The Final Oral Examination for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY Interdisciplinary Studies (Department of Curriculum & Instruction, School of Environmental Studies)

Hilary Leighton

2004 Simon Fraser University MEd

Wild (Re)turns: Tracking the Epistemological and Ecological Implications of Learning as an Initiatory Journey Toward True Vocation and Soul

Tuesday, August 26, 2014 10:00am
Graduate Student Centre, room 108

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Wanda Hurren, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, University of Victoria (Co-supervisor)
Dr. Duncan Taylor, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Co-supervisor)
Dr. Rick Kool, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Betsy Geist, Graduate Programs in Leadership & Change, Antioch University, Seattle

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Catherine Costigan, Department of Psychology, UVic
Abstract

Many people in Western culture experience systemic separation from an intimacy with the natural world and as a result, suffer a disconnection from their own natures. As an educator, my interest in the epistemological and ecological implications of nature-based, reflective learning as a form of initiation into maturity and calling led me to explore how education might create the conditions for consciously turning around the whole human with potential for turning around the whole world.

Drawing from insights and wisdom from depth psychology, ecopsychology, mythology, philosophy, the poetic traditions, literature, spiritual practices, and curriculum studies, and by adopting Jung’s psychology of individuation as a theoretical backbone for this body of work, I sought to fully flesh out and discover how we might reclaim and embody our original human wholeness (our individuated natures), and how education might be a catalyst for this. I have organized this study in such a way as to align with three central themes found universally in all rites of passage and that mirror my own heuristic research journey, namely: the separation, the threshold experience, and the return.

In the separation stage, I offer an historical perspective of much of Western culture’s current incongruence with nature. In addition, I provide a critique of how contemporary educational practices with their overt focus on profit-making and careerism further reinforce this dualistic thinking.

As a counterbalance, at midpoint of this study, I set forth on my own deep phenomenological threshold-crossing immersions into nature. This research became, in effect, a (re)search of self where surprisingly more of my own calling was revealed to me through the hermeneutics of powerful, wild teachings.

At the conclusion, as I (re)turn “from the woods”, my findings are shared (in part) as pedagogical examples of life-enhancing, less codified and embodied practices designed with the whole person—body, mind, and soul—and earth, in mind that may support students (and teachers) in discovering their particular and deeply fulfilling ways of belonging to and contributing toward a living ecology.

A symbolic artifact (a map of the journey) accompanies and completes this work.

Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

2011-13 University of Victoria Interdisciplinary Graduate Funding Award

Presentations


