Many Voices Speak The River: Education in an Adventure—River—Landscape

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I sat there and forgot and forgot, until what remained was the river that went by and I who watched. On the river the heat mirages danced with each other and then they danced through each other and then they joined hands and danced around each other. Eventually the watcher joined the river, and then there was only one of us. I believe it was the river.

—Maclean 1976, 61

In the southern hemisphere Autumn of 2002 I spent six weeks working and travelling in the South Island of New Zealand. My work included visiting academics and students in outdoor and adventure education programs within tertiary institutions, to give lectures, seminars, and to work with staff and students on field trips. It had been more than fifteen years since I last visited New Zealand, and on this trip I focussed my interests on the coastal plains and the rivers, towns, and people that are to be found there. It is clear that certain commercial interests are promoting a fascinating cultural and ecological experiment in New Zealand. Vast tracks of the country have been commodified and packaged for
tourists into an adventure-landscape. It is impossible to avoid the everywhere adventure presence. Exiting the aircraft, before leaving the terminal, each new arrival soon sees that New Zealand is THE country for adventurers. Posters, tourist paraphernalia in shop fronts, and walls covered in brochures all call you to ride-wild-rapids, ski-virgin-powder snow-covered mountains, walk in primeval forests, and cast a fishing line in untainted waters. New Zealand is presented as clean, green, and pristine—and it’s all out there waiting!

In the time and space between visits, I had developed a keener eye for the tensions located in adventure education and the complex and sometimes contradictory ways that we experience the land. My research interest is located in the confluence of ideals we hold for adventure experiences and the places where those adventures are enacted, in this case on the rivers that flow out of the Southern Alps of New Zealand’s South Island. As a practitioner and researcher in outdoor and adventure education I am interested in how the places we encounter in educational practice are presented and structured into learning experiences, and how these places work on us, as we work on them.

I begin with a brief analysis of some of the meanings of landscape and adventure. I then introduce phenomenology as an inquiry approach into explaining the meaning of human experience, and specifically discuss the aims and processes of hermeneutic writing and the ability of the texts it produces to orient the reader to a “critical pedagogical competence” (van Manen 2001, 8). A poetic hermeneutic text, Many Voices Speak The River, is presented in a way which constitutes a novel approach to researching the complex and contradictory ways that we encounter and socially construct rivers in adventure experiences. The text is presented with an end-in-view, which is to apply a committed orientation to the pedagogical issues that surface in a river adventure education. I conclude with a sample and a lesson—“plausible insights” (van Manen 2001, 9)—that are intended to serve other researchers and practitioners in their efforts to comprehend the adventure education experience.
The rivers I paddled on with staff and students are real rivers. This seems a ridiculously obvious statement. Our buoyant kayaks and canoes floated upon the surface of these rivers, the spray hitting our faces was icy-cold, a scoop of river water in a billy, brought to the boil to make a brew, sustained us. All of us on the river trips experienced the real physical and material river—the river-itself. But equally, the river seemed able to divide, to braid into many different rivers, each seemingly imagined and presented differently. The adventurer’s river contrasted the historical, the poetic, the geophysical, and each seemed to flow separately through the landscape. The one river became many rivers to many people. Each of these many rivers is spoken, written about, and referred to very differently. Many voices speak the one river into many rivers and an awareness of this phenomena is critical to the work of adventure educators.

That we socially construct multiple interpretations of the same landscape is not a new concept. But the significance of this in the pedagogy of adventure education, where the landscape is often interpreted and presented narrowly as wild-nature and as testing-ground, has received insufficient discussion. Educational programs in the outdoors often romanticize ‘nature’ and claim environmental values are learnt by participants, or they set physical and emotional challenges in remote places and claim personal and social development outcomes. It is rare, in adventure education, that the landscape is encountered ‘on its own terms,’ or even that the landscape has stories to tell.

American landscape scholar J. B. Jackson (1984) believes that we have come to use the word landscape carelessly. The geographer D. W. Meinig (1979) presents a simple exercise worthy of consideration for adventure educators. He writes of a group of people from a similar background standing in the countryside, viewing the same scene. Independently they ‘see’ the same landscape differently as nature, habitat, artefact, system, problem, ideology, wealth, history, aesthetic, and place. Meinig recognizes that we may construct the same landscape in multiple combinations of these interpretations—often internalising complex and contradictory meanings. For Jackson, the old fashioned definition of landscape as “a portion of the earth’s surface that can be understood at a glance” (1984, 8) has begun to change and evolve. Might we need to pay careful attention to some of these new meanings? A brief exploration of some of these changing meanings is needed.

Bate (2000, 132) suggests that a “land-scape means land as shaped, as arranged, by a viewer. The point of view of the modern observer, not the land itself.” He is right in the first instance, and wrong, I feel, in the second. Raffan explains (1992, 6) that “although land exists, the scape is a projection of the human consciousness … [the] land—the thing you can walk on, measure, map, paint, buy, sell, and assay—is transformed in the human mind into landscape, a much broader, far reaching, and illusive entity.” Again, I think Raffan is right in the first instance, and wrong in the second. The land-itself exists and is always and everywhere beneath and beyond our socially constructed interpretations. But it is where Raffan suggests that the human mind landscape is a “much broader, far reaching, and illusive entity” that I feel he errs. The land-itself always escapes our capability for understanding and comprehension—but not our ability to embody it within our limited experience. We experience it at all times and in all places and it is always broader, more far reaching and elusive than our interpretations. Our experience of the land is both embodied and socially constructed in character, and these experiences work on each other in a reciprocal manner. When we work on the land, and alter it materially by our presence and actions (say, by building a dam to produce hydro-electricity or, more modestly, by pitching camp on its banks and simply walking across a beach of river stones to the water’s edge) we are driven to do so through acting out our socially constructed relations and desires for experiencing the river landscape. Kayakers for example, like to ‘play’ on river waves whilst engineers wish to ‘harness’ the river’s energy and put it to other uses. And, of course, it is quite possible that some engineers may also be kayakers. As we modify the river, it in turn re-creates us through both our embodied and socially constructed experiences.

Two interesting pedagogical questions arise here for adventure educators. Firstly, how do we attend to the social constructions we are both subjected to and contribute to, as they are
shared cultural phenomena, as we view and act in the landscape? Secondly, how do we attend, in pedagogical situations, to the experience of the river that we cannot fully articulate or comprehend? As adventure educators we potentially structure experiences that are narrow and increasingly limited as encounters of the river or, alternatively, we may encourage experiences that include more expansive stories of the adventure-landscape.

For many adventure educators remote, wilderness, and ‘natural’ areas are often presented as ideal settings for adventure activities that challenge participants physically, mentally, and emotionally. These places are legitimized as ‘learning places’ where the “physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual faculties are all engaged. Attention to one part of our being waxes and wanes, but there is connectedness, a continuum throughout the experience” (Miles 1986/87, 36). Further, Miles (1990) believes that the rare gift of teaching in wilderness brings a great burden of responsibility to the educator. He argues that ‘wilderness educators’ (his term);

must teach responsibly for nature and wild land values….must help their clients learn the special lessons about nature and human nature which may be revealed in wild places, lessons which may help them back home to do their part to assure sustainability of nature and civilization. (Miles 1990, 43)

The use of adventure activities in outdoor environments is considered by most to be at the core of adventure education. Lists of educational benefits; psychological, sociological, personal, moral (Ewert 1985; Mortlock 1987; Priest and Gass 1997), are presented as truths so central to the cause as to be almost above challenge. Remote or ‘wilderness’ areas are seen as ideal settings for journeying and adventure activities which challenge participants physically, mentally, and emotionally’ (Lugg 1999). These values are exemplified in Outward Bound style programs where personal development and team building are considered the most significant learning outcomes. It is the addition of claims that outdoor adventure-based learning will teach participants responsible relationships with ‘nature,’ whilst continuing to adhere to personal and social outcomes of adventure experiences, that is most problematic.

Miles’ sentiments seem admirable, but these sentiments in adventure education rarely seem to be supported by careful analysis of the ‘special lessons,’ or how they may be ‘revealed’ only in ‘wild’ places, and how it is that they may ‘transfer’ to the participant’s wider life experience. These would seem to be critical omissions. Examinations of these omissions are vital to an adventure education that responds to the land and the landscapes where we work.
This is difficult and challenging work, for it calls us to examine and re-examine our practices for the narratives that instruct and sustain them. Some of these narratives are bound to be contradictory, as already indicated through reference to Meinig’s views about ‘seeing’ (socially constructing) the landscape in many different ways. But if we fail to take up this challenge we arrive at an impasse, and our pedagogy risks being responsive only to the dominant social constructions of the day—and some of these may all too easily shift our practice into ‘places’ we do not want to go. A gap may quickly open between what educators claim an adventure education experience is about, and what it can realistically deliver, particularly in terms of the participant’s experience of a relationship with the land.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Recent developments in philosophical inquiry into the nature of lived experience offer us a passage through this impasse. During my New Zealand visit I collected ‘evidence’ that might help in answering the two pedagogical questions I outlined earlier—research data if you like. This data is quite different in both form and intent than data normally collected in research where behavioural and positivistic methods of inquiry tend to dominate. This data is found in anecdote, observation, poem, and written statement, and each form provides potential insights into the complex and contradictory experiences of the adventure-river-landscape. This evidence must contribute to a rigorous research approach that allows us to draw conclusions about the nature of our pedagogic practice in the river adventure experience.

Phenomenology is a way of doing philosophy that has gained favour in the 20th century. It is, according to Moran, “a radical way of doing philosophy, a practice rather than a system” (2000, 4). The emphasis in phenomenology is on the phenomena itself and how it reveals itself to us through our direct experience of the subject matter of inquiry. When we adopt a phenomenological orientation we are attempting “to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to the consciousness, of the experiencer” (Moran 2000, 4).

We are doing phenomenology when we find ourselves being-inside the question we seek to answer and we are doing hermeneutic writing when we try to put the essential nature of that being-inside the experience into words. There is a deep human need for us to share these stories. The lesson of this particular text then, is the need for us to find the stories where we work—and our role as educators in their making, their telling, and re-telling.
Hermeneutic writing involves the careful writing and construction of interpretive texts. These texts allow the research/writer and the reader to mutually interact with the essence of the phenomena being studied. van Manen expands (2001, 129).

Writing involves a textual reflection in the sense of separation and confronting ourselves with what we know, distancing ourselves from the lifeworld, decontextualising our thoughtful preoccupations from immediate action, abstracting and objectifying our lived understandings from our concrete involvements, and all this for the sake of now reuniting us with what we know, drawing us more closely to living relations and situations of the lifeworld, turning thought to a more tactful praxis, and concretising and subjectifying our deepened understating in practical action.

van Manen’s description of the passage from textual reflection, to momentary decontextualizing of the experience, and then subsequent return to a more tactful praxis, is what makes the hermeneutic approach so worthwhile to educators. We have a commitment to understanding the real meaning of experience—before, during, and after its ‘social construction.’ This intentionally serves a better comprehension of educational practice. The most demanding challenge though, is the initial suspension of our assumptions of experiences via their everyday ‘social construction.’ We have to give ourselves over to the “the experience of the experienced thing” (Seamon 1979, 20). We become much more aware of the role of subjectivity in the attachment to, and drawing meaning from experience. A genuine effort is called for in order that explanations are not imposed before “the phenomena have been understood from within” (Moran 2000, 4). The phenomenological method compels us to be sensitive “to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak” (van Manen 2001, 111).

No strict methodological structure can be given to the phenomenological researcher. Rather, the researcher must enter the situation striving for meaningful insights into the essential nature of human experiences. Exemplary hermeneutic texts may serve as role models, yet each text must find a way into and through the labyrinth of many meanings that spring from each experience. Phenomenology does not offer a theory or a mechanism for the control of experience. Yet it does offer us a way inside the apparent mystery of human experience and can deliver us to a “critical pedagogical competence…[a] knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of carefully edified thoughtfulness” (van Manen 2001, 8).

Many Voices Speak The River

Intuitions, diaries, journals, logs, documents, statements, poems, literature, observations, anecdotes, and interviews all provide the phenomenological researcher with ways into the construction of the hermeneutic text. In Many Voices Speak The River I have attempted both wittingly and, I hope pre-reflectively, to bring to text some insight to the one-and-

http://ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v09n01/articles/wattchow.html (6 of 14)
many rivers on which we adventure. The text’s sources are anecdotes drawn from the field trips with two different tertiary program groups, observation, and tourist promotional material gathered on a walk through the streets of Queenstown (the adventure tourist town Mecca of New Zealand), from New Zealand nature and landscape literature, and from Geoff Park’s environmental history of the coastal plains Nga Uruora (The Groves of Life): Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape (1995). Within the text are also placed archetypal statements from the theoretical literature of adventure education (Ewert 1989; Luckner & Nadler 1997). These draw the writer and reader’s attention back to the orientation of the text, which is to the development of a critical pedagogical competence in adventure education.

There is no intentional privileging of any of the voices over another and each voice is as potentially as significant as the next. The voices are represented through textual fragments (quotes, anecdotes, commentary) and in the voice that speaks to the reader in the confluences and clashes between fragments. In this sense Many Voices Speaks The River is not a ‘classic’ hermeneutic text as it is not a purposeful, reflective, textual presentation of something by the author alone. In this case I am more concerned to faithfully represent the many voices I encountered and also to provide space for the conversations between them. The only conscious filter applied in the selection of voices other than my own voice (which is written in italics), is the ability they have to compel us to reflect upon the pedagogical interests of this paper.

There is no ‘right’ way to read the text. It deliberately attempts to escape the usual linearity of narrative and readers may venture from left to right, from top to bottom, in cluster, or back and forth, and so on. I hope you will find it interesting enough to experience more than one reading. The text attempts to bring into being a polyphonic (many sounded/many voiced) account of the experience of the adventure-river-landscape. As you go to Many Voices Speak The River, remember that your voice, the reader’s voice, is as mutually engaged in the seeking of essential meaning as any of the voices on paper in the text.

**MANY VOICES SPEAK THE RIVER**

**Drawing meaning from Many Voices Speak the River**

With van Manen’s “critical pedagogical competence: [a] knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations” (2001, 8) in mind, how might the hermeneutic text of Many Voices Speak The River assist us towards greater pedagogic tactfulness in adventure education? Firstly, it is a sample of the real and socially constructed rivers of particular persons, cultures, and a part of the world, a being-inside the adventure-river-landscape, and you, the reader, may discover insights that spring from the text that serve your teaching practice. Secondly, it is potentially instructional to other adventure educators as it contains a (not the) ‘lesson’ for educators to find their way inside the landscape narratives where they work.

**A Sample: Being-inside the adventure-river-landscape**

Many Voices Speak The River is a way of questioning how part of the world is experienced and it reflects a desire to know the world in a certain kind of way. How can my wanderings-along and wonderings-upon these encounters with New Zealand rivers, and their texts, be of relevance to others in distant places working in different pedagogical contexts? Can we justifiably venture from the particular to the universal, and how might we learn from this hermeneutic text? The answers to these questions are found in the text’s intelligibility (van Manen, 2001), its deep subjectivity, and its ability to instruct us in listening to many voices.

During the act of writing Many Voices Speak The River I encountered three surprises. The first belongs to the theme of adventure-river-landscape. My initial intent was to construct a
text about the New Zealand adventure-landscape, and I had been attentive on my travels and encounters and collected many statements and anecdotes that would have served that purpose. But the river surfaced and began to take control of the narratives within the text. It is fair to say that rivers and ways of experiencing them have been a significant part of my life experience for more than twenty years, both personally and as an educator and writer. I have previously written of rivers as physical and intuitive journeys (1998), of how crafting a canoe paddle can mediate the meeting of body and river (1999), and how conceiving of the river as *place* requires us to reconsider our outdoor pedagogy (2001). Collectively, through these reflections and the experiences that inspired them, I have embodied and understood the river as both adventure and teaching landscape pre-reflectively and intellectually, in much the same way as a teacher does the ‘life’ and ‘mood’ of their classroom and school.

There exists a kind of universality of experience that springs from the essential qualities of experiencing rivers that many of you will share with me, that comes through text. van Manen (2001) calls this the potential *intelligibility* of the text. It may resonate with you, the reader who shares something of the essential adventure-river-landscape experience. You may feel your own experiences within and through the text. When you do, you may draw meaning from the text that is useful in your own pedagogic context. You may question and interrogate the text and drift into your own reflections—this is the mutual voice that each reader finds, working in, on and out of the text. This may be particularly strong for those readers who are adventure educators, working with participants on rivers—who may encounter similar social constructions of rivers as adventuring places. But the *intelligibility* of the text may also speak to other educators in other settings who work amongst their own socially contested and ambiguous grounds, where many voices vie to be heard.

The second surprise was the presence of river stones, and their many manifestations; in and on the edges of the rivers, as re-located cemented-in-place and caged-in architectural structures, as Rock Garden rapid, metaphoric syllables, carved away river channels, as “missing rock walls by centimetres,” and even as cornerstones to theory. To me the presence of stones emerged as a kind of dreamscape. Their apparent permanence, as opposed to the fleeting presence of water rushing over them, or people rushing past them, seems confounded by the human actions taken against them. Stones and rock seem the very essence of materiality, the very bedrock of experience, yet suddenly they are removed from the river to become part of an architectural landscape which houses very different intentions.
Walking barefoot upon river stones, their round edge jostling beneath the body’s weight, giving way yet supporting, is a sensuous pleasure known to most river travellers. It is one example of sound, smell, and touch working its way into our deep being with the river. Equally, cupping a river stone in your hands, this tiny fragment of the river, reveals a far greater whole. The long geophysical story of the river and its land shines through the facet of a mica crystal reflecting the sun, or a paper thin seam of quartz splitting the flesh pink granitic grains of the stone. All tell a story of the deep past reaching through time to that moment—that meeting. Of a time before history leaping forward to be cupped in hand. This dreamscape of stones seems to call out to remind me to pay very close attention to the constant tension between the material/physical river-itself (and the experiences that we embody pre-reflectively) and the meanings we imagine, construct and attach to our river experiences.

The presence of the stones emerge as a way of being-inside the complex and contested adventure-river-landscape. Their presence is embodied through the senses, but equally they work as a powerful metaphor. As educators we often feel compelled to locate our pedagogy in the seemingly stable world of rational thought and theory—we are constantly called upon to justify and objectify. Yet this apparent stability and objectivity shifts dramatically beneath our weight and that which seemed certain becomes uncertain. The dreamscape, the intuitive, and the highly subjective is required, not to replace, but to compliment our ability to theorize our pedagogical practice. Each of us has dreamscapes, as do our students, to which we, and they can attend. They will lead us to aspects of our experience of the world to which no rational pathway exists.

The third surprise surfaced in the confluence and juxta-positioning of voices from the collected statements, writings, fragments of poems, and anecdotes. If we give ourselves up from inherently narrow individual experiences, memories, and interpretations to a wider world of shared encounters with adventure-river-landscapes, we gain insights difficult, if not impossible, to achieve otherwise. If we can hear the many voices in the text, and the voices that occupy the space between them (including our own), we can reach a kind of ‘listening’ state that leads to ‘plausible insight.’ The challenge here is to initially, suspend our belief in what we think the text should be telling us.

Post-reading reflection seems to clarify our ideological preferences—the river as wealth, as testing-ground for the human ego, as a place of colonial expansion, as a wild force, as a place always populated by human history, as place of poetic reflection, or as web of ecological relations. Reading the text allows us to enter the one-and-many rivers we are experiencing in our adventures and, as I said earlier, we might be surprised at the complexity and contradictory nature of rivers. I am hesitant to lead too much further beyond this point, downstream into my own contradictory rivers. I have tried to be particularly careful not to assess the moral weight of the differing ideological positions that underpin many of our social constructions of the adventure-river-landscape as my commitment is to a pedagogical questioning, not an ideological conclusion. The text, not my interpretation of it, but your interpretation of it, must be allowed to speak to do its work.

Many Voices Speak The River is an attempt at being-inside the adventure-river-landscape. It is a sample. Its potential is limited and bounded by many things—time and space to write, choices of text, absences of others, the fragmentary nature of the ‘evidence’ that simultaneously opens and closes spaces for interpretation. It will always be partial and incomplete.

An obvious silence, for example, is the lack of a Maori voice. The Maori are the indigenous peoples of New Zealand and, as is the case in many colonized countries, they have struggled to keep their culture, languages, and narratives alive. With the exception of a bi-lingual interpretation sign on one riverbank, the Maori voice was not encountered. That probably says much about gaps and flaws in my ‘evidence’ and Many Voices Speaks...
*The River* is greatly weakened by the omission.

But it may also say something about indigenous presence in the adventure-river-landscape and possibly in adventure education. I should add here that the indigenous voice was encountered on another coastal paddling field trip with students—particularly through place-names, mythic stories, the re-telling of recent histories and in a variety of other ways— but that is another story.

The text calls us to listen not only *to* the many voices speaking the river, but also *for* silences as well. Together they challenge us to consider which ways of knowing the river we are privileging and which we are denying. Bringing these assumptions to the surface is particularly valuable to the educator who wishes to critically reflect upon their pedagogic practice, and how relationships between the river and participants may be limited by an adventure education pedagogy that prioritizes the voices of personal and social development over the more ambiguous voices of alternative histories, cultures, and styles of story telling.

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**A lesson: Being-inside the adventure-river-landscape**

How might *Many Voices Speak The River* serve as a lesson for adventure educators? It is a lesson of sorts to become immersed in the text, and to see what springs forth of pedagogical worth. All texts potentially offer this kind of lesson. But the hermeneutic text also does its work as a lesson in other ways.

As previously noted, it is not possible to conclude a fixed theoretical model for a kind of ‘Many Voices’ lesson that might simply be adapted to other pedagogical contexts. It is tempting, and we are conditioned to do so through our training as educators. But this approach betrays what lies at the heart of the phenomenological orientation.

Each immersion into the life of questioning must discover the unique style that leads to insight—and teachers and students alike must attempt this work together. It calls for a
playful, exploratory and open orientation to pedagogical possibility. What emerges for me is the possibility of a river pedagogy in my own work with undergraduates in Australia. This critical reflection upon the social construction and embodied experience of New Zealand rivers suggests the possibility of co-writing the complex nature of river experiences as a negotiation between students, teacher, activity, the many voices of broader community and the river-itself.

The style of text construction I discovered for Many Voices Speak The River had its genesis in many places, only some of which can be identified. Those that cannot be identified are not hidden deliberately, I just have not been able to uncover them as yet (and may never). However, I can readily trace the inspiration for the multi-voiced approach to four immediate sources:

First, reflecting upon his writing of an environmental history of the Snowy River, the Australian landscape scholar George Seddon wrote that “part of my problem in writing environmental history stems from the linearity of language, where I wanted a polyphonic account” (1997, 58). Many Voices Speak The River is my response to Seddon’s latent question, is a polyphonic approach possible?

Second, Robert Henderson’s Ph.D. dissertation Outdoor Travel: Explorations for Change (1995), employed a side-by-side narrative of the voices of students and guide which illuminated some remarkable synergies and contrasts in how experience is told by its experiencers.

Third, Laurie Duggan’s 263 page documentary poem, The Ash Range, speaks to the ‘idea of Gippsland’ (a region in south-eastern Australia and the place I call home) as it constructs a narrative of many sources to tell a fuller story with fewer silences and forgotten voices.

Finally, I have both laboured and revelled for some years through outdoor programming in the attempt to awaken students to the many voices that speak the places we experience—sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

Each of these writers and researchers struggled with, and had to discover, a style within their research that would tell the fullest story possible. There is no easy way to this discovery and every phenomenological encounter will demand a unique hermeneutic response, if it is to lead towards an authentic discovery of the meaning of experience. As challenging as the task may seem, the entry point to it is as natural as breathing, and breathing gives us voice.

We do not need to be philosophers skilled in phenomenology to intuit its potential value to us as adventure educators. If anything, phenomenology suggests a more natural mode of inquiry. When Barry Lopez describes an Inuit man’s response to encountering an arctic landscape for the first time, it is eminently phenomenological in character.

“I listen.” That’s all. I listen, he meant, to what the land was saying. I walk around it and strain my senses in appreciation of it for a long time before I, myself, ever speak a word. (Lopez 1986, p. 257)

After our initial suspension of belief (our listening in a state of humility before the land) we are compelled to return to speak and write the words that make the hermeneutic text. When we do so, we locate ourselves deep in the work of pedagogy, struggling to both embrace and comprehend the nature of our educational experiences.

**Afterwords**

The ultimate worth of any hermeneutic text that has a pedagogical end-in-view, says van Manen (2001), is the ability to draw upon the ‘plausible insights’ that it brings to clarity. I
have attempted to outline these ‘plausible insights’ in the Sample and Lesson sections above. But I have also been mindful, I hope, to include a degree of uncertainty and humility into the text and discussion.

The outcome of the cultural/ecological experiment of constructing a national adventure-landscape in New Zealand is unknowable at this point. In our work as adventure educators, as we might consider ourselves, we are on a remarkably similar journey. We promote and popularize certain social constructions of the places where we work, and limit others. We generate certain opportunities for participants to embody these places, and we limit others. One thing I feel I can say with certainty is this; we need to constantly seek to know those experiences in the fullest way possible. Too narrow a knowing privileges one story over another, and silences voices that equally belong and have a right to speak in the places we work.

Paul Sinclair, environmental historian for Australia’s Murray River and its people, suggests that we should offer “future travellers the imaginative space to think about land and water in new ways” (2001, 15). He believes that non-Indigenous settlers in the Murray River region have experienced a “practical forgetfulness” (2001, 57), silencing many of the narratives of knowing the river, Aboriginal and settler, a space which has been filled with the dominant progressive and management stories of the river. In an interesting parallel terminology, van Manen suggests that teachers may find themselves working through a “nihilistic forgetfulness of the essence of our being as teachers” (2001, 123). As adventure educators we can find ourselves stranded in the middle ground of all this forgetting—a silencing of what it means to be in the places that we work. This practical and nihilistic forgetting is very different from the forgetting described by Norman Maclean in the opening quotation I chose for this paper. Maclean’s forgetting on the edge of the river is a suspension of belief that leads him toward an embodied being with the river-itself, from which already knows he must return to act more tactfully in the socially complex and contradictory world. In the moment that he finds himself in the one river—he simultaneously finds it a place of many voices.

*Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters.*

—Maclean 1993, 104
References


**About the Author**

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