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MASTER'S PROJECT: DIVERSE EXPERIENCES, STORIES, AND IMPACTS OF
LAND-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AT MAPLEHILL SCHOOL AND
MY PERSONAL LEARNING JOURNEY IN RELATION TO POWER, PRIVILEGE,
AND IDENTITY.

A Project Presented

By

Vivian Stein

To

The Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master's Degree Specializing in Leadership for Sustainability

October 2019

Defense Date: August 27th, 2019

Committee:

Matthew Kolan, Ph.D., Advisor

Heather Laine Talley, Ph.D., Professional Affiliate

Abstract

Throughout the past seven years I have been inspired and transformed by my relationship with Maplehill School and Community Farm. This research project seeks to explore a community's connection with land through the lens of serving youth with social, emotional, cognitive, and developmental disabilities and traumas. This project explores my personal learning journey in relationship to power, privilege, and identity. What are the diverse experiences, stories, and impacts resulting from land-based educational programming at Maplehill School? How do I understand my personal learning journey in relation to power, privilege, and identity? The following research explores interwoven stories from youth at Maplehill School as well as the land it is situated on, and myself.

Gratitude

For the Maplehill School and Community Farm, you are the catalyst and inspiration for this Master's degree and research project. Our relationship is a gift of mind, body, and spirit. You teach me to listen with my whole being and build relationships through humility and vulnerability. You have brought me joy and meaning. I continue to learn so much about myself, the land, and being in community. I am grateful.

For my family, you are my grounding force. To my brothers, Mike and Dan, you hold space for me to be my authentic self in all forms. Mike thank you for being my editor and allowing me to talk through my project every step of the way. Dan thank you for your thought provoking worldviews and big brother encouragement. Dad thank you for your unconditional love. Mom your spirit body surrounds me and guides me. Pat thank you for your support. Lastly I want to call in my ancestors past and future: you are the reason I am here. I am grateful.

For this MLS cohort, you taught me a great deal and I am forever changed by our experience together. A special gratitude for Malcolm and Corina, my capstone accountability partners, these past two years have been a gift. Our conversations have been inspiring and full of unpacking power/privilege as well as full of connection and laughter. You are beautiful humans. Thank you Heather, my anchor coach, for our conversations - I am in awe of how you ask questions and encourage me to think about things in a new way. I am grateful.

For the land, you ground me - physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

I am Grateful.

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Sowing Seeds
(Introduction)
Placing Myself, Youth, and Land-based Education

Maplehill School is situated on over two hundred acres of land in Plainfield, Vermont, Abenaki territory. We serve youth between the ages of 12 and 22 who live with social, emotional, cognitive, and developmental disabilities and traumas. Maplehill Schools mission statement states; "Maplehill School is a safe, caring, land-based educational community where relationships inspire learning." This project has been informed by being in relationship to, and inspired by Maplehill School. How do diverse experiences and stories reveal the impact of land-based educational programming at Maplehill School? How do I understand my personal learning journey in relation to power, privilege, and identity?

Charles, a youth at Maplehill, says, "It's a big property - and there is lots to learn from it." Charles arrived at Maplehill School over five years ago - he barely spoke and was slow to build trust. He is diagnosed with autism and developmental trauma. Developmental trauma is defined as exposure to prolonged adverse events from infancy to early adolescence (Van Der Kolk 2014). During our conversations, Charles shared with me how the land at Maplehill School calms him, is a great source of exercise, and has amazing views. Charles thrives at Maplehill School these days. He spends the seasons

harvesting fruits from the garden, building fires in the winter snow, learning about the trees - especially the gift of the maple tree sap and the birch for its fire starting bark, and enjoying our surroundings.

Cultivation (Methods)

This research project highlights stories of diverse and shared experiences in relation to land. I have chosen stories because I believe they reveal the interconnectedness of relationship. Lentfer (2019) explains, "...stories can be vehicles for people to consider consequences and be more inclusive...Stories require people to slow down, and listen — not just achieve."

Youth at Maplehill School were asked to partake in an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire contained eight questions, which asked youth to share about their journey to Maplehill School, a highlight at Maplehill School, their connection to land through their emotions, getting their needs met, and building relationships - as well as anything else the student wanted to share with me. I originally chose to administer the questionnaire with six students from the approximately twenty-eight enrolled students - this was based on relationships, time allotted, and participation in land-based activities. Two additional students later partook in the questionnaire during the course of this project because the opportunity arose based on schedule alignment, and not

based on the original considered factors. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 1 - some questions were reframed slightly depending on student's social, emotional, and cognitive ability. The consent form to participate can be found in appendix 2.

In addition to spending time with the stories youth shared, I was also dedicated to examining my power, privilege, and identity as an educator and farmer. Self-reflection and learning was tracked through prompt journaling, daily notes, check in calls with my capstone team, anchor coach, co-workers/friends and tending to the land. Layla Saad, inspired my journaling prompts, with her *Me and White Supremacy Workbook* (2018) and *Food Solutions New England's 21-day Racial Equity Habit-building Challenge* (April 2019). Throughout the semester I participated in a monthly gathering, with 7 female and non-binary white presenting people, circled around *Emergent Strategy* (2017) by adrienne maree brown. Our gatherings addressed self-reflection in relationship with white supremacy through check-ins, grounding practices, listening, and learning-labs.

In adrienne maree brown's 2017 book, *Emergent Strategy*, she shares an "assessment of fractals" (p.185) in which she asks an individual to receive feedback from a trusted community on how one shows up in the world. Her sample questions were adapted for this project in order to check in with my

capstone accountability group throughout the course of our projects. Our

adapted questions are:

1. What is your vision in the world? What do you see as your impact in the world? How do your impact and vision align?
2. How does your impact sustain or challenge white supremacy?
3. How are you embodying your impact and vision? How does it feel in your body?
4. Where do you see room for growth? Did anything happen this month where you stepped up or where you wanted to and didn't? How would you do it differently and/or how would you imagine a different result?

We, as a group, listened and record each other's responses while creating space for self-reflective and partner-share feedback. We met bi-weekly to keep each other in alignment with our visions in between our accountability question sessions.

Land-based education is a term used in the context at Maplehill School to refer to programming out on the land (e.g. maple sugaring, animal chores, landscape tending, and garden work). While I believe these activities are part of land-based education I recognize that indigenous wisdom incorporates connection to land as mother, spirit, living kin, and source of life supporting forces. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) has been a leading source in my understanding of indigenous wisdom in relation to land. Reading and reflecting on Kimmerer's stories of human and plant relationships impacted my

awareness around my relationship to land as a non-native working within a land-based educational system. Articles by Tuck, Mckenzie & McCoy (2014) and Styres (2011) served as sources of inspiration as I reflected on my power, privilege, and identity learning journey in relation to land-based education.

Harvest (Results)

In the 2005 book, *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World*, Fritjof Capra is quoted,

“Understanding relationships is not easy, especially for those of us educated within a scientific framework, because Western science has always maintained that only the things that can be measured and quantified can be expressed in scientific models. It’s often been implied that phenomena that can be measured and quantified are more important - and maybe even that what cannot be measured and quantified doesn’t exist at all. Relationships and context, however, cannot be put on a scale or measured with a ruler.” (p.21)

Brad, age 17, shared his story about reconnecting with himself through maple sugaring and tending to our beef and jersey cow herd. He told me that Maplehill School’s focus on land-based education, through hands-on experiences, has helped him manage his anger. The personal experiences Brad

talked about with me strengthened our relationship and cannot be measured on a scale as Capra talks about. As Brad heads toward graduation he and I talk about the impact our cow grazing program has had time at Maplehill. As Robin Kimmerer describes: "Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond" (Kimmerer, 2013, p.125). Brad has loved being in relation to the land through cow grazing and in return he feels the earth healing his wounds and loving him back. His time at Maplehill has transformed the way he shows up to honor the land he is not native to.

I was deeply moved by the youth at Maplehill School and their sharings about their experiences and stories in relation to land-based education. My perception about what they would offer turned into incredible conversations and moments for relationship building in connection to land.

I am deeply connected to the land as a farmer and educator. Opening the first seed packet in the spring reminds me of the cycle of life - each seed a gift from the earth. My relationship with land as a farmer began over ten years ago, I was fresh out of college and processing the inevitable loss of my mother to cancer. I knew tending to the land was my calling when my hands first touched the warm soil. Each season I am filled with amazement when the first

squash blossom opens its delicate yellow petals. I must work to heal my internal conditions, the soil, so I can show up for my community, the fruit of our collective story.

I am a cis-white woman forming relationship with land that is not my native homeland. Kimmerer (2013, p.207), asks, "What happens when we truly become native to a place, when we finally make a home? Where are the stories that lead the way?" The Abenaki people have stories to tell, the maple trees have their story, the beanstalks have another, and the water that flows from below my feet yet another - each interconnected. Kimmerer's questions above have required me to examine the stories that have led me on the path I am on today. The privileges I am afforded based on my identity has clouded the ways I listen to these stories. Eve Tuck et al. (2014, p.7) brought awareness to the ways in which I had not considered my occupation on stolen land and/or Indigenous peoples fight for reclaiming of their land. I will never be native to this place I call home. I must listen to the stories of the Abenaki people and the land and honor their wisdom. I must center Indigenous worldviews and understandings of land. Centering Indigenous wisdom requires me to examine the ongoing ways in which settler colonialism impacts my worldviews and the education system I serve in.

Land-based education is more than the act of participating in activities on the two hundred plus acres Maplehill School is situated. Land and land-based education as revealed by some Indigenous scholars "...should involve an analysis of territory and settler colonialism; center indigenous realities" says Calderon (Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy, 2014, p.3) and "...land informs pedagogy through storied relationships that are etched into the essence of every rock, tree, seed, animal, pathway and waterway in relation to the Aboriginal people who have existed on the land since time immemorial" (Styres, 2011, p.721).

I have been a farmer at Maplehill School for seven years and my story with this land is just beginning. Learning from, and about, the land has required me to re-establish new narratives and storylines. The Abenaki people of Vermont tended the land long before Maplehill School arrived. If we are a land-based organization then the story of the land must be listened to and told. It is our responsibility as a community to integrate the history of the Abenaki people and the land into our curriculum and community agreements. I have begun working with the licensed teachers at Maplehill School to craft curriculum addressing our relationship with the land. Youth who attend Maplehill School are not usually focused on land-based education when they arrive. My intention

is that youth will learn and leave Maplehill School with an education that brings awareness to the land and its story.

Tending
(Evaluation/Assessment)

Lily has been at Maplehill for over five years. When I asked Lily about a time she felt connected to land she shared with me a story of walking up to a large rock in the pasture. She shared with me how it calmed her and made her feel in her mind and body, and that it was just what she needed. Lily comes out to the garden about once a season to pick raspberries - she talks about it all year and waits for the moment we can pick together. She has learned that being in relationship with the raspberries, and the large rock in the pasture, encourages her to speak her truth and find connection with herself and the land. Lily has shared stories with the land, connecting her with the history and wisdom that came long before her. Whenever Lily crosses path with a raspberry or raspberry bush she is reminded of its life cycle and her own journey.

I evaluated and assessed the quality of this project by being in relationship to the community at Maplehill School, the land, and myself. Relationships have the power to reveal what may exist beyond my conscious awareness. This culmination capstone paper and presentation has been a tool

for evaluation/assessment - writing and reflection have shed light on the successes and areas for growth within my work.

My aspirations for this project were in alignment sometimes and other times it was challenging. They were in alignment when I was meeting with students listening to their stories and being in relationship the land at Maplehill School. They were in alignment when I was in conversation and receiving feedback from my capstone partners, anchor coach, co-workers, and friends. Lastly, they were in alignment when I was learning about the history of the land and the Abenaki people who tended it before our arrival. There were many times during this project where I felt discouraged by time constraints and self-doubt. There were many moments where I was battling white supremacy in my body.

Revealing the impact of land-based education with youth at Maplehill School was my initial aspiration. Sharing stories and experiences connected youth with the impact of being in relation to the land at Maplehill School. The results have impacted how I show up each day in relationship with the community I serve. I am now more than ever able to share my story - by engaging in conversations with staff, students, and the land from a place of vulnerability and humility.

Crop Rotation
(Recommendations/Next Steps/Key Learnings)

There is much more that needs to be explored in terms of land-based education and its relationship with Maplehill School Community and myself. The voices of the land, through indigenous wisdom, need to be more explicitly taught and collectively shared as a community of practice.

I commit myself to ongoing learning as I lean deeper into honoring land-based education, the youth I serve, and my own privilege awareness journey. Learning, as it is ongoing, will integrate land-based conversations and curriculum rooted in indigenous wisdom as well as a commitment to honoring each member of our community as they are. Further information on my commitments, personal recommendations, and next steps can be found in appendix 3.

“I can take the buried stone from my heart and plant it here, restoring land, restoring culture, restoring myself” (Kimmerer, 2013, p.266). Kimmerer's questions from above about becoming native to a place and making it a home involves me taking the buried stone of my power, privilege, and identity and planting it. Planting the seeds of my awareness journey and tending to them is crucial to my ongoing learning. My capstone journey has been a reveal of what

lies beneath the surface - uncovering a story toward restoration of the land I call home, the culture I identify with, and my heart.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Student Questionnaire

1. Tell me about how you came to Maplehill. How is Maplehill different from your previous school? Or, can you tell me about your journey to Maplehill and how it is different from your last placement?
2. What's one of your favorite memories/experiences at Maplehill?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you felt connected to the land at Maplehill? And/or can you share a story with me about a time when you felt connected to a land-based project or experience at Maplehill?
4. How did that make you feel?
5. Has being at Maplehill helped you connect you with your emotions?, if so How? Can you share a story with me about how Maplehill has helped you connect with your emotions/ability to manage them?
6. Can you tell me about how you feel your needs were met by your experience with land? How has being at Maplehill helped connect you to your voice? And/or can you share a story with me about how Maplehill has helped you connect with your voice/ability to ask for what you need?
7. Can you tell about whether your experience on the land connected you to another human or non-human? How has being at Maplehill helped you develop deeper relationships? And/or can you share a story about whether your experience with the land has connected you to another human or non-human?
8. Anything else you'd like to share

Appendix 2

Consent Form

Greetings Maplehill School Community,

Over the past year and a half I have been working towards a Master's degree in Leadership for Sustainability from The University of Vermont. My capstone project will look at whether Maplehill School's land-based educational programming leads to a connection with land that then facilitates self regulation, self advocacy, and relationship building. Throughout the next few months I will be administering surveys with students designed to answer this question. This study is designed to highlight the voices of the land and students we serve.

As a community member if you would like to participate in this research study please let me know.

Each participant must complete a consent form. Please review the below consent form and submit it to Vivian Stein at Maplehill School. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

With Gratitude,
Vivian Stein
Farm Educator
802-454-1169
vivian@maplehillschoolandfarm.org

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
University of Vermont - Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural
Resources Burlington, Vermont
Masters of Science in Leadership for Sustainability - Spring 2019

Title of Study: A Case Study: What is the Impact of Land-Based Educational Programming at Maplehill School and Community Farm?

Researcher: Vivian Stein, M.S. Leadership for Sustainability,
vivian@maplehillschoolandfarm.org

You are being asked to be in a research study looking at the impact of land-based education at Maplehill School and Community Farm. You were

selected as a participant because you attend the Maplehill School and Community Farm as a currently enrolled student, you are a parent and/or guardian, or you are an employee. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of the study is to look at whether Maplehill School's land-based educational programming leads to a connection with land that then facilitates self regulation, self advocacy, and relationship building. This research will be part of my Master's degree capstone project - which will include a paper and presentation.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do partake in a monthly survey. This survey will contain no more than 10 questions and will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Each survey will be administered by the researcher. There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. There may be discomfort from students being asked vulnerable questions about their connection with land, self regulation, self advocacy, and relationship building. The benefits of participation include creating deeper connections with land and the self as part of the Maplehill School community and its networks. By being a part of the study students will engage with questions that highlight their voices as it relates to the land-based educational programming Maplehill School offers.

The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. I will not include any sensitive information (ie: name) in any report I may publish that would make it possible to identify you. However, you will be given the opportunity to review and approve any material that is published about you, if you choose. If you choose to be identified in this study a further consent form will need to be signed.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at anytime without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or Maplehill School. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the study at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at anytime feel free to contact

me, Vivian Stein at vivian@maplehillsschoolandfarm.org. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Subjects Name (Printed): _____ Date: _____
Subjects Signature: _____

Parent or Guardian (Printed): _____ Date: _____
Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Researches Name (Printed): _____ Date: _____
Researchers Signature: _____

Appendix 3 Continued Learning Assessment

The following assessment tool is intended to track my learning inquiries and designed to hold me accountable throughout the 2019/20 year. Inspired by this capstone project the upcoming year will be a time for reflection and integration. I acknowledge the insights and curiosities that arose from this capstone project will be carried forward for well beyond a year. I acknowledge that a commitment to revealing my power and privilege in relation to youth and land-based education is at the heart of my service. At the end of the 2020 Summer I will reassess my learnings and insights.

Personal Learning

- Continue to reflect on the accountability questions inspired by adrienne maree brown and my capstone team. Once a month check back in with the questions and journal about new insights revealed.
- Continue to check in with my personal accountability team (co-workers and friends) - asking for feedback on ways in which I show up to challenge dominance and oppression.
- Attend monthly gatherings in my local community supporting social justice change work - ie: Emergent Strategy working group, Stand Up for Racial Justice gatherings.

- Revisit Journal writings from the past two years and highlight/reflect on patterns, new insights, and continued curiosities.
- Revisit and build on the resources listed below - monthly choose a reading and journal about deeper insight into how I personally show up in the world.
 - <https://www.foodsolutionsne.org>
 - <https://whiteawake.org/self-education/themes-and-resources/>
 - <https://awakeningthehorse.wordpress.com/category/decolonization/>
 - Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants, By Robin Wall Kimmerer
 - Teaching to Transgress, by bell hooks

Land-Based Education at Maplehill School

- Continue to engage the conversation with staff and students around their/our understanding of land-based education - Create a follow-up open-ended questionnaire for youth and staff to engage with, once the data is gathered share the results at a staff meeting. This will allow for continued conversation engaging Maplehill School community in future discussion around the integration of land-based education.
- Work with Special Education teachers to create and/or resource curriculum around land-based education
- Attend Abenaki gatherings and workshops - through the Ethan Allen Homestead, the Vermont Abenaki Artists Association, and other pop events as posted through social media.
- Increase knowledge base around native plants - bring in more native cultivars to the Maplehill School property. Create native plant garden.
- Revisit and build on the resources listed below - monthly choose a reading and journal about deeper insights into how I can show up for the youth and community I serve.
 - [Discovering Black Vermont](#)
 - <https://www.farmbasededucation.org/justice>
 - <http://www.soulfirefarm.org/food-sovereignty-education/youth-program/>
 - [The Storytelling Project Curriculum](#)
 - An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States, by Roxeanne Dunbar-Ortiz
 - Farming While Black, by Leah Penniman

- Wetland, Woodland, Wildland: A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont, by Elizabeth H. Thompson & Eric R. Sorenson
- Voices of the Dawn: An Autohistory of the Abenaki Nation, by Frederick Matthew Wiseman
- Vermont's Natural Heritage: Conserving Biological Diversity in the Green Mountain State, by The Vermont Biodiversity Project
- Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Mapping the Long View, by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck, & K. Wayne Yang
- Land Education: Rethinking Pedagogies of Place from Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives, by Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie & Kate McCoy