificially divided into the conceptual sub-categories of self, others, and environment.

### *Holistic education*

Experiential education is seen to deliver a comprehensive process ‘which combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour, and aims to encompass emotions, imagination and physical being, as well as intellect’ (Martin, Franc, & Zounkova, 2004, p. 12). For OE to be able to deliver an education which integrates actions, thoughts and beliefs out of a deep ecological value base it must recognize the holistic processes that govern beings in such a world. Holism means a non-reductionist understanding of reality that assumes all parts are interrelated and co-dependent.

In their book *Outdoor and Experiential Learning: A Holistic and Creative Approach to Programme Design*, Martin et al. (2004) explore such an approach to experiential

learning. They recognize the complexity of the self as composed by individual, community, society and culture. Although the individual is understood to be affected by different realms outside the narrow self, their philosophy is still an anthropocentric one as there is no regard to non-human aspects of the self. There is no evidence that they have accepted the holistic world-view in which environment and individual are intertwined—part of the same. Quay (2005) offers the same critique of environmental education and says ‘it is important to realise that environmental problems are social problems’ (p. 84). Outdoor education practitioners must realize that both the social and environmental spheres are ‘a necessary component of a holistic approach’ (Quay, 2005, p. 84) to outdoor education.

Such approaches, given that they are freed from an anthropocentric position, could provide us with the method of facilitating the needed deep transformation that Takano (2004) proposes. Nicol’s (2003) call for adoption of deep ecology as philosophical underpinning for OE and Higgins’ (2000) and Halliday’s (2000) ‘questioning’ and ‘authenticity’ approaches in values education are part of an holistic education that integrates all of the trends discussed in this section.

Loynes (2002) outlines a new paradigm for outdoor experiential learning that he names ‘the generative paradigm’. He describes it as a reaction to a widely practised and documented ‘algorithmic’ paradigm which is born of the modern positivist, industrialized, computerized and individualized world-view. In describing the ‘generative’ paradigm, Loynes uses terms such as ‘valuing intuition’, ‘spirituality and the journey’, ‘valuing the twilight and the firelight’, ‘relational mutuality’ and ‘restores place as a central and critical dimension’ (pp. 122–123). When describing the source that informs this paradigm, Loynes notes that it is ‘attempting to define something else by defining what it is not’ (p. 121). Such an emerging paradigm, with potential to greatly influence the development of OE, demands to be based on more than merely a negation of a previous paradigm. It must have a grounding philosophical underpinning (Nicol, 2003)—a positive source of inspiration. As we shall see, indigenous ways is such a source, as it is capable of informing OE’s philosophy and practice, incorporating new OE trends, while offering what can be described as a generative paradigm for OE.

### **Fruits of our ancestors—Indigenous ways**

Thousands of years of uninterrupted living in harmony with the natural world and educating their young and uninitiated in it have made indigenous peoples experts in education out-of-doors. They have developed methods which are robustly embedded in ecological philosophy, environmental ethics, low-impact practices and biological processes. In the vast area of indigenous and aboriginal studies only a handful of papers deal with the question of how to apply indigenous knowledge and education to modern-western society, or in fact how the two can benefit each other. The reason for that is rooted in a history of European imperialism and colonization (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006b) which led to the belief that native populations, as barbarians and heathens, could only benefit from the conquerors’ own ways and religion (Cowan,

1992; Diaz, 1963; Kirkness, 1999). In order for us to learn from indigenous people we must first admit that our ways are not necessarily superior and that different people of different places and times all have something to contribute to the flourishing of life on this planet.

### *What is indigenous?*

Common definitions of 'indigenous' often prove problematic. For example, the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2010a) defines indigenous as 'naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place'. This definition is problematic for our purposes for two reasons: all phenomena in the universe originate from a previous form or place, hence the problem of ascertaining the point of origin. The *Cambridge Dictionary* (2010b) defines natural 'as found in nature and not involving anything made or done by people', which, in the case of people and culture, could not be expected to apply. Grenier (1998) and Johnson (1992) provide us with a more useful definition. They use the term indigenous to refer to a population that has learned how to survive in a certain locale in harmony with their environment, and is still doing so. Indigenous people may be said to belong to a place, in contradiction to the dominant western notion of a place belonging to the people. The Tzutujil of Guatemala consider an individual to be indigenous to the place only once a family member has died and has been buried in that place (Prechtel, 1999). The dead family member, having returned to the landscape (the equivalent of science's decomposition), becomes part of the land and so their relatives become related to the land (Abram, 1996; Prechtel, 1999). This definition of indigenous is of paramount importance to us as it hints to our own, often subdued, indigenusness.

Indigenous people are found all over the globe, they have unique practices, language, appearance and beliefs. The term indigenous could be seen as reductionist, as it refers to many different peoples from different parts of the globe with vast differences. However, despite possessing differences that should be respected, many have recognized that the similarities shared by all those different peoples are sufficient for considering them a common phenomenon (Abram, 1996; Bruchac, 1992; Grenier, 1998; Ingold, 2000; Johnson, 1992; Terena, 1992; UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2006). 'Indigenous', 'traditional', 'aboriginal' and 'native' are all interchangeable terms in this paper. Examples from many sources support the commonality of indigenous peoples' philosophy and value systems (Abram, 1996; Bruchac, 1992; Chay, 1992; Cowan, 1992; Ellis-Smith, 2005a; Ingold, 2000; Kawagley, 1999; Suzuki, 1996), which represent some common features of their world-view. These features are briefly summarized in Figure 2.

### *The landscape as the source*

The natural environment is the source of life, history and culture. Leaders draw their authority from the environment and wisdom is a boon granted by the forces of nature.

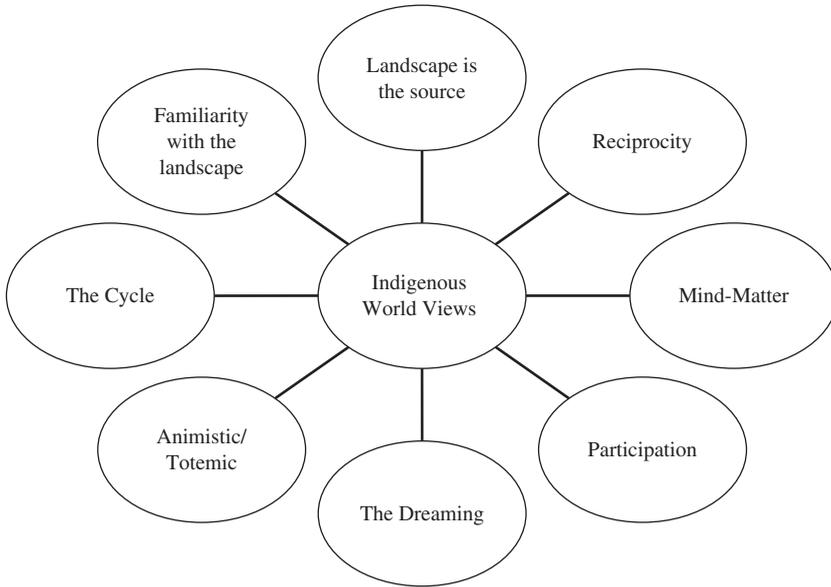


Figure 2. The views and values comprising indigenous world-view.

*The cycle*

All life is conducted in cycles: agricultural, human life and death, the celestial bodies, the seasons. All is part of a continuous cycle of reoccurrence and all that is to happen is part of an archetype that has manifested before and will manifest again.

*Mind-matter*

The metaphysical, spiritual and physical worlds are all aspects of the same world. There is no immaterial world—only aspects that we may not perceive. Mind and matter are inseparable.

*Animistic or totemic*

All nature is alive. Animate and inanimate entities, as well as events, all have spirit and are all a form of consciousness.

*Familiarity with the landscape*

Humans have animate and inanimate ancestors and family members in the wider landscape community. Upon death a person remains in this metaphysical-spiritual-physical world as an animating force; other forms of consciousness are never totally alien.

*Reciprocity*

The well-being of the human community is dependent on a mutual respectful relationship with the surrounding environment. All life is interacting; there are no objects—all are subjects.

*The dreaming*

Dreaming is the original act of creation. It involves moving from the invisible to the visible—from dreaming into an awakened state. The time of creation is ongoing, unfinished, always occurring under the surface.

*Participation*

The creation act requires participation; it is re-created periodically and cyclically. Without participation creation stops.

It is important to emphasize that indigenous people are very diverse and grouping them in a generic category of people does not serve the genuine dialogue that needs to occur for learning to take place (Hamilton, 2003). While sharing of cultural knowledge is controversial (Scafidi, 2005), some indigenous people have resisted the appropriation of their culture, while others are enthusiastic about sharing it (Hamilton, 2003; Lertzman, 2002). In the originating culture, feelings of ownership, concerns about misuse, and the potential challenge to traditional ways are the reasons for opposing the sharing of cultural material (Scafidi, 2005). In the appropriating culture, a shallow stereotypic understanding and alienation from one's own culture, are two of the problems associated with importing cultural material (Hamilton, 2003; Lertzman, 2002).

While there are obvious cultural differences between indigenous people the world over, as Lertzman (2003) relates about rites of passage, the core elements seem to be cross-cultural. In overcoming the pitfalls of cultural misappropriation we expose ourselves to 'how much there is to gain by learning to walk between the worlds of different cultures' (Lertzman, 2002, para. 2). The exposure to the 'indigenous nature based cultures can help remind us of our own connection with nature' (Ellis-Smith, 2005b, p. 71) and our own indigenousness. In the next section indigenous education's relevance to OE will be explored using the views and values described above, respecting the limitations of cultural appropriation.

**Indigenous ways and outdoor education**

Indigenous ways offer us a model of education that has global relevance. It has been tested over millennia, and a compatible philosophy has developed alongside practice. It offers an alternative relationship with the environment to the dominant utilitarian one (Booth, 2000). In this section I will explore the relationship between

indigenous ways and the various OE trends described above: humanity as part of nature, education for nature, values education, extended ecological Self, and holistic education. What do indigenous ways have in common with OE? How do they help us to achieve the needed transformation? How can they enrich outdoor educators' views and practices?

*Humanity is part of nature and extended ecological self*

The indigenous link to their environment is that of family members, as Palomino (1992) exemplifies: 'the sun is my father, the moon is my mother, and the stars are my brothers' (p. 46). Animals, plants and landscape features can all be referred to as relatives. These ties to the environment cannot be broken, as one is defined by the other. Neglecting your relationships to all life does not make it disappear. Instead, like a saddened or vindictive relative, life exacts its toll on you (Prechtel, 1999).

Indigenous cultures can be split into two categories of world-view: 'totemic' and 'animistic'. Totemic cultures believe that 'every living being . . . draws its essential form and substance directly from the land' (Ingold, 2000, p. 113). Totems themselves are the inclusion of certain elements of otherness embraced as part of a people's identity, be it plant, animal or land feature. Moreover, members of totemic cultures will not hunt or eat a totemic animal (Cowan, 1992). Deep ecology uses the term 'Self' to denote a personal identity that transcends the narrow ego self; similarly in totemic societies:

a man [*sic*] is only a man [*sic*] when he takes on every aspect of his totem. For in doing so he [*sic*] transcends the limitations of himself [*sic*] and enters into a particular category of sacredness (Cowan, 1992, p. 45).

Animistic cultures believe that 'animate beings are engendered not by the land but reciprocally, by one another' (Ingold, 2000, p. 113). Whether animistic or totemic, indigenous people's identity is inextricably tied to their surrounding environment. Norwegian outdoor educators, inspired by the deep ecology philosophy and their own ancestry, have come to include the environment in one's identity as part of their practice (Tordsson, 2007). By employing long, traditional, skill-emphasized outdoor journeys they facilitate identification with ancestry and provide a context wider than the here and now of mundane life. The key to that identification is the environment and the skills which are part of it. As Ingold (2000) explains, skills are not transmitted from one knower to another, but rather are discovered by each learner anew. These skills are negotiated with the environment in ways that re-enact the ancestral actions and attitudes.

The belief that we possess a 'soul' or 'spirit' which is of an immaterial nature, coupled with the belief that we are unique in that respect may very well be at the centre of our self-inflicted separation from our environment—one that we perceive as completely material and devoid of spirit (Abram, 1996; Palomino, 1992). Indigenous people not only refute the idea of humanity's uniqueness or superiority (as evidenced on many occasions; see Bruchac, 1992; Chay, 1992; Palomino, 1992; Terena, 1992),

they also see no separation between the physical and spiritual realm, as both exist in or on this earth as different manifestations or characteristics of life (Abram, 1996; Cowan, 1992; Palomino, 1992; Prechtel, 1999).

### *Education for nature*

The question of whether OE should serve nature or be served by it makes no sense to an indigenous person (Pinchbeck, 2006). For the most part, because for them 'land embodies culture, history, and the remains of distant ancestors. Land is the source of all life and the basis of identity' (Suzuki, 1996, p. 11). The separation of humanity and nature does not exist, what is good for the web of life is good for the individual. This respect for all life and the sacredness of nature are embedded in their cultures. Indigenous ways employ complex systems in the service of keeping the balance between humans and their environment.

Mythical stories are one of the ways in which indigenous people maintain the balance in the service of the greater web of life. Since everything in indigenous ways is cyclical, and all returns in due time (Bruchac, 1992), elimination of a component of the cycle is seen as the rapture of reality (Abram, 1996). Stories teach people a way of conduct, as they 'exist to keep human beings in balance', and enable them to see their 'place as part of the circle of creation, not above it' (Bruchac, 1992, p. 9). Out of this cyclical world-view indigenous people believe that 'not helping with reciprocal actions generates inequality' and they reject the 'accumulation of benefits in a one-way direction' (Palomino, 1992, p. 48).

The most complex systems of keeping the balance between people and environment are the vast arrays of rituals and ceremonies. Indigenous people, believing in reciprocity, believe that in the same way that the land feeds them they must feed back the land (Terena, 1992). Rituals and ceremonies are the vehicles through which indigenous people feed back their environment and keep the balance (Cowan, 1992; Prechtel, 1999). The Tzutujil people of Guatemala have a contract with their gods:

The gods said that they would keep life coming to us if we promised to send them remembrance. The fruit of our remembrance was this earth and our lives, and we had to send them some of its deliciousness by means of ritual. (Prechtel, 1999, pp. 106–107).

Every ritual and ceremony in Tzutujil life is about this reciprocal agreement. The gods and spirits (and their manifestations in the landscape) feed the people and the people feed them in return. Even death is seen as a gift to the gods; a person should be 'spiritually ripe' to make a good gift that was achieved by going through many initiatory rituals.

### *Values education*

For indigenous people, philosophy, values, and action are all inseparable; they are a way of life. Palomino (1992) proves the case for Quechua people: 'religion is really a way of life, a knowing, an understanding, living side by side with the forces of nature

in holy mutual harmony' (p. 45). Palomino explains that the word 'religion' does not exist in Quechua language but is used to 'indicate our relationship with the divine beings that are the holy forces of nature' (p. 46). Indigenous education recognizes that values and actions are inseparable and brings values into the foreground of the educational process.

One of the ways in which indigenous peoples conduct their values education is described by Cowan's (1992) account of an aborigine initiation rite in which male children are initiated into adulthood. This rite serves as both a social initiation and an individual spiritual one. The ritual involves pain and blood shedding, which represents two value systems: submission to the elders' will (communal values) and the ignition of a self-awareness (personal values). As the initiate accepts his communal responsibility to his tribe he receives, in this case, a bullroarer that stands for:

the voice of the sky heroes talking to him. He is told to whirl the boomerang as often as he wants, thus encouraging him to enter into an interior dialogue with his ancestral heroes (Cowan, 1992, p. 58).

Halliday (2000) points out the need for an external perspective on personal value systems. This rite is an example of how indigenous people conduct such education, and balance both individual exploration and communal context.

*Rites of passage* is a non-profit organization founded in 1977 to 'provide opportunities for people to undertake a classical rite of passage to mark and celebrate their transition from one life stage to another' (Bodkin & Sartor, 2005, p. 32). *Rites of passage* draws its inspiration from Native American, aboriginal Australian and indigenous African traditions. The programme's 'vision quest' is adapted from van Gennep's (1960 [1909]) three-step model of 'separation, threshold and incorporation', in which participants re-enact the timeless hero's quest (Campbell, 1993; Loynes, 2003). The programme has other similarities with indigenous ways, such as 'honor[ing] the consciousness and intelligence of the earth' (Bodkin & Sartor, 2005, p. 38). A major point of difference between this process and traditional rites of passage stems from participants having to leave their communities' context to undergo *Rites of passage's* experience, while in indigenous cultures it is the community which holds the ceremony for the initiates. The authors recognize many different benefits to their programme, most notably, a better understanding and connection by participants with their 'life purposes'. Given that 'for most people, when they return to community—workplace, family, church, town—there is not the welcome that would happen in traditional cultures' (p. 41), the ultimate purpose of the ceremony, the making of a better community member, is most likely missed (Beames, 2004b; Bell, 2003).

Another way in which indigenous people conduct their values education is through the instruction of skills. In indigenous societies technology and skill are perceived to be part of one's identity. For example, a certain people might identify themselves by their hunting, fishing and trapping skills (Ashini, 1992). Those skills involve physical ability, knowledge and technique. Ingold (2000) reminds us that 'skills are thus as much biological as cultural' (p. 5), and goes on to argue that skills are more than

just physical techniques but a ‘capability for action and perception’. Therefore, skills are as much a product of a world-view as they are a technique. This further explains how indigenous people consider skill as part of their identity; the physical action is intertwined with the mental and environmental contexts. Skills are a product of world-view and vice versa.

In Norway, within the *friluftsliv* tradition, skills are seen as a formative part of one’s identity. As part of my *friluftsliv* studies in Telemark University in Norway I participated in an 8-day sailing trip on the south coast. During that trip we learned how to sail traditional boats, splice and fix hemp ropes, and live communally. Participants spent time practising fishing, setting cages for lobster and preparing and cooking the catch—all in keeping with the traditions of the people of the coast. The inclusion of skills in OE activities is common practice, but it is the inclusion of these skills into our platform of identification—the things that make us who we are (Baker, 2007), which can be linked to indigenous ways. For indigenous people, education is taken as the bringing up of a person and community member—a wholesome process that involves all aspects of that person (Kirkness, 1999; Lertzman, 2002; Prechtel, 2001).

### *Holistic education*

Higgins (2000) pointed out to us that the ‘do as I say not as I do’ approach is not an effective one. If we want to educate holistically, then we must believe and act a world-view that recognizes that all is interrelated and co-dependent and transcend the synthetic separation of ‘self, others, environment’. This paper has shown that there is little doubt that indigenous ways transcend such separation, in that all aspects of life are intimately connected and part of a whole (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006a). The holism of indigenous ways is also what makes indigenous ways elusive to modern academic discourse, which is based on reductionist, atomist and dualistic models (Capra, 1982).

Indigenous education differs from so-called western education in many ways, but most fundamentally in its holistic approach to learning (Lertzman, 2002). Phenomena are always understood ‘through direct experience in the natural environment. For them, the particulars come to be understood in relation to the whole’ (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006b, p. 2). It is this approach to learning that forces educators to reconcile the two approaches of travelling to the learning subject and finding learning contexts within their local landscape.

Another main principle of indigenous education is a long-term multi-generational perspective. Education is not seen as a short-term limited exercise but as a process that can span many generations (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006b). As such, educational aims should not be planned and judged on a single lesson or course but over many years, a life-span or a few generations. This concept is alien to modern educational practices where ‘problems that are often the product of long-term generational shifts’ are met with solutions that focus on the immediate (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006b, p. 15).

Indigenous education employs a community-based approach; all learning is contextualized within the family, community and culture (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006b). This results in an education that delivers highly personalized and customized learning that remains in sensitive contact with the larger local landscape and community (Maeda, 2005). Indigenous education takes place through prolonged observation, and is a process that allows for a more complete understanding of all parts of the whole (Henley, 1996). Individuals are free to learn through experiences that affect their different perceptive realms, through thoughts, technical skills, emotions, and aesthetics (Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin, & Ewert, 2006; Kraft, 1999; McWilliam, 2004; Sharp, 2004). It is not solely for the teacher to determine what the student may learn but for the student to choose those experiences that stand out over a prolonged period of time, in a process not dissimilar to Freire's (1993 [1968]) 'libertarian' education. In libertarian education the student-teacher relationship is bilateral; the teacher does not simply transfer information to the student, but embarks with them on a journey of discovery shaped by their interaction. This allows for a more complete understanding of the learning subject and greater potential to integrate new understandings into the learner's existing world-views.

Indigenous people have long dealt with the issues now being faced by modern outdoor educators. Questions of values, environmental practices, teaching and learning styles, and personal and community development have found their way into indigenous people's education systems. By directing our attention to what they have achieved over many years we are finding some answers to our own questions.

### **Limitations and further research**

The arguments presented in this paper are limited in a number of ways. First and foremost is a cultural limitation; my own background could not be better described than a world away from the cultures I have studied to write this paper. Hence my interpretations and understandings are those of an outsider. An insider's exploration would be of great value to the field of enquiry.

Second, the holistic character of indigenous knowledge evades academic reductionist methods of enquiry and limits our ability to conceptualize it. Being mostly oral, indigenous lore was, in most cases, documented by Westerners or by Western deconstructionist methods. Consequently it has lost at least some of its original meaning while being subjected to an alien cultural interpretation.

Third, the available documentation for the theoretical exploration of indigenous education is limited. Further research, with emphasis on the way in which indigenous ways could inform western education, would be of great benefit. Descriptions of alternative OE practices are scarce and there is reason to believe that a lot of the work being done is not reaching widespread publication. There is plenty of room for documentation of such OE programmes, especially empirical studies of processes and outcomes.

A potential field of enquiry has presented itself in the form of a study of the similarities between outdoor educators and tribal shamans. Shamans are experts

in indigenous ways, with their role being one of balancing the human and more-than-human world (Abram, 1996; Prechtel, 1999). Operating in the transitional space between civilization and the wild, shamans act as a bridge between the human community and its environment.

There is more scope for documentation of the link between OE and indigenous education, with emphasis on local indigenous people and their place-specific practices. Taking the principles outlined in this paper and turning them into an exploratory programme, where the principles will be tested and refined against practice, is needed to further this research.

## Conclusions

Recently outdoor education has seen a number of new conceptual frameworks that challenge many of the fundamental principles underlining current practice. Some of those trends present themselves as a coherent pattern of change. For example, the view of humanity as part of nature and the inclusion of deep ecology in OE's philosophical base, the ecocentric view that sees the environment as an active participant in the OE experience, the co-dependency of action and values, the extended ecological self and the inclusion of elements of otherness in one's identity and a holistic education that goes beyond the reductionist separation of self, others and environment have all been linked to indigenous ways.

Living as part of nature is one of the most defining principles in indigenous society and individual life. In order to pass those lessons to the next generations, indigenous people have developed culturally appropriate educational systems. Their systems consist of storytelling, which serves the role of a historical account, a code for proper conduct and a source of world-view (Abram, 1996; Bruchac, 1992; Chay, 1992; Cowan, 1992; Palomino, 1992; Prechtel, 1999); ceremonies and rituals which enact mythical occurrences and help individuals and communities to enrich, enliven and reflect on their experiences (Prechtel, 1999, p. 2001); and the skills that are infused in everyday life and their acquiring that puts their world-view into practice.

Indigenous education contains a philosophical base, a mode of practising and enacting those lessons in an educational context and a practical testing component in the survival of everyday life. When applied in a cyclical and intertwining way, these methods serve a very similar process to the one described by the experiential learning model of doing, reflecting, abstracting and applying (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999), yet more similar in chronological construct to the 'dramaturgy wave' (Martin et al., 2004) in which different aspects of the person are called forth in a successive and interacting way. The learner is faced with contexts that engage different combinations of attitudes, values and actions which result in a more comprehensive learning experience and increase the probability of transference to their own world-view.

Indigenous ways are thus positioned to provide us with the models and practices of a holistic, value-based, place-specific, nature-serving, and nature-centred paradigm for OE. Indigenous ways transcend the narrow ego self, the alienation of others, unattainable spirituality, bureaucratic arbitrary borders and the notion of linear time

which separates us from the cycle of nature to propose an education in which actions are infused with value, culture, place and spirit. The process of getting to know indigenous ways is not just an outward journey, but an inward journey into our own culture, environment, and heritage—our own indigenoussness.

### Author biography

Itamar Cohn received his bachelor degree in outdoor education from Trinity University College, Wales. Over the past several years he has experimented with outdoor education in diverse locations. From the UK the author has led youth development expeditions to Latin America. While in Israel he worked as an instructor for an environmental education boarding school with teens and as a rehabilitation challenge course instructor for mentally challenged children. In the south of India the author piloted an outdoor environmental education programme with tribal children. Most recently he has worked as a wilderness guide for OutwardBound in California. His research interests include different ways of knowing, the effects of cultural constructs on outdoor education experiences, outdoor environmental education and indigenous and traditional world-views. He is currently among the co-founders of the EcoME Centre in Jericho/Almog Junction in the West Bank in Palestine/Israel—a centre for personal and environmental sustainability for Israelis and Palestinians, where he focuses his work on joint Palestinian and Israeli desert expeditions.

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