

# Pedagogy of the Moment: a Journey on Becoming Wide-Awake

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Experientially framed around Malcolm's learning experience in Antarctica, the paper seeks to understand elements that are central to *educational moments* where a high student becomes wide-awake. To become wide-awake, we are arguing, is to become ontologically open to the possibility, imagining, and potentiality of radical transformation through one's acknowledged agency. Exploring the convergence of four pedagogical tributaries—*cosmological, place, relational, and hermeneutic*—we unpack how this moment makes Malcolm see the world anew. The paper concludes that a *pedagogy of the moment*—a 'moment' not in its momentary-time-sense, that is, as an in passing moment, but a *performative moment* that is deeply situated in time, history and place—is a necessary aim of education in a world thrust into unknowns by global sustainability challenges.

## An opening at the bottom of the world

*As I near the ridge summit, I see Malcolm and Morgan standing side-by-side staring out over the edge. They are both 16 and tall. Before I reach them, I make a full stop. I could hear my heart beat, and for the first time: I could hear silence. The white continent stretched out beyond and before them. Mesmerized by the whole scene(ry), I continue quietly walking over to a rock metres behind from where they stand and grab a seat. Silence. These are the moments I love as an educator. What are the students thinking, feeling, becoming? Another fifteen minutes pass. Silence continues.*

*There is movement. Malcolm turns around. He has tears rolling down his cheeks. Comfortable in catching each other's gaze I ask, "Malcolm, what's up?" His reply remains vivid nearly a decade later. "This is the first time in my life that I've ever heard silence." He went on to share the sounds (and ways) of his New York City existence.*

*Malcolm (M): There is around-the-clock noise. Everyone's moving fast. The place never sleeps. People plugged in, doing their thing.*

*Lisa (L): Why the tears Malcolm?*

*M. A part of me feels so small and insignificant, like I could be flicked off this ridge... this planet and it would not matter. Yet at the same time, standing here, I feel a part of something so much bigger.*

*L. Overwhelming?*

*M. Yeah, but also really empowering.*

*L. That's what I love about this place. It makes you wonder how one person can possibly be pertinent to the world. And yet we are. Every living being, human or otherwise, matters.*



TO CITE THIS ARTICLE PLEASE INCLUDE ALL OF THE FOLLOWING DETAILS:

Glithero, Lisa & Ibrahim, Awad. (2012). Pedagogy of the Moment: A Journey on Becoming Wide-Awake. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry* 9 (2) <http://nitinat.library.ubc.ca/ojs/index.php/tci> <access date>

*M. It's a wild feeling.*

*Life, it seems, interferes in the most inappropriate way. Malcolm and I realized the ship was leaving. In total silence we walked. John Muir's (1911) words echoed through my mind as I descended from the ridge following in Malcolm's footsteps: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe" (p. 110).<sup>3</sup>*

### **This is not an introduction: This is Malcolm's Moment**

Language fails us; it cheats us. Malcolm's moment is beyond language. It is about hearing silence. Malcolm's moment is beyond the pedagogical. It is an ontological moment—a moment of becoming. A moment where Malcolm realizes that stillness can move us as human beings.



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*Malcolm stands atop Baily Head, the eastern point of Deception Island, a sub-Antarctic island found at latitude of 62°80S. Ocean, sky and the Antarctic continent to the south become blurred. A world of blue and white hues stretches out before him. Depth, distance, and space seem inconceivable; a limitless expanse. There's a gentle breeze coming up off the water carrying with it the smells of the sea, the ice and the ripeness of guano that only half a million chinstrap penguins can produce. It is -2 degrees C—hard to believe this is the place once described by early 20<sup>th</sup>C explorers as a "god forsaken land."*

*Malcolm, an athletic, spirited, 16 year old 'New Yorker' is one of 60 students from a dozen different countries on a two-week learning journey—the Students on Ice 2003 Antarctic Youth Expedition. Together with a team of scientists, historians and educators the team sets out to foster new understanding and respect for the Polar Regions as cornerstones of the global ecosystem. Through experience and dialogue the ideas of a generation of global citizens are explored.*

In the vast stillness, void of human abstraction, Malcolm awoke; a breakthrough of consciousness thrusting him into this world anew. Disruption often stirs consciousness. Was Malcolm's catapult to the literal ends of the Earth, a disruption from familiar lived New York City patterns, what aroused consciousness? In other words, arousal stirred by the 'stepping out' of a living history; distance offering perspective. Or was *something* more afoot? Unplugged from the human induced isolation of a technology crazed urban existence (Franklin, 1990, p. 46), an awareness of the more-than-human world surfaced for Malcolm. In moments like these, one can only think of Henry David Thoreau (1862) address to the earth, this "mother of ours":

Here is this vast, savage howling mother of ours,  
Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children,  
as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned

from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man. (p. 4)

In Antarctica's wilderness, Malcolm awoke to what had always been within him: a (re)union of Human and Nature. He has *become* in that landscape, only to be overwhelmed by what it means to become full and fully Human, to become wide-awake. Maybe it is the overwhelming of Nature that makes us Human; but only in a loving heart will the sky, the ice, the sea and light find their (true) meaning. When they do, significant to note, they are no longer objects to be named but a Thou that commands us to respond. Malcolm finds himself in a dialogical life where the sky and the gaze of the vastness of the space open him up to the "abyss beneath the concepts," which makes possible "rational intercourse with that which is beyond concepts" (Buber, 1970, p. 62). Imprinted within these notions, clearly, sit Buber's (1970) work on *I-Thou*. Here, Buber contends, the relation between Human and Nature or Human and non-Human Things is so close to the threshold of mutuality that he finds himself in an I-Thou relation(ship). "If I am to explain it now," Buber writes about his stroke of his broad dapple-grey horse, "beginning from the still very fresh memory of my hand, I must say that what I experienced in touch with the animal was the Other, the immense otherness of the Other, which, however, did not remain strange... but rather let me draw near and touch it." In this sense, Buber continues, "it let me approach [it], confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of *Thou* and *Thou* with me" (pp. 22-23, original emphasis).

One is never ready for these moments, Buber argues, the I-Thou moments. They simply happen, but for their happening to be meaningful, they require readiness and, as a result, a response. This is why what Maxine Greene (1995) calls 'wide-awakeness.' It is not a moment per se but a journey. What we are calling 'Malcolm's moment' is not in reference to his experience with Thou but a time-moment that needed us, as educators and educational researchers, to stop and think. In fact, we are arguing, the experience is not even between Malcolm and Nature but rather is within. According to Buber, this union of I and Thou is not a dissolving of the two distinct but rather a communion, "a reciprocity of being itself" (p. 173).

Put otherwise, Malcolm recognizes the being in Nature and in turn, acknowledges the Nature within him. Buber suggests that in such cases "something is awakened by our attitude and flashes toward us from that which has being" (p. 173). In becoming wide-awake of this communion we open up to the actuality before us and for Malcolm it was the realization of being and becoming "a part of something so much bigger." We do not abandon "what is actual," Buber contends, but we do "step out of our habits of thought" and be open to that which "acts on us" (p. 177). Malcolm had witnessed this, and his tears were a performative moment of becoming wide-awake, of opening oneself to "receiving the spirit" of being (Buber, 1947, p. 106).

## **Becoming Awake: "Teaching for openings"**

*Empowerment*

*Engagement*

*Active citizenship*

*Agency*

*Transformation*

*Social change*



Among so many others, these terms are deeply embedded in our daily vocabulary as educators. We understand semantically and maybe philosophically their significance and place in educational discourse. It is our experience as educators and researchers however that it is in the pedagogical translation of such terms do their ambiguity and complexity emerge. William Ayers (2001) speaks of teaching as “spectacularly unlimited” (p. 5). Maxine Greene (1995) speaks of “teaching for openings” (p. 109) and uses the term *wide-awakeness*—“awareness of what it is to be in the world” (p. 35). Paulo Freire (1973) speaks of *conscientizacao*, education as a “revolutionary practice”: an empowering process towards liberation, viewing students (and humans) as “makers of their way” (p. 97; see also Freire, 1994). On her part, bell hooks (1994) celebrates teaching that “enables transgression—a movement against and beyond boundaries” (p. 12). Brent Davis (2004), on the other hand, speaks of teaching as “mindful participation” (p. 176) towards “expanding the space of the possible” (p. 179). Although Freire and hooks offer a more emancipatory interpretation of education, collectively these educational theorists (and others) equate education as possibility, (re)creating, imagining, opening up and going beyond.

Inspired and moved to act by the visionary work of the above authors, we interpret pedagogy in a reflexive and ontological sense, much like Van Manen (1990)—as educators, we are “oriented to the world in a pedagogic way” (p.151)—and similar to Freire’s notion of praxis—“reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 36). Nonetheless, as teacher educators we are mindful of the limiting perception in the field of pedagogy as equated to the “act of teaching, instructional methodology, curriculum approach, or education in general” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 142). In an act of reclamation, pedagogy for us resides in questioning—in the epiphanies, breakthroughs, awakenings, openings, imaginings, and possibilities of which Ayers, Freire, hooks, Greene, Davis, and others speak. However to truly own such a pedagogical orientation as educators, we feel two sequential steps are critical. First we must understand what elements are central to *educational moments* where a student becomes awakened. For us, it is the accumulative nature of these educational moments that made Malcolm’s tears possible; these moments produce and at the same time are products of the *journey of becoming wide-awake*. Here, we are naming awakeness as becoming open to possibility, imagining, and the potentiality to transform the world through one’s acknowledged agency. Secondly, we must have the capacity to situate pedagogy within our own practice. This essay will examine the first step only—unpacking educational moments of becoming awake.

Using the opening vignette as a backdrop, we are exploring the following questions in this essay: What elements intersected to create and make Malcolm’s awakening possible? How can we as educators be mindful of “teaching for openings,” (Greene, 1995, p. 109) creating space for students to enter a “field of possibles” (p. 111)? In theorizing the vignette, we propose four elements we see as central to what we are calling *pedagogy of the moment*. In our introduction and initial unpacking of Malcolm’s moment, which was experientially narrated by the first author of this article, we touched on the first element. We call this first element *cosmological pedagogy*, which we discuss further below. Malcolm’s moment, meant being awakened to the I-Thou communion, that is, “being a part of something so much bigger.” The remaining three elements of equal significance include: *place pedagogy*; *relational pedagogy*; and *hermeneutic pedagogy*. The intersection of the



four elements—cosmological, place, relational and hermeneutic pedagogy—is where, we propose, one becomes awakened; the *pedagogy of the moment*.

### **Becoming Wide-Awake: Cosmological Pedagogy**

Interestingly, it took Malcolm a detachment from the cosmos he knew (New York City) to relate to that cosmos. When he did, that is, when he realized he was a part of “something so much bigger,” neither him nor New York City was ever the same. In this *pedagogy of the moment*, Malcolm was awakened to the I-Thou communion, that is to say, he recognized the “being-sense” in the world itself; the result of which he became mindful of the “self-sense.”

...there are I and You, there is dialogue, there is language, and spirit whose primal deed language is, and there is, in eternity, the word. (Buber, 1947, p. 143)

If, however, dialogue and language are so central to existence, as Buber seems to argue, we are left with an anthropocentric worldview which, at minimum, does not account for (not to say diminishes) the “historical moment in which we live” (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011, p. 29) where the biotic community and natural world are in ever increasing danger of disappearing. It is here where we introduce the notion of a *cosmological pedagogy*.

A cosmological pedagogy begins with the premise that the universe—“an interacting and genetically related community of beings” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 72)—exists; and by naming it “interacting community,” it “can only be understood in the context of relationships” (p. 72). In the case of Malcolm, for instance, it was in coming face-to-face with Nature that he came face-to-face with and felt a part of “something so much bigger.” In recognizing the natural world and the broader cosmology as a living being, an entity perpetually in the process of *becoming* based on the interactions of all parts, Malcolm awoke to his own agency. It is the idea that “I am part of something big, a grand living and breathing, ever-becoming narrative.” A visceral moment of potentiality stirred within him as he stood face-to-face with Nature. It is precisely at moments like Malcolm’s when an educator, oriented towards a critical and transformative pedagogy rejoices. As “makers of our way” (Freire, 1994, p. 97) educational moments that “provoke the young to be free” (Greene, 1995, p. 121) are continually, relentlessly and excitingly pursued. Yet at the same time, critical theory’s generalized focus on culture (human world) and its social-justice approach to inter-human problems such as class struggle, racism and oppression, need to be “fused into wider biocentric concerns” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 64).

Noteworthy to this discussion is Freire’s emerging work at the time of his death in 1997 on developing an ‘ecopedagogy’: a now well developed movement taken up internationally by scholars including Gadotti (2004), Kahn (2008) as well as further supporters of the Earth Charter Initiative ([www.earthcharterinaction.org](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org)). An ecopedagogy embodies the relationship-oriented, ecological thinking to which we speak above and advocates for a broader planetary and biophilia-centric worldview of which we fully support. Furthermore, the critical and transformative nature of ecopedagogy also aligns with our interpretation of a *performative moment*, in this case Malcolm’s moment, that is deeply situated in time, history and place; as Kahn (2008) insists “to think and live historically is to be ecological, to move in a bed of context” (p. 522). Although we find ourselves supportive of Kahn’s (2008) attempt “to provide the beginnings of a theoretical and historical foundation for a planetary ecopedagogy movement” (p. 526), his simultaneous call for a “radical ecopedagogy” (p. 537) –an action plan that radically



opposes “transnational technocapitalism” (p. 523) and the globalization of neoliberal ideologies—is seemingly too radical an orientation to utilize within our current pedagogy of the moment framework. Highly oppositional and rooted in an ‘us-them’ binary, much like Bowers work on an eco-justice pedagogy (2002, 2003, 2009), we are more drawn to focusing on a narrative visioning of ‘what could be’ rather than an oppositional narrative dwelling on ‘what must not be.’

Although in relationship with and borrowing from the ecopedagogy movement, what we are naming a cosmological pedagogy also draws from Stephen Sterling’s (2001) work in sustainable education and the underpinnings of an ecological participatory worldview. Sterling’s process-oriented paradigm, rooted in systems thinking and influenced largely by Frijtof Capra’s systems-oriented work on ecoliteracy (2005), moves beyond the binaries commonplace to critical (eco)pedagogy and creates spaces for participatory dialogue on enacting and sustaining socio-ecological change. Of further inspiration, Edmund O’Sullivan’s (1999) call for the rise of what he calls “Ecozoic age.” Articulated first by Thomas Berry, Ecozoic age is an Earth-centered grand narrative that speaks to the biocentric approach to transformative pedagogical experience, which is central to our discussion here. Put simply, in conclusion, a critical pedagogy of *beyond* humanism and an ecopedagogy of beyond radical binaries is required—a cosmological pedagogy.

### **Becoming Wide-Awake: Place Pedagogy**

*It’s the following day; Malcolm and I (Lisa) are up on deck, aboard our vessel, sailing to our next landing.*

*L: Hey Malcolm. Can I ask you a few questions?*

*M: Sure Diz [Lisa’s nick name].*

*L: What do you think of when I say the word ‘Nature?’*

*M: Trees. Birds. Squirrels. Things that aren’t human.*

*L: What about the ‘natural world?’*

*M: All the things that aren’t human. A collection.*

*L: And what about the word ‘wilderness?’*

*M: I think of this place. Antarctica. It’s wild. Untouched by humans.*

*L: Last one, I promise. What about ‘place?’*

*M: A place? Like school, my house, Yankee stadium, central park?*

*L: Yup, those are all places. Interestingly you picked places from your life at home in New York. Do you feel connected to your homeplace?*

*M: Never really thought about it. I mean, I like living there.*

*L: Remember yesterday on top of Baily Head [opening vignette], we questioned how one person can possibly be pertinent in the world. Yet standing there we were both moved by the beauty, silence and realization of feeling part of something bigger. We both felt empowered, believers in possibilities, people able to create change. Have you ever felt that way back home?*

*M: No.*

We have come to understand in our practice as educators that we will not protect, conserve, serve, (deeply) understand nor dwell well in place unless we feel a sense of belonging to place. bell hooks (2009) put it best:



Talking about place, where we belong, is a constant subject for many of us. We want to know if it is possible to live on earth peacefully. Is it possible to sustain life? Can we embrace an ethos of sustainability that is not solely about the appropriate care of the world's resources, but it is also about the creation of meaning—the making of lives that we feel are worth living (p. 1).

Following critical theory tradition – a field “profoundly concerned with who we are, how we got this way, and where we might go from here” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 309) – hooks' conception of place is built around an emergent notion of a citizenry lost. In our living history, it seems, a world thrust into unknowns by global sustainability challenges, both socio-political and environmental, a sense of one's rootedness, direction and pertinence are too challenged. Abundance-scarcity dichotomies, diasporas—both voluntary and involuntary—and intense individualism are but a few factors that we would suggest uproot a sense of place. To “live fully” and “well,” words that hooks uses often, requires a conscious belonging to place. Within such a conception of place one finds pertinence and agency. For Malcolm, his homeplace of New York City was a place of the familiar, a place of routines and assumptions, patterns within bustling noise. Yet pertinence and agency were not part of his self-sense.

Freire spoke of humans as “history makers” and the “dialectical interplay between the way in which history and culture make people even while people are making that very history and culture” (as discussed in Glass, 2001, p. 16). Greenwood (2009), a renowned place-conscious educator, refers to humans as “place-makers” (p. 275). How do history makers and place-makers differ? Freire's ontology focused on the cultural (human world) and little on how culture is shaped by place—something Greenwood defines as “the nexus of culture and environment” (p. 276). By shifting to place-makers and thus acknowledging that places are where “people and *other beings* live their lives” (p. 274, emphasis added) we become oriented within a *cosmological pedagogy*.

Greenwood's *critical pedagogy of place* offers a theory that aligns well with hooks' notions of belonging. Together they frame what we are calling a *place pedagogy* that we identify as the second critical element to our proposed *pedagogy of the moment*: a wide-awakeness pedagogy of place, time, people and things. Greenwood's (2009) critical pedagogy of place combines the decolonization and deconstruction traditions of critical theory with the notion of reinhabitation. Deconstruction refers to the unpacking of cultural ideologies causing degradation and oppression. Reinhabitation refers to “living well together in a place without doing damage to others, human and nonhuman” (p. 279). Ultimately, a critical pedagogy of place challenges educators to question our “theories of knowing and being” (p. 275) and to recognize our pertinence and agency as place-makers. Unpacking the cultural and historical conditions of our enacted assumptions, and in doing so, becoming mindful of the “floating signifiers” (Hall, 1997) of culturally generated meaning, is an essential first step towards a *place pedagogy*. In unhooking that which gives meaning in culture we recognize the “privileging of the discourse of difference” (Greenwood, 2009, p. 278) and the widespread (not universal) anthropocentric stance of the historical moment in which we live. It is at this moment we believe a *cosmological pedagogy* – “one that can only be understood in the context of relationships” (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 72) – intersects with our notion of *place pedagogy* largely informed by Greenwood and his critical pedagogy of place.

Shifting away from a discourse of difference towards that of *relationship* does not dismiss the necessary condition and celebration of (cultural, ecological, biological) diversity. Rather this conceptual migration prioritizes interdependence. It creates an opening to re-think, re-imagine and re-make our places mindful that “we are part of something bigger” as Malcolm reminds us. In the process of re-making our places, cosmologically connected by the understanding that we are “diverse people living together in one finite world” (Greenwood, 2009, p. 278), we become subjects in leaving our mark on the flesh of the human and more-than-human world. This transformative place-making act—or living agency—gives relevance, pertinence, and the essence of belonging of which hooks so poetically speaks, to one’s life. We become a living history that is “critical, sensory, active and alive” (Greenwood & McKenzie, 2009, p. 5). We became awake to where we came from, where we are and where we are going. A citizenry no longer lost.

### **Becoming Wide-Awake: Relational Pedagogy**

*Having bid farewell to Antarctica, we are now sailing back across the Southern Ocean to Ushuaia and eventually onwards to our respective homes around the globe. Two weeks, and several thousand miles later, new relationships, new perspectives, new experiences, and new questions are stirring. What has changed—within, around, between?*

*M: Hey Diz. Can I ask you a question?*

*L: I’m all yours.*

*M: Now that we are heading home, we are talking a lot about what we can each do in our personal lives, at home, at school, in our communities, and in the world at large. When I think of my own personal life and home, there are changes I can see doing, and will do, that will help make a difference I hope. But when I think about school...it gets trickier. The vibe of my school is not really in tune with some of the things we’ve been talking about and seeing on this expedition. Like the bricks of the building, the school system seems impossible to move. You’re a teacher. How do you change things?*

*L: Working with people like you who are asking questions.*

*M: Are enough people enough to change things?*

*L: In your initial question you used an interesting word... ‘system.’ What is this thing we call the (school) system?*

*M: It’s everything—buildings, teachers, students, administrators, government, rules and regulations, even the exams and the uncomfortable chairs we write them in.*

*L: The system is comprised of structural phenomena like you said—buildings, chairs as well as decision and policy making structures. There are also historical phenomena to the system... why things are the way they are. But more importantly, the system is us! We collectively produce the system. However at the same time, the system produces us. What do you think of that notion?*

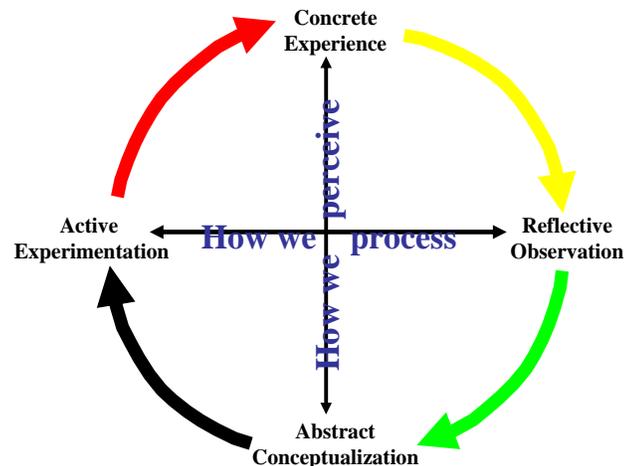
*M: If we are the system, then we have power to change it. If the system produces us then what is it that the system is producing?*

Freire urges us to “understand the world in relational terms” rather than in “dichotomous and fragmented ways” (as discussed in Darder, 2002, p. 65). Let us use this as a starting place for our notion of *relational pedagogy*. For Freire *relational* meant praxis oriented — “the relational interaction between reflection, naming of the world, action, and



the return to reflection once more” (Darder, 2002, p. 82). Freire’s notion of praxis has pedagogical parallels with the field of experiential education as outlined in Figure 2 below:

### The Experiential Learning Cycle



This figure was shared from a presentation prepared by Dr. James Raffan in Ottawa, Canada, on August 3, 2009. The figure was modeled after Kolb’s (1984) cycle of learning based on experience and is used with permission from the author.

This diagram schematically represents the cyclical process of experiential learning that Dewey (1938) – a pioneer of the experiential education movement – articulated. This experiential education is defined by 12 principles, which were approved in 1994 by the Association for Experiential Education’s Board of Directors (Luckmann, 1996, p. 49). Among others, learners are active participants in the social construction of knowledge. Here, significant to note, the importance of “reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis” in experiential education, according to Luckmann (1996, p. 49), mirrors Freire’s praxis of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 36). In our own respective teaching approaches we believe and strive to continually model such praxis. Malcolm’s moment, teased out in the vignettes throughout this essay, also moves through a similar learning cycle. From his experience on top of Baily Head (opening vignette) to conversations displaying critical reflection and analysis (second and third vignettes) to action and application (fourth vignette) Malcolm demonstrates “working through intersubjective experience and thought to make change where it’s needed” (Greenwood & McKenzie, 2009, p. 5).

In the previous sections we identified relationships as cornerstone of *cosmological pedagogy* and *place pedagogy* to which we speak. It is our reciprocal relationship with all things being and our mindful participation as place-makers that open spaces for an awakened orientation to the world. As noted earlier, a more than humanist ontology is essential in our historical time as complex questions of future sustainability spill into

commonplace dialogue. Relationships prioritize interdependence. Interdependence as concept must be foundational to our time's living narrative.

However there is a further layer to what we are calling *relational pedagogy*. Relationships, inherent to ecological discourses, are similarly central to complex systems theory. These two fields “share a worldview” (Davis, 2004, p.173). Malcolm speaks of the challenges he feels when pondering system change. What is it about the schooling system (broader educational systems in general) that impedes change? How do systems work? Is “enough people [i.e. critical mass] enough to change things?” Ultimately it seems what Malcolm was asking, after years of reflection: “where are the places where I as a young person can intervene in the system” (Meadow, 1997)? Systems thinking<sup>4</sup> as a theoretical field represents ideas that have been around for some time (e.g. Merleau Ponty's notion of coupling in 1962; the work of C. Weick on organizational theory and D. Meadows work on the limits of growth in the 1970's, etc.) and is a fascinatingly complex field that we do not intend to explore in this paper. However, a capacity for systems thinking, as displayed by Malcolm, rudimentary as it may be, is a necessary element of becoming awake. Understanding that “I as an agent, a subject, and a constituent element within a system have agency” is critical in order to imagine new and renewed systems more relevant to today's challenges. We must know the system in order to transform it, and as Franklin (2010) suggests, we must “scruple” together on structural impediments to democratic life; collective dialogue for clarity and possibility.

A *relational pedagogy* thus melds reciprocity of being, a beyond human ontology, and experience-reflection-action praxis with disciplined thinking on system change. Just as Malcolm understood himself as “part of something so much bigger” referring to the wider biotic community, he too recognized himself as part of social constructions (e.g. schooling system). In being face to face with the system, Malcolm considers his own agency while at the same time knows he is a product of the system. What then becomes essential is mindfulness around the ways in which we produce the system. Once understood we can then make a conscious decision of producing the system differently. This is what Freire's legacy (1994) and the pedagogy of hope and Greene's notion of wide-awakeness are about. Becoming wide-awake to this thinking is central to our interpretation of *relational pedagogy*—the third critical element to what we are naming the pedagogy of the moment, a full and wide-awakeness pedagogy of human possibility. Understanding how relationships, interactions and intersubjective experiences make possible the emergence of new behaviours, new essences, and new momentum is the turn of *hermeneutic pedagogy*.

## **Becoming Wide-Awake: Hermeneutic Pedagogy**

*2007—four years after our shared learning journey in Antarctica...*

*L: How inspiring it has been to follow your story Malcolm.*

*M: Well you were there for the start of it—Antarctica 2003 expedition.*

*L: Your story started long before that Malcolm.*

*M: Yah... I guess (said with his characteristic wide-dancing eyed grin). But that certainly represented a significant moment in my life.*

*L: In what ways?*

*M: I look at my work now with at risk, marginalized youth. Everyday I learn and grow. It never really feels like work but rather who I am, what I do. Through community-centered education projects I work side by side with youth trying to make the community*



*better, more relevant, more hopeful. Through listening to kids' stories, their situations, their frustrations, so many of which I can see myself as a kid, we explore why things are the way they are and how things could change. There's a lot of buy in by the kids. Once they realize that they are part of the very systems they are frustrated by (school, institutions, laws), there's a shift. Last fall a group of youth wanted to see an old abandoned building site which was routinely used for partying and vandalizing get turned into a skate park. Together we explored how to make their idea reality. And they are doing it. The park is almost complete. It's inspiring.*

*L: It seems more often than not today's youth are publicly perceived as 'disengaged' and 'apathetic.' I think youth, anyone for that matter, become disengaged by inaction. When their voices are continually not heard or their ideas not acted upon, they step away from traditional forms of engagement. But engaged they most certainly are. From community-based activism like your skate park example to social networking, creative expression (spoken word, hip hop, dance) or social entrepreneurship... youth are engaged, moving, raising voice, taking action, making change. They are just going about it in ways that are more reflective of the times in which we live.*

*M: I agree. It is not cynicism, nor apathy but more a crisis of relevancy. Sure the kids talk about getting rich, having 'stuff' – after all it's the 'American dream' we created—but the kids talk a lot about community, wanting to feel like they belong, that they matter, that their lives are worth living, that they have something to give to the world, and that the world needs to become a more peaceful, just and healthier place.*

*L: It's funny eh. It seems you and I have gone full circle.*

Our notion of *hermeneutic pedagogy* is interpreted through the lens of Brent Davis's (1997) work on what he calls *hermeneutic listening*. Although written in the context of teaching mathematics, Davis describes hermeneutic listening as “an imaginative participation in the formation and the transformation of experience” (p. 369). Unlike “evaluative listening” where teacher is “listening *for* something in particular” (p. 359) hermeneutic listening reclaims the experience of listening – something for which Western culture has no epistemology (see Hendry, 2007, p. 495). Although supportive of “interpretive listening,” a “sort of reaching out” to access “the subjective sense being made,” Davis embraces its constructivist orientation but sees the focus on individual sense-making and on individual cognizing agents as a limitation (Davis, 1997, pp. 364-365). He put it thus: “it makes little sense to study the emergence of an individual's understanding without considering the social and political contexts in which such understanding arise.” (p. 374).

By proposing hermeneutic listening Davis (1997) shifts the focus to “the dynamic interdependence of agent and setting, thought and action, knowledge and knower, self and other, individual and collective” (p. 370). Learners' particular context and backgrounds become central as does the notion that through their (individual agents) interactions, ideas and possibilities emerge that move us beyond what can be obtained in individual sense-making. A breakthrough towards “expanding the space of the possible” (Davis, 2004, p. 179) or as Greene suggests, “teaching for openings” (1995, p. 109). Davis's work on hermeneutic listening challenges teachers to “reinterpret practice” (1997, p. 355) by positioning themselves as willing participants in the learning community. Vulnerable, fallible and open, the teacher listens, questions, *scruples* with the same authority she demands of her fellow learners. Teaching “without guarantees” (Hall, 1997).



Davis's interpretation of pedagogy as a thoughtful act of hermeneutic listening has links to Van Manen's (1990) work on hermeneutic phenomenology in which pedagogy is presented as "pedagogic thoughtfulness" (p. 154). Hermeneutics as tradition is a field of inquiry that seeks to unhinge the social and historical conditions that inform our assumptions and presuppositions. What makes Davis's work so pertinent to this essay is his bridging of a critical pedagogy mindfulness of how our historically-made situation informs our teaching location with his coupling of a deep ecologically informed "participatory epistemology" (1997, p. 160) and a complexity-based ontology. In drawing links between embodied knowledge and enacted knowledge, and mindful participation and empowered action, Davis proposes that society can be remade through the joint action that emerges from teaching practice informed by hermeneutic listening. That is individual and collective identities are being shaped by the unimagined trajectories emergent from a negotiated, participatory, and open space of learning. We are calling this approach *hermeneutic pedagogy*.

In the final vignette Malcolm, and the first author's relationship with Malcolm, had come full circle. From a teenager moved by an experience of standing face to face with "something" big amidst the silence of Antarctica, Malcolm now stood *in* the world as a community educator engendering a sense of belonging, pertinence and agency in inner city youth—the very things Malcolm was awakened to (and thus questioning) at the ends of the Earth. Through reflection, analysis and mindful participation Malcolm came to understand systems and constructions. He learned to recognize how meaning is generated in culture and structures and often unknowingly reproduced. Without knowing the work of hooks (2009), Malcolm understood the "creation of meaning—the making of lives that we feel are worth living" of which she spoke (p. 1). Malcolm became the history-maker, the place-maker and the maker of his way of which Freire and Greenwood speak. The joint action of Malcolm and his students—acted upon ideas cultivated in a negotiated space of listening and possibility—are transforming the world in personally relevant and significant ways.

### **This is not a conclusion: This is still Malcolm's Moment**

The convergence of these four pedagogical tributaries—cosmological, place, relational, and hermeneutic—created an opening for Malcolm to see the world anew. We chose *pedagogy of the moment* with much intention. We conceive the 'moment' here not in its momentary-time-sense, that is, as an in passing moment, but a *performative moment* that is deeply situated in time, history and place. Malcolm's tears were both a performative gesture to/of everything that is Malcolm's life history and an expression of experience of coming face-to-face with "something so much bigger." To *become wide-awake(ned)* of and ready for this moment, we are contending, one has to be at the intersection of cosmology, place, relation and hermeneutic. Oriented to the world as educators, it seems, the act of *becoming* represents the source of much wonder, inspiration and hope. There is no method to becoming. There is however – after years of reflecting on Malcolm and so many other stories of our students, "acts of becoming" – elements to learning and teaching for "imagination, openings and possibilities" (Greene, 1995, p. 17). We, the authors, stand at the confluence of four ever-fluid, ever-changing pedagogies—cosmological, place, relational and hermeneutic—that are moving us at this time, in this space. Our best may be here, in Malcolm's moment, but our absolute best is yet to come. It will happen when and if we are ready for it. We hope we will be ready for it, and at that point, we will follow Khalil Gibran (1966, p. 121) and say:



Love's procession is moving;  
 Beauty is waving her banner;  
 Youth is sounding the trumpet of joy;  
 Disturb not my contrition, my blamer.  
 Let me walk, for the path is rich  
 With roses and mint, and the air  
 Is scented with cleanliness.

## Notes

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the article, vignettes are personal notes made by the first author while serving as Education Director for Students on Ice Expeditions ([www.studentsonice.com](http://www.studentsonice.com)) from 2004 to 2008. Malcolm is a fictitious name given to the student to respect anonymity.

<sup>4</sup> With roots in the traditions of physics, chemistry, biology and economics (Mason, 2008), complex systems can be described most simply as a theory that “concerns itself with environments, organizations, or systems” and the nature of the interactions and relationships “among their constituent elements or agents” (p. 36).

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**Submitted: October, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012.**

**Approved: November, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.**

