



Land Affirmation: Moving Naturally Toward Reconciliation

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Abstract

Land acknowledgment is an important educational practice of recognizing unceded Indigenous territory. For physical and health educators (PHE) this practice need be not only oral and discursive but also active and interactive. Land acknowledgment can be a physical affirmation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The purpose of this essay is to describe how a practice-based, land-affirming PHE curriculum may contribute to moving naturally toward reconciliation. We propose a curricular approach emphasizing breathing, earthing and naturing practices of land attunement. Such practices are reflective of Indigenous conceptions of animacy and ways of being in kinship with the land.

Keywords: movement; curriculum; Indigenous; land; reconciliation.

Résumé

La reconnaissance du territoire est une pratique éducative qui consiste à reconnaître les territoires Autochtones non cédés. Pour les personnes enseignant l'éducation physique et la santé, une telle pratique se doit d'être active et interactive et non seulement un discours. Cette pratique de la reconnaissance du territoire est une acceptation des façons d'être et de savoir des Autochtones. Le but du présent essai est de décrire comment un curriculum orienté par la pratique et la reconnaissance du territoire peut contribuer à un mouvement vers la réconciliation. Nous proposons une approche du curriculum mettant l'accent sur la respiration et des pratiques d'harmonisation à la terre et à la nature. Une telle approche reflète les conceptions Autochtones du vivant et d'affiliation au territoire.

Mots clés : mouvement; curriculum; Autochtone; territoire; réconciliation.

Introduction

We have composed this essay in affirmation of the Coast Salish lands within the lower mainland of British Columbia on which we live, work, and play. Being affiliated with one of the universities in this part of the province, we begin this essay with a respectful acknowledgment of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our campuses have been built.

This land acknowledgment is one we have become accustomed to giving publicly as we become ever mindful of the ongoing effects of colonization on the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. In doing so, we are challenged to consider our own “colonial settler” and “homesteading” ways of perpetuating colonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012) even to the extent of feeling quite unsettled by the personal and practical implications of acknowledging these unceded and stolen lands on which we have settled. How then should we respond in personal, pedagogical, and practical ways to what this land acknowledgment asks those of us who otherwise feel quite settled in where we now live and work and play?

There is certainly a pressing need for settlers on these lands to engage in processes of reconciliation that redress the wrongs perpetrated against the people who have been displaced. The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC; 2015) are telling indictments of the colonization of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. These TRC findings are also compelling calls to action for those of us working in schools and universities. Anishinaabe journalist and author Tanya Talaga (2018) writes that, although there is much to criticize in how education systems have forced a rift between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, educators in these systems will be key to reconciliation.

In Canada, legions of teachers have taken it upon themselves to learn more about this country’s true history by reading and teaching books by Indigenous authors and historians, even if their governments are not keeping pace with what they are doing in the classroom. The educators always lead us forward. (Talaga, 2018, p. 112)
How then should we respond as physical and health educators to the TRC findings and calls to action?

Our reconciliation approach should not diminish in any way the impacts of displacement from traditional territories, the destruction of familial ties, and the intergenerational traumas resulting from forced assimilation, particularly through the Residential Schools. The ongoing discovery of the bodies of so many Indigenous children buried on the grounds of former Residential Schools must surely give us pause for thought about colonization and the genocide that has been wrought (MacDonald, 2019). But there is also a complementary need for those of us who have settled on unceded territories to do our own “soul work” (Greenwood, 2021) of reconciling our relationships to these lands and to the human and more-than-human beings who are Indigenous to them. As David Greenwood (2021) points out: “What is at stake here is the recovery in ‘settler society’ of our curiosity about what it means to be human and live a more conscious life in the presence of others in a sacred, creative world” (p. 374). At stake is a process of coming into a more harmonious relationship with the lands on which we live and work and play with one another.

Greenwood (2021) regards “soul work” as “an eclectic mix of solitary and communal practices with long traditions within and beyond Western culture” (p. 375). He writes of

a love for the creation of which I am a part, a love that has been nurtured by many decades of learning from the land, as well as from literature, history, poetry, art, and ecological science in the Euro-American tradition. From this foundation I have developed practices in earth-based spirituality, friendship, wandering, meditation, and yoga. All these converge in habits of embodied mindfulness to place and its layered, changing stories. (p. 375)

Our claim in this paper is that, in addition to these artistic, literary, scientific, and meditative practices, there are physical activities and interactivities to be taken up in physical and health education (PHE) that contribute to this “soul work” and thus to the land acknowledgments that are the very basis of the TRC’s calls to action. Such land acknowledgments are in keeping with a deepening sense of reconciliation which, as Deborah McGregor (2018) points out, concerns not only living on the land but “living well” with the land. Reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous people is fundamentally about what is necessary for “balance to be restored and maintained among all beings in Creation (many of whom Western cultures do not even consider to be alive)” (McGregor, 2018, p. 229).

We broach this soulful sense of reconciliation, first of all, by delving a little deeper into what a land acknowledgment means to us and then, by suggesting how to move naturally, or rather nature-ally, toward reconciliation through particular practices of breathing, earthing, and naturing. Our aim is not so much to prescribe PHE practices as it is to affirm a motile connection to the lands we are acknowledging and, in so doing, suggest the kinds of activities and interactivities that might be incorporated in school curricula.

Land Affirmation

The protocols of land acknowledgment can easily become formulaic and facilely performative (Asher et al., 2018). We utter them dutifully, maybe position ourselves autobiographically in relation to certain places on this land, and then we can in good conscience move on. What is missing is the deep reflexivity called for by the TRC (2015) in forging “a new covenant of reconciliation” (p. 121). Land acknowledgments are integral to this covenant whereby, as Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson has proposed, “we decolonize acknowledgement” as a practice abstracted from our daily lives and consider “how acknowledgement’s form has a place within our lives and work that is always in relationship with the specificity and context of its use” (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 22). Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, who is a member of the Mohawk, nation reminds us that, as well as being tied to the circumstances of our everyday lives, it is especially important that land acknowledgments be “a time to give thanks” and an opportunity “to consider our individual and collective role in the stewardship of Mother Earth and in building relationships between Indigenous people and communities and the rest of the country” (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 24). And Lisa Ravensbergen of Ojibwe ancestry suggests that the intention of a land acknowledgment be essentially the “embodiment of transformation” in our relations with one another and “in the way that we move forward” (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 30). Land acknowledgments can thus be regarded as integral to the TRC’s “new

covenant of reconciliation” (2015, p. 121) wherein we emphasize the specificity, relationality, and transformative physicality that makes this land meaningful to all of us.

A different relationship to land than one of settlement is being stressed. With fellow travelers Sean Blenkinsop and Mark Fettes (2020), we are wary of the “notion of land, or territory, as something one lives *on*” and instead want to cultivate “an understanding of land as something we are a part of, something that lives in us and calls us to account before our myriad kin” (p. 1036). While asphalted playgrounds and manicured playing fields may give the appearance of moving upon and over the ground, we need only take off our shoes, step off the beaten path, and venture into the woods to sense the vibrancy of places that in turn animate us. Words of land acknowledgment go only so far toward appreciating the textured, contoured, vegetated, demarcated, and populated landscapes wherein we can literally move toward reconciliation.

Let us take to heart the idea of moving naturally, which is to say animatedly and vitally, toward reconciliation. We mean by these adverbs the ways of moving afforded by, and suited to, a range of natural environments. This means regarding skillful movements as not simply actions of, say, kicking or striking a ball, pounding the pavement, lifting weights, blocking an opponent, and other such instrumental, purposive actions. Conventional PHE curricula focused on fundamental movement skills employ a terminology of movement competency that tends to occlude vitally relational and deeply spiritual dimensions of “physical literacy” (Nesdoly et al., 2021). These curricula can overshadow the “animacy” that is core to Indigenous ways of knowing and that can be sensed within and beyond our own movement agencies. The motile sense “that the world is alive and has an agency of its own” (Asch et al., 2018, p. 52) is a “core animacy” we first discover “when we learn to move our bodies and learn to move ourselves as infants and children” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010, p. 10). We continue to cultivate this “core animacy” in developing “our capacity for movement and our capacity to move sensibly and efficiently in the world generally, and in the world of other animate beings in particular” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010, p. 10). Moving naturally may well come naturally at first, however it requires particular attention be given to primal or core motions in order for PHE practices to steer toward reconciliative land affirmation.

Does it matter that fundamental movement skills focus on locomotion patterns irrespective of terrain? Does it matter that the skills of object manipulation are applied to presumably inanimate things such as bats and balls? Should there be concern that learning to move one’s body adeptly and efficiently is too often cast as individualistic skill acquisition? Botanist and Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes of “the grammar of animacy” that eludes us when speaking of things and objects and mostly inanimate entities as tools of individual achievement. Kimmerer asks us to appreciate,

a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. *This* is the language I hear in the woods; this is the language that lets us speak of what wells up all around us. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 55)

Others have been inspired by this “grammar of animacy” to take up the active, verbal “kinning” of our relations with one another in the more-than-human world (Van Horn et al., 2021). The insight we take from this important work is not primarily one of language deconstruction but of how other gerunds lend tangible, kinaesthetic expression to

“kinning.” We propose that breathing, earthing, and naturing are relational practices of animacy to which PHE advocates can relate. They are suggestive, more so than kicking, dribbling, throwing, catching, striking, and catching, yet perhaps equally so with crawling, hopping, skipping, running, dodging, leaping, landing, and balancing, of actual physical activities and interactivities that affirm our ties to the lands we are acknowledging.

It is with these ties in mind, and the bodily “kinning” practices that become the ties that bind us to one another and to the more-than-human world, that we move past the verbal and conceptual expressions of land acknowledgment to write of more evidently physical affirmations. We create kinship with one another and with other entities through what we do more so than what we say. An active and interactive affirmation of kinship thus feels truer to the PHE practices we seek to foster than discursive land acknowledgments. We literally want to affirm, confirm, firm up, make steady, take up, and strengthen the kinships felt with others and with the more-than-human world.

Affirmation of this more active and interactive nature is in keeping with the following key statement in the TRC (2015) report:

Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This is a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that *reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth* [emphasis added]. (p. 123)

What better ways of reconciling ourselves with the earth can there be than breathing with what the earth offers, becoming grounded in the earth’s textures and forms, and moving naturally with, over, under, around, upon, and through the animate forms that arise with and from the earth. In doing so we can enact a “belief shared among many Inuit, Métis, and First Nation people that a sacred connection exists among people, the Earth, and everything above it, upon it, and within it” (TRC, 2015, p. 163).

Moving Naturally

The movement sensibility to which we aspire is a kinaesthetically felt and at times synergistically flowing connection to the milieu of action (Smith, 2007, 2016; Smith & Lloyd, 2006). We move not just to exercise and develop motor skills but to find resonance with others (Smith, 2020) and become attuned to that which the immediate environment affords us (Smith, 2021). Movement, whatever our physical capacities, is a primary way of being in the world and an inherently educable medium of our relations with one another and with the wider animate world.

Practitioners stretching the bounds of what are generally considered to be appropriate and inclusive movement practices for children and youth in schools provide exemplars of moving naturally. Beyond fitness programs, games and sports, gymnastics, dance, and even meditative and martial arts, we look to Natural, Paleo, Primal, and Ancestral Movement, and to a burgeoning interest in the movement fundamentals that are said to be indicative of our hunter-gatherer evolution. Moving naturally, broadly speaking, encompasses a range of practices whereby we can be released from the “captivity” of our contemporary, mostly sedentary and quite physically regimented lifestyles (Bowman, 2014; also <https://www.nutritiousmovement.com/blog/>). We draw inspiration from these

practices and their originators in pursuing a PHE approach to land affirmation and in proposing particular ways of moving naturally toward reconciliation.

Ido Portal's promotion of "Movement Culture" based on free flowing, physical exercises (see <https://www.idoport.com>) were what drew Stephen, the first author of this essay, to an even more expansive idea of fitness than he had been exploring as foundational to PHE curricula (Lloyd & Smith, 2009; Smith, 2015; Smith & Lloyd, 2007). Portal's movement practice has aspects of capoeira, martial arts, and gymnastics, yet is essentially a multidisciplinary study of the moving body and what we are capable of when capitalizing on strength, agility, and flexibility. Much of this exploration takes places in a gym with various pieces of equipment, however Ido Portal's website (<https://www.idoport.com>) encourages movement exploration using railings and barred structures in urban spaces as well as quadrupedal motions and weight-bearing balances on concreted, paved as well as grassy surfaces. It was, however, the environmental settings for Erwan Le Corre's movement approach (see <https://www.movnat.com/movnat-team/erwan-le-corre/>) that drew Stephen to a more expansive sense of PHE and one that is consistent with his own childhood experiences of moving in nature settings (Smith, 1992, 2006). Natural Movement involves the fundamental motions of running, leaping, climbing, swinging, hanging, lifting, carrying rocks and logs, as well as grappling with other people. It is a practice of moving on, over, through, under, and around obstacles on land and swimming and diving in naturally formed water courses (see <https://www.movnat.com/movnat-team/erwan-le-corre/>).

Damien, the second author of this essay, has studied these and various other movement practices extensively. As a former elite gymnast, he was drawn initially to Georges Hébert's "natural method" of moving through obstacle courses and subsequently studied with Erwan Le Corre and other Natural Movement practitioners in Europe, Foragers, Hikers, and Fisher-Folk in Newfoundland, with Traceur, Freerunning, and Parkour communities in New York City, Montreal, and Mexico, Free Divers in Mexico, and with Surfers in Costa Rica. These practical studies of "Animal Flow" (<https://animalflow.com/about/mike-fitch/>) extended to such partnered and martial and performing arts-influenced movement practices as "Fighting Monkey" where free-flowing improvisation with others is stressed (<https://fightingmonkey.net>).

A consistent thread running through these diverse practices is not simply an emphasis on locomotor and agility skills along with manipulations of equipment, but developing bodily responsiveness to different environments and to natural ones in particular. As Frank Forencich (2006) points out, "movement is a broad, general term that covers a wide range of physical action" (p. 266). It is a broader term than exercise and encompasses much more than fitness activities, games, and sports. Movements incorporated in the aforementioned practices emphasize bodily capabilities of exploring a range of landscapes and waterscapes. These are primal movements of "wild fitness" (see Tara Wood at <https://wildfitness.com/our-philosophy/>) and always potentially "wild play" (Forencich, 2006) which reconnect us with the land. These various movement practices upon which we draw are indicative of how we may come to appreciate the afore-mentioned "grammar of animacy" (Kimmerer, 2013) within a physical literacy well suited to the task of reconciliation.

The origin of many of these practices can be attributed to the rediscovery of the physical education program developed by Georges Hébert in the early years of the

twentieth century (Hébert, 1912). Considered a “forerunner of the ‘body ecology’ movement” (Philippe-Meden, 2018, p. 25), Hébert’s “natural method” of movement exploration was based initially on observations of people performing physical tasks in the course of their everyday activities. Against the militaristic drills of the time, he created a movement practice “based on connecting, intertwining and fusion of internal and external impulses of the subject and the environment that are in symbiotic relationship” (Philippe-Meden, 2018, p. 29). His program was comprised of: walking, running, jumping, as well as quadrupedal locomotion and swimming; stability, strength, and agility motions of balancing and climbing; and manipulative actions of lifting, throwing, and self-defence. These motions “should be continuous, at a rapid and sustained pace and progressing on rugged terrain in a natural environment” (Philippe-Meden, 2018, p. 30).

The “natural method” was the inspiration in the 1990s for a group of young men who trained on a fitness trail and obstacle course called the *parcours de santé* in Sarcelles, France. They changed the spelling and created a movement practice that has become known worldwide as Parkour and been popularized through the 2001 motion film *Yamakasi*, subsequent documentaries such as *Jump London* and *Jump Britain*, in an action sequence at the beginning of the 2006 big-budget movie *Casino Royale*, and via internet websites and YouTube postings (see also Angel, 2016). Parkour and its more artistic progeny Freerunning, a term coined by Sébastien Foucan who was one of the originators of Parkour, is in part inspired by and partly an evolution of the ten core “utilities” or fundamental motions that Georges Hébert emphasized.

The appeal of the recent incarnations of the “natural method” is not confined to Parkour, given the many and varied activity disciplines we have mentioned in passing that incorporate such movements. Indeed, we are reluctant to hold up any particular practice such as Parkour which, while based on community ideals and values of inclusion, may still be subject to charges of racial tension and class, gender, and age biases. Lawrence (2019), for instance, concedes that urban Parkour and Freerunning may well exhibit “culturally anarchic and spatially subversive interpretation of physical activity [that] contrasts markedly against more conventional and rule-bound forms of athletic culture – such as traditional games like football, netball or rugby” (pp. 112–113) yet these movement practices may still exhibit “racialized and gendered discourse” (p. 113). Our justification of these practices is not to diminish any thorough-going critique but to regard them, for present purposes, as indicative of educative possibilities for all children and youth of moving naturally on and with the land. Just as we have come to regard land affirmation in a motile rather than primarily discursive way, we explore various movement practices as appealing to Indigenous ways of being attuned sensorially to others and to the animate world. Essential features of these practices are drawn upon only insofar as they prove useful in exemplifying how to move naturally toward reconciliation in contrast with an otherwise distanced, detached, and estranged relationship with the colonized land upon which we have settled.

We start with very basic and primal practices that are accessible to all children and youth before taking up more vigorously challenging ones that might appear more suited to more able participants. The point is not to prescribe a curricular framework but to suggest practices adaptable to different ages and physical capabilities. In so doing, we show practically how land affirmation can be the point of departure for sharing breath with others, becoming grounded and connected to the more-than-human world, and what it

might mean to move synergistically and reciprocally with the very forces of nature. We propose nothing more than what our bodies know and what comes naturally to us—which is to feel and move kinetically, kinaesthetically, and energetically beyond ourselves.

There is a simplicity to the practices presented here that belies the power they hold in allowing us to move beyond our own self-defined margins of physical agency. Children and youth need not be explicitly mindful of the affects and effects of these practices. Many of us will, in fact, have childhood memories of engaging in such practices just for the sensory stimulation they afforded us. But this is the very reason for appreciating the self-expanding power that such practices of moving naturally afford us. In the words of Anishinaabe poet and story-teller, Richard Wagamese (2016),

I came here to inhabit a body that would allow my soul to experience. So I am not my body. I came here to experience the grandest thought. So I am not my mind. I came here to experience the deepest feeling. So I am not my feelings. I am all of it: thought, feeling and experience. That translates to awe, joy and reverence. For all life, for all beings, for all Creation. (p. 94)

This Indigenous vision of bodily being inspires us to consider how practices of breathing, earthing and naturing may potentially infuse the PHE curriculum.

We point out in passing that the writings of Richard Wagamese will be cited more so than other Indigenous works throughout the remainder of this essay. These writings have particular appeal for their profound simplicity in expressing the very kind of “soul work” of reconciliation David Greenwood (2021) recommends. Wagamese’s writings stand out in the narratively intimate weave of “kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion” around an “embodied practice” of land affirmation (Simpson, 2017, p. 151). They help us discern the best PHE practices of breathing, earthing, and naturing.

Breathing

Taking students outdoors, whether as an activity break from the regular classroom schedule or as part of a designated PHE program, is a time to breathe out. Yet in stepping outside the classroom, beyond the walls of the gym, and into the fresh air, there is the necessity, too, of breathing in. This all occurs very naturally and mostly with little attention paid to breathing practices. Students set off on a run or maybe they are involved in, say, soccer practice drills or a modified game. The students will be at various times out of breath and catching their breath. Whatever the specific activity at hand, it is to be expected that there be some measure of cardio-vascular fitness development. But beyond this economy of the breath that is part and parcel of activities such as field games and sports as well as outdoor fitness and recreational pursuits, there can be an emphasis on breathing practices that reveal the energetic sources of inspired movement.

Breathwork is featured in Yoga, Qi Gong, meditative and martial arts such as Taijiquan, Taekwondo, and Aikido, and in a wide range of bodywork and somatic practices. We are not necessarily advocating these practices per se, although there is indication from our conversations with teachers that certain of these practices are being incorporated in the “active living” component to school PHE programs and increasingly in classroom-based “mindfulness” programs. Hatha Yoga has become especially appealing at the upper secondary level. What these practices point towards, for present purposes, is the potential incorporation of breathwork in the activities that take place out of doors. Breathing exercises can help the students settle down at the start of the class, say, when

gathering together in a circle, and getting ready for the more vigorous activities to follow. Breathing exercises can become implicitly if not explicitly part of land acknowledgment and be the somatic means of affirming where PHE classes actually take place.

We do not have space in this essay to address the range of breathing exercises that could be taken up. Suffice it to say that they extend from breathing in and breathing out counts, to bringing attention to diaphragm motion and chest expansion and contraction, to simple body actions of bending and stretching, raising and lowering arms, to magnify inhalations and exhalations. A breathing approach that has gained recent popularity due largely to the purported physiological adaptations to cold temperatures and to exercising in snow and ice environments is the “Wim Hof Method” (<https://www.wimhofmethod.com>). We mention this specific breathing reference only insofar as it points to the wider world connections we seek to encourage through breathing practices. Beyond the worthy incorporation of breathing practices in the school classroom (e.g., Tran, 2015), such practices can be best incorporated in outside PHE activities. There is much recent scientific evidence attesting to the importance of breathing correctly (Nestor, 2021) and we add weight to this rationale for including such practices in PHE programs by treating them also as part and parcel of an extended land affirmation.

We press the point further by suggesting that, “heightening one’s awareness of one’s breathing cycle is a freeing practice and a primary principle of a decolonizing embodied pedagogy” (Brunette-Debassige, 2018, p. 218). This suggestion is in accord with chronic illness and disease being tied to the socio-cultural determinants of health and, particularly, to the social determinants of Indigenous health (Greenwood et al., 2015). In reality, these health determinants are matters of stress, constriction, and inflammation (Marya & Patel, 2021). By focusing on breathing to the extent that this is possible in PHE “students become aware of and reflect on their own unconscious breathing patterns” and, in doing so, “they can begin to examine the ways in which they may interfere with their own natural breathing cycle during times of stress (Brunette-Debassige, 2018, p. 218). Such examination, through simple breathing exercises extending into more vigorous bodily actions and interactions, can happen naturally in sharing breath with others.

Speaking and listening, and storytelling itself, are literal and metaphorical ways of sharing breath. In these discursive practices, and especially when inspired by Indigenous storytelling, we can appreciate how “humans and the web of life are bound together, reflecting cosmologies in which breath is shared and borders are illusory” (Marya & Patel, 2021, p. 174). Storytelling is a way of sharing breath where “to listen is to inhale and create the delicate space for stories” (p. 179). But such sharing is more evidently apparent in physical play with one another, especially where the intention is not just to be out of breath but to be inspired in the company of others. Richard Wagamese (2016) again captures the essence of the practice we want to foster:

From our very first breath, we are in relationship. With that indrawn draft of air, we become joined to everything that ever was, is or ever will be. When we exhale, we forge that relationship by virtue of the act of living. Our breath commingles with all breath, and we are a part of everything. (p. 44)

Breathing practices—from regularly taking students outside, teaching them healthy patterns of breathing, emphasizing breath awareness as more than cardio-respiratory fitness, and having them appreciate, at age-appropriate levels, inspired stores—are very practical ways of breathing life into PHE land affirmations.

Earthing

We tend not to consider the sensorial needs of our feet in the same way we feel our hands. We ‘glove’ the feet daily with socks and shoes and have become accustomed to overlook, to our detriment, that feet, like hands, have a range of unique problems to solve and functions to perform that are best done with a steady, unimpeded flow of sensory information. Feet can gather data about surfaces and textures, obstacles, and sharp objects (exteroception) while keeping the body upright and balanced (proprioception). One would not rock climb with gloves on and, for similar reasons, gymnasts, dancers, and martial artists practice almost exclusively with bare feet or with minimal foot covering. Excelling in these activities requires a tactile-kinaesthetic connection between the body and the environment. The better the flow of information between the body and the surrounding milieu the more likely it is that performance is enhanced. A ground-based practice illustrative of what is possible when bodies, too, are considered tactile surfaces for contacting the ground can be found in Marlo Fiskin’s performative movement arts approach to Flow Movement which is described and well-illustrated on her website (see <https://flowmovement.net>).

Standing barefoot on the ground can prompt a discussion with students about the roots of trees and how they act like the feet of a human, reaching deep into the earth to draw out nourishment and to ensure stability. Students walking barefooted on grassy playing fields or slowly and deliberately in a treed area can reflect on how ground textures and temperatures feel. Simply returning to a flat concreted or paved surface may well provide a jarring contrast with the feeling of earthly connection that the students were enjoying just a moment ago. These barefoot exercises are informed by environmental education practices and an emerging “science of grounding” (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44ddtR0XDVU>) although our intention in this essay is to consider earthing activities, as we did with breathing activities, more in keeping with how they affirm a felt connection to the land. To what extent can we claim these practices have a “calming element” flowing from increased connectivity and enhanced relationships and that they express “this vital and physical communion with the planet” (Wagamese, 2019, p. 86)?

Commonly found in parks in China are walking paths studded with smooth river rocks. Such paths have been constructed elsewhere in the world and are justified by precepts of reflexology—that the pressure points in the soles of the feet release toxins and pressure applied there helps the flow of energy through the body. Yet many children will already know the fun of balancing on a large rock or trying to jump from one rock to the next along, say, a dry riverbed. To these earthing practices we add the Japanese one of *Shinrin-Yoku* or Forest Bathing which involves walking in a forested place. It is a health practice with physiological benefits, however it is not simply “exercise, or hiking, or jogging. It is a practice of connecting with nature through our senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch” (Li, 2018, para. 5). The practice is ostensibly about attuning to the natural world. Qing Li writes that “*Shrin-yoku* is like a bridge. By opening our senses, it bridges the gap between us and the natural world” (Li, 2018, n.p. para. 5.).

While it may not be practical in PHE classes for students to be barefooted or very likely there will be river courses or forests readily accessible, there are different surface textures that can be experienced dynamically on most school grounds. Quadrupedal movements on these surfaces and balancing on logs and rocks open up sensory

connections. And where there are some treed areas and more naturally vegetated sites, students can find their own *sit spaces* where, after various returns, they attune to a micro-ecology of enhanced movement awareness. Richard Wagamese (2019) reminds us that “by taking ourselves to the land, to a place where we can feel the Earth, we put ourselves in a place with the greatest flow of energy” (p. 77). Students gain an understanding embedded in Indigenous traditions—that “the land is a feeling” (Wagamese, 2021, p. 6).

As we walk upon the earth, we move with the same eternal rhythm that beats within it. The heartbeat. The earth is a drum, a spiritual being, and the beat of it is the first sound we hear in the darkness of the mother’s belly. The drum of her. The heartbeat. (Wagamese, 2019, p. 23)

Earthing practices of land affirmation are tactile, proprioceptive, and kinaesthetic ways of feeling the textures and temperatures of surfaces through movements of increasing locomotor range and bodily agility. This is how the “core animacy” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010, p. 10) can be cultivated.

Naturing

Earlier in this essay we mentioned certain practices of moving naturally with which we are quite familiar. We now describe an exemplary practice of moving naturally in more detail in order to illustrate the extent to which it is possible to foster an active and interactive approach to land affirmation in PHE. This practice is Nature Parkour. Like Parkour in urban settings, Nature Parkour is an athletic and gymnastic practice of navigating through a series of obstacles using nothing other than one’s own physical capabilities along with the incentive of being with a group dedicated to arriving at the same location together. Parkour was first developed, as previously mentioned, in a forested area not too far from Paris and, although it is known for leaps and bounds between buildings in cities, this origin points to a contemporary version of Parkour where the leaps are across naturally formed crevices and chasms, vaults are over rocks and logs, heights are reached scaling rock faces, and climbing and swinging motions involve finding the movement affordances of trees and their branches.

Rafe Kelley is a key proponent of this nature-based approach. His *Evolve Move Play* summit brings together like-minded movement practitioners from various parts of the world (see <https://www.evolveplay.com>). The Nature Parkour he advocates emphasizes being present and attuned to the land and its formations and outgrowths. Of primary importance is the attention given to the landscape in which one finds oneself and to the world that lives literally underfoot and within one’s reach. Initially the movement possibilities of being in a certain place with unfamiliar landforms and vegetation may not be evident. But the possibilities become increasingly obvious with focused attention and an enhanced repertoire of skills and techniques. There is nourishment, an energetic flow and synergistic feeling to the motions of Nature Parkour—“feeling and pushing out the flow of your energy into the flow of the energy of the planet” (Wagamese, 2019, p. 142).

Simon Thakur’s promotion of “Ancestral Movement” on his website (see <https://ancestralmovement.com>), although not based quite so much on the motions of parkour and more on meditative arts, presses our capacities for moving naturally even further into realms of animacy. Again, the environment is not regarded as scenery but as the distinctive realm of movement possibility. Going further back into our hunter-gatherer past, Thakur looks to animal tracking practices and to Indigenous manners of mimicking

animals, paying particular attention to our body parts that are especially sensitive to movements of the body parts of others. One aims at mimicking the movements of animals in the forest in order to feel their energies and thus where they are located. Primary exercises are those of the spine, the undulations of which are key to all radial actions of the limbs and the different patterns of locomotion. Ancestral Movement practice pertains to the evolutionary bodywork of key somatic figures such as Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (1993) and Emilie Conrad (2007), while emphasizing an eco-somatic extension of such bodywork practices into natural environments (McHose & Frank, 2006; Olsen, 2002). What it adds notably to them is the interactive component such that moving naturally is fundamentally an expression of kinaesthetic empathy. Venturing into woods and forests, and naturally formed waterscapes too, gives us a sense of the “vital powers” we share with other creatures and affords expression of the very “vitality” of what can be called our “humanity” (Smith, 2017, 2018).

Several of the activities and interactivities we have mentioned in this essay are promoted on the PHE Canada website under suggested “Physical Education Activities.” They include “taking students to a forest, trail, or greenspace,” “hiking” and “forest bathing,” and “planning a parkour challenge.” Even the rudiments of animal mimesis can be found in a suggested K–3 activity titled “Animal Tango” and a grade 4–7 activity called “Get Expressive!” (see <https://phecanada.ca/programs/phe-learning-centre/physical-education-activities>). Nature Parkour and Ancestral Movement exemplify the degree to which these and other activities and interactivities PHE teachers may incorporate in their school programs provide “opportunities to get students interested and engaged with the natural world immediately available” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 24). It may well require “third-party outdoor educators to facilitate and help deal with the challenges associated with leaving the confines of the school” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 24), nevertheless the possibilities of children and youth moving naturally toward reconciliation seem mostly to require only a little teaching imagination and inspiration.

We call upon Indigenous ways of knowing to continue to press the case for moving naturally toward reconciliation. Nature Parkour and Ancestral Movement are indicative practices of just how far we might take PHE out-of-doors and base the development of fundamental movement skills on the motions of moving with others of the human and more-than-human kind. Earlier we introduced the notion of “kinning” as an umbrella term for various practices of attuning to these others. Having now indicated some particular movement practices of nature attunement, we close this section with an aspiration that is at the heart of land affirmation. Richard Wagamese (2016) writes:

The phrase ‘all my relations’...It’s hugely important. It’s our saving grace in the end. It points to the truth that we are all related, that we are all connected, that we all belong to each other. The most important word is ‘all.’ Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. That means every person, just as it means ever rock, mineral, blade of grass, and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to choose collectively to live that teaching, the energy of our change of consciousness would heal each of us – and heal the planet. (p. 36)

“All my relations” is an aspiration for us all and especially for physical and health educators who inspired by emergent movement practices exemplifying attunement with nature. The

naturing practices we have mentioned bring the precepts of land-based education and the principles of Indigenous land affirmations to bear directly upon the vital powers, core animacy, and requisite motions of cultivating kinship with others of our own kind and those of a more-than-human kind.

Conclusion

We have contended throughout this essay that, for land acknowledgments to be especially meaningful to PHE practitioners, “education for reconciliation has to be taken out of the classroom and be grounded in land-based pedagogy” (Maroom & Rattray, 2022, p. 115). Taking students out-of-doors and teaching them practices of breathing, earthing, and naturing “allows students to be immersed in the land, become closely acquainted with the land, and to develop a personal relationship with the land” (Maroom & Rattray, 2022, p. 118). A core PHE curricular competency of Personal and Social Responsibility is thereby expanded to not only emphasize “Indigenous knowledge and perspectives” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.) but also the range of practices that can be taken up in affiliation with Indigenous ecological sensitivities (Cajete, 1994).

All of which involves doing more than adding prefatory land acknowledgments to PHE business as usual. There is certainly much to be inspired by in stories of Indigenous athletes who have excelled in conventional games and sports. For example, Mohawk Olympian Waneeq Horn-Miller advocates strongly for all children and youth having access to such physical activities as will empower them (Napier, 2021). But in this essay, we have pressed for more than the reliance on present PHE activities and, we now add, for more than incorporating Indigenous games and sports, dances, and other cultural contents in PHE curricula (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006 pp. 24, 43, 86). Land acknowledgments can be taken up in enlivening and animating ways of moving not just on but with and through local landscapes and waterscapes.

The critically conceptual work of decolonization that is necessary for us to do as settlers on the unceded, traditional territories of Indigenous peoples cannot be denied. While we have not addressed the intergenerational traumas created by the Residential Schools or the ongoing appropriation of traditional territories, or any of the other processes of colonization for that matter, such as the use of “Euro-Canadian sports and games to help bring about fundamental changes in the values and behaviours of Aboriginal students” (Forsyth, 2012, p. 31) forced into Residential schools, we are mindful that the history and ongoing settlement on unceded territories needs to be well and truly understood. By the same token, we cannot rest content with a critical, socio-historical awareness, just as we ought not settle for land acknowledgments overlaying PHE curricula that do not oblige us to consider the very curricular means of moving toward reconciliation. The practices of breathing, earthing, and naturing are starting points not just for doing our own body and soul work but also for gearing PHE curricula toward the harmonious relations which we want to affirm. The decolonization and reconciliation efforts to which we can contribute directly as PHE practitioners involve “being-becoming indigenist” ourselves—“to connect deeply with and embody soul, place and relational accountability” (Tanaka, 2016, p. 210)—through the motions of land affirmation afforded to us.

We trust others will be similarly inspired by the various practices to which we have referred and for which we have provided diverse sources and resources. These practices of

breathing, earthing, and naturing are indicative of an indigenization of PHE curricular and pedagogical processes that are already in the making. As we both witness and participate in the growing popularity of these practices around the world and appreciate how they tap into essential motion, mimetic, and ecological aspects of land affirmation, we come to a fuller awareness of just what is possible in moving naturally toward reconciliation.

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