Community Forestry Education in the Swan Valley, MT: Contributions of Northwest Connections' Field Program

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COMMUNITY FORESTRY EDUCATION IN THE SWAN VALLEY, MONTANA:
CONTRIBUTIONS OF NORTHWEST CONNECTIONS’ FIELD PROGRAM

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B.S. in Resource Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2003

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Community Forestry Education in the Swan Valley, MT: Contributions of Northwest Connections’ Field Program

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As the community forestry movement matures, a question remains regarding what kind of educational experience nurtures and inspires people in community forestry? This thesis seeks to contribute to a better understanding of community forestry education by examining a field educational program known as “Landscape and Livelihood” (LL) offered by Northwest Connections, a small community-based conservation organization in the upper Swan Valley of western Montana. Based on extensive interviews, observation and the author’s own personal experience as a former LL student, the thesis documents the program’s use of field ecological studies involving both scientific and local knowledge integrated with journaling, homestays, and involvement in Swan community activities such as fuelwood gathering and citizen science projects. Analysis of interview data was informed by key concepts and concerns from popular, place-based and process educational theories. The results suggest that the LL program contributed to students gaining a more nuanced understanding of and appreciation for rural people and their forest-based connections, knowledge and livelihoods, and a greater sense of joy, hope, and inspiration for participating in conservation related activities in the future. Swan residents who participated as homestay families gained validation of their local knowledge and role as community forestry educators and also experienced joy, hope and inspiration for the future as a result of their interaction with students and the LL field semester. The thesis concludes on the possibilities generated by LL for community forestry and lessons for community forestry education more generally.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This thesis is dedicated to the Swan Valley, the land and people.
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The community forestry movement in the U.S. claims to offer an alternative to conventional forestry by nurturing the participation of rural residents and communities in forest management (Baker and Kusel 2003). Integral to meeting these goals has been a call for rural communities historically dependent on a forest economy to share their knowledge of forest ecology and priorities for forest management in forest decision-making, especially on public forest lands. Through this process, rural communities are envisioned to become more aware of and capable of building partnerships with professional forest managers and other stakeholders and taking on more direct responsibility for public forest management. However, as the movement matures, it is still not clear what practical on-the-ground practices nurture people’s capacity for participating in community forestry and what can be done to strengthen them. While the importance of collaboration and partnerships between rural communities and others is constantly noted, how to build and sustain such relationships as a means to support resiliency within communities are also not well known. This thesis refers to the process of learning the technical and personal skills to effectively engage in community forestry as “education for community forestry.” It takes as its window into the process of community forestry education a focus on a field based educational experience offered by a community-based conservation and education organization known as Northwest Connections (NwC) located in the upper Swan Valley, Montana. Since 2001, NwC has offered a fall semester course known as “Landscape and Livelihood” (herein LL) which brings college-level students from nearby as well as from around the country to the Swan
Valley to live in and learn about the ecology and culture of the area through intensive involvement in local places and people.

While promotional materials from NwC suggest something very meaningful is occurring within and between students and the rural community members they interact with during the field course, the educational center has not conducted a formal evaluation. This study attempts to contribute to that effort, while also examining how community forestry can be strengthened through particular educational experiences. Thus, the main objectives of this research project are to (1) describe the educational activities and intentions of NwC’s Landscape and Livelihood field course, (2) document the meanings and impacts of the field course on the students, rural residents and local, private forest land owners and managers who participate in the program, and (3) suggest some general lessons for community forestry education.

**Origins of Community Forestry in the Swan Valley**

Similar to other rural communities around the West, the 1980s were a time of intense change as well as conflict in the Swan Valley (Cestero 1997). Located between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the Mission Mountain Wilderness, this sparsely inhabited valley was undergoing rapid economic change. Once heavily dependent on timber for local livelihoods, in the 1980s Montana’s northwestern economy faced a 25% decline in its annual timber harvest (Cestero 1997). For some valley residents, these policies were a positive step toward protecting ecosystems, but for others it represented a loss of family income and cultural identity. Two environmental organizations emerged, Friends of the Wild Swan and the Swan View Coalition, and they litigated all proposed
timber sales on national forest land. Those households with long-term involvement in the timber industry became angry, unsure where to find work, and uncertain as to what had become of their historic and much loved ways of life and livelihood.

In this climate, a handful of residents came together to work toward a community-based process for discussing and mitigating conflicts over the direction of forest management on public lands (Cestero 1997). After a year of meeting informally, the “Swan Citizens’ Ad Hoc Committee” formed in 1990 to provide a forum for community residents to discuss their concerns in a civil manner and to identify a common vision for nearby forests that balances forest ecological well-being and sustainable economic livelihood, including maintaining the quality of life people love in the Swan Valley (Cestero and Belsky 2003). Though not wanting to act as a spokesperson for the entire community, the ad hoc committee did articulate interest in assisting "the community in resolving, collaboratively, the conflicts affecting the Swan Valley” (Cestero and Belsky 2003, p. 155). One of the successes of the ad hoc committee was to rent the out-of-use ranger station in Condon. This building later became the home to the Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC), the formal non-profit organization that the ad hoc committee evolved into during the early 1990s.

The Swan Ecosystem Center today serves as an umbrella organization for community forestry activities in the upper Swan Valley, including efforts to work with partners (including the USFS) on forest management related issues. For example, as partners with USFS, they sell maps and firewood permits as well as provide general information about the national forests in the area. SEC is also very involved in providing local environmental education. Towards this, they developed a natural history museum
SEC operates through sub-committees. The sub-committees on education and ecological literacy can be seen as an impetus for developing Northwest Connections (NwC), particularly through the vision and efforts of local resident Melanie Parker. Melanie attended the meetings of the early ad hoc committee in 1996 as a graduate student in the Environmental Studies (EVST) program at University of Montana with Barb Cestero, also an EVST graduate student. At the time, Melanie was examining the Highlander Center and other facilities as models for public education centers. NwC formed as the product of both a marriage with a local man (and landowner) and from educational activities that Melanie was organizing at the Swan Ecosystem Center (e.g. teacher-training workshops to provide ecological education in the valley elementary schools as well as youth field trips.) During this same time, she was beginning to form NwC, and she and the other founders decided their center would focus on college-level students to avoid competition with the youth education activities at SEC. These students may also go off and become conservation leaders such as in community forestry, and here was a chance to teach and influence them.
The formation of NwC arose as the confluence of the visions of three people: Melanie Parker, Andrea Stephens, and Melanie’s husband, Tom Parker. Melanie Parker and Andrea Stephens were graduates of University of Montana’s Environmental Studies Masters Program with a focus on environmental education. They believed that most students of environmentalism were receiving an education that promotes superiority of scientific environmental knowledge and little appreciation for rural people whose livelihoods depend on the land and often affords them extensive ecological knowledge; this creates polarization, which is antithetical to the spirit and needs of community forestry (M. Parker, personal communication, April 23, 2004). Tom Parker, a long-time resident of the Swan whose livelihood relied upon commercial outfitting, was looking for a less-environmentally damaging way of making a living. He also wanted to find a way to share his knowledge of the Swan environment to offset what he saw as unraveling ecosystems, communities, and loss of local knowledge. By January of 1997, Tom, Melanie, and Andrea developed a vision statement for Northwest Connections. One of their key programs, the focus of this research, is their Landscape and Livelihood (LL) program.

Northwest Connections became a non-profit education organization located on the old Beck homestead near Condon. Their mission is to "assist land managers and private land owners in better understanding, conserving, and restoring critical habitats and habitat connections in the Swan Valley and surrounding areas" (http://northwestconnections.org/organiza.htm#mission). In particular, Northwest Connections seeks "new ways to integrate local knowledge and conventional scientific processes in the conservation of Montana's rural forest lands"
More specifically, the founders characterize local knowledge as being “place-based” knowledge (discussed in more detail later) where someone spends significant amounts of time through seasons and years, observing nature (M. Parker, personal communication, April 23, 2004). Landscape and Livelihood is viewed by its founders as a way to re-orient ecological science by coupling it with place-based knowledge, engaging local people in activities to promote land stewardship, employing local people, and trying to reduce land fragmentation across the watershed. Importantly, these are also important goals of most community forestry efforts.

While SEC serves as the umbrella organization for the Swan Valley watershed through coordinating ecosystem management-based collaboration and communicating with state, federal and other organizations. Northwest Connections views itself as having a narrower focus on public and undergraduate education involving the integration of science and local knowledge in the watershed. It connects most directly to SEC through collaboration in watershed studies and ecological monitoring projects. All projects NwC develops within the Swan Valley watershed are coordinated through SEC. Tom and Melanie Parker also serve as citizen members on several SEC committees. The SEC ad hoc committee has become an information conduit for residents. When there is a need for information, the committee will organize speakers at the community center to provide a specific forum (Cestero and Belsky 2003).

Northwest Connections attempts to nurture the broader goal of community forestry by developing programs, such as Landscape and Livelihood, that mirror the concerns of community forestry to conserve or restore forest ecosystems while improving
the well-being of the communities that depend on them. NwC tries to promote these community forestry values through its educational programs, especially its signature field semester program, Landscape and Livelihood. What are the specific programs that constitute Landscape and Livelihood? What are students, residents and other private forest managers interpreting and taking away from the Landscape and Livelihood program? How does the educational program contribute to community forestry education and practice in the Swan Valley, and what are some key implications from different education theories for strengthening “community forestry education?”

This thesis is organized in the following way. Chapter Two provides a literature review on current thinking regarding U.S. community forestry with particular attention to education for community forestry. To put the latter in a broader education context, the chapter examines educational philosophies and approaches that resonate with education for community forestry, including popular education, place-based education and process studies. These approaches help to build key principles that inform the analysis and discussion of research on NwC’s efforts. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and specific methods used in the research, particularly the overall approach of participatory research and multiple methods including participant observation and interviews. Chapter Four describes the LL field semester and the philosophy and goals of the LL instructors. Chapter Five presents the results of the research. The results are organized into key themes. Many of the key themes found for both the students and residents involve the following: 1) Understandings of people in rural landscapes 2) Views on forest-based livelihoods 3) A sense of joy, hope, and inspiration and 4) Desired participation in conservation related activities. Chapter Six is where I share my own
personal reflections and experiences as a former Landscape and Livelihood student.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis and makes the case that Northwest Connections, especially through its Landscape and Livelihood field education program, is helping to foster individual level changes in students and community residents who participate as homestay families in ways that may in the long run contribute to community forestry.

My conclusions are based around NwC’s contribution to providing channels for young people to become more aware and respectful of rural peoples, livelihoods and their deep connection with the landscape in which they live, and for rural residents to share and validate their own forest knowledge and cultures with these students and others, in the process becoming more confident and inspired to work toward forest conservation in their area. The thesis concludes on the less tangible but critically important contributions of popular, place, and process-based educational experiences such as LL to inspire and impassion as well as inform – elements that I think offer much to the community forestry movement.
CHAPTER 2  LITERATURE REVIEW AND KEY CONCEPTS

This chapter provides a brief description of community forestry in the U.S. and three educational philosophies and movements that are particularly relevant to community forestry education: popular education, place-based education, and process studies. I chose these three because they emphasize key elements that are also pertinent in community forestry or should be in developing education for community forestry: learning from doing, learning from others who may be different than you, learning to be ethical and just, and learning to achieve something practical on the ground. These literatures provided key concepts that informed data analysis and results of this research by helping me to develop a language for discussing them. I begin below with a brief overview of community forestry and community forestry education in particular.

Community Forestry

Community forestry began in the 1970s initially overseas in Southeast Asia and Africa. Community forestry in the United States, also referred to as community-based forestry, emerged largely as a response to the legacy of Progressive Era science which privileged expert knowledge, timber, and local communities as a source of labor. Baker and Kusel (2003) describe its evolution in the following way:

The legacies of the Progressive Era – the disenfranchisement of rural communities from forest management policy and planning processes as a result of the rise of interest group politics and from the science of forest management through the discounting of local knowledge and the bias of science toward commodity extraction – have played key roles in creating the conditions that led to the emergence of community forestry, especially on public lands (2003, p 37).
The Progressive Era, however, was not without community forestry advocates. Though the visionary first-generation professional, American forester, Benton MacKaye, supported Progressive Era ideals, he also argued for alternative forms and perceptions of science. MacKaye struggled to make community forestry part of the approach to forestry practices in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the end, however, according to some scholars, Gifford Pinchot’s view of science as being led by the trained experts, paved the way for a century of exclusion of local communities from decision-making (Baker and Kusel, 2003).

Gifford Pinchot’s vision of forestry was led by timber production as its primary goal while defining community stability as simply having a “healthy” supply of timber (Baker and Kusel, 2003). This logic collided with the reality of the 1980s with drastic reductions in timber harvest for many reasons. Old growth was cut without concern for sustained yields. Automation took jobs from real people. Global markets shifted the nature of supply and demand. The actual resource was dwindling. And environmental organizations, backed by legislation such as the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Forest Management Act (acts which redefined the participation process), effectively appealed and litigated forest management decisions. The local communities who were most directly affected by all of the above factors were the least empowered and organized to have a voice in what was happening. According to Baker and Kusel (2003, p 52) “rural communities realized that although timber industry lobbying groups and national environmental groups might have argued over resource-dependent communities, neither argued for them.”
The 1980s has been characterized as a time of stark polarization and deep antagonism between environmental organizations and extractive communities both of whom often furthered intractability through negative framing mechanisms. Meanwhile, federal agencies managing the contested lands found themselves increasingly mired in conflicts that challenged the claim that the prevailing science is value-free and ontologically singular. Add to the mix contradictory legislation (Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act and the National Forest Management Act) the Forest Service is mandated to follow, and conflict is guaranteed (Nie, 2003). Baker and Kusel argue, ultimately, it is the structure of the Forest Service, for which Pinchot set the tone, that fails to address the emerging conflicts in the New West.

It focuses on information gathering, not joint learning and decision making; it does not provide incentives for developing a civil political discourse about contentious and value-laden resource management issues; and it sets up the public agency as a final arbiter, responsible for weighing the different inputs it receives and deciding which planning and management direction to take (2003, p 52).

Though the Forest Service is mandated to provide opportunities for participation as a way of preventing or resolving these conflicts, Baker and Kusel (2003, p 52). point to the shortcomings of the public participation model and community-based implementation that have emerged during the last few decades, “[O]rganized interest groups and the general public have little vested interest in or sense of ownership of the plans and management outcomes that result from such a process, primarily because the structure of the participation process preserves hegemony.”

In sum, forest management decisions in the latter part of 1980s culminated in bitter conflicts fueled by a litany of appeals and litigation, entrenched positions, and a
deeply frustrated populace. This is not to say that community forestry emerged as a linear progression, but by this time, the stage was certainly calling for alternative approaches to forest management and especially different models of public dialogue and social learning.

Typically discussions of community forestry focus on three interacting dimensions: environment, economy, and equity (Baker and Kusel 2003). Environment refers to sustaining forest health, ecosystem function, and biodiversity. Unlike more narrow environmental interests in which ecosystem health is achieved by restricting or eliminating human activities in the forest, practitioners recognize that humans are part of the system and that concerns about health, function, and biodiversity will be addressed through a combination of wild and working landscapes (Baker and Kusel 2003).

Economy refers to developing strategies that advance “mechanisms in which prices reflect the full suite of forest ecosystem services and products and strengthening possibilities for activities such as value-added local processing that increases the flow of economic benefits from forest management to workers, local communities, and local forest ecosystems” (2003, p 84). Equity raises questions about who benefits and who is included in local governance.

Community forestry practitioners are reasserting claims as diverse as the validity and valorization of local knowledge and the rights of local communities and those who work in the forest to steward themselves and the forests that support them. Addressing and resolving these claims and others involves a complex renegotiation and realignment of the interests and claims of local and nonlocal groups. Whereas the dimensions of environment and economy involve primary reliance on the state and the market, respectively, equity calls for local residents and workers to engage with both, and with a particular focus on advancing institutions to promote modifications to the political, legal and economic structures that have governed forest resource management (2003, p 85).
While the community forestry triad is about developing new relations between people and forests, in the U.S. context it is especially about restoring democratic values of civic participation and self-determination in particular places. Grounding in a particular place enables integrative work for building or revitalizing relationships between people (as well as with their environment). As such, community forestry requires developing local social institutions for democratic decision-making to determine both objectives for managing forest resources, and procedures for doing so in an equitable manner. This involves residents working with others (often people with different forest management goals and conflict resolution practices) to identify common visions and forest management practices. Baker and Kusel highlight this by describing community forestry as (2003, p 9) “the rights and obligations of communities with respect to forest resources and the importance of developing community-based participatory and civic science models of research, monitoring, and evaluation.” But how do people engaged in community forestry efforts learn to do this?

While there are many environmental education and learning programs available for college students around the country, there are very few that are dedicated explicitly to “community forestry.” Environmental education programs for college students such as Wild Rockies Field Institute and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) tend to focus largely on learning about ecosystems, natural history and orienteering skills; they tend not to not emphasize community and environmental interactions geared toward enhancing civil engagement and democratic processes. I located only one field program that resembles NwC, founded by rural residents and offering a type of experiential, community-based forestry education that attempts to integrate different forms of
knowledge and encourages resident participation in developing new democratic forms of forest management, as distinct from traditional experiential education programs, which focus more on individual student development. This community-based conservation organization is Wallowa Resources in Enterprise, Oregon, with an education program that is actually modeled after Landscape and Livelihood. To get a better sense of the philosophy and goals of educational programs that seek to enable deeper processes of individual as well as social (community change) I turned to the literatures known for these emphases: place-based education, popular education and process studies.

**Place-Based Education**

Place-based education can be defined as “learning that is rooted in what is local – the unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art of a particular place. The community provides the context for learning, student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning” (Rural School and Community Trust, 2002). Place-based education is a movement that has evolved from a range of education programs throughout the U.S., including the Foxfire Fund, the Annenberg Rural Challenge, Stories in the Land Teaching Fellowships, and Education for Sustainability (PEEC, 2003). The Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (PEEC) is a collection of organizations and foundations that works to strengthen place-based education practices through evaluative research and knowledge sharing. In a concept paper created by the Collaborative, place-based education challenges the status quo of the education that is most accessible to students.
Place-based education offers a fundamentally different approach to both environmental education and community development. It is one of the outcomes of how environmental education has evolved to reflect a more community-based and experiential approach to the learning process (Sobel 2004). For this reason, I have not focused on environmental education literature in this review because it does not provide many case studies similar to Northwest Connections and Landscape and Livelihood, that being a more explicit integration of social and ecological aspects. More specifically, place-based education bucks the trends toward standardization and high-stakes testing of mass-produced, mass-consumed, one-size-fits-all knowledge by immersing students in local heritage, regional cultures and landscapes and the rich diversity of local opportunities and experiences, using these as the springboard for study of regional, national and global issues of increasing complexity (PEEC, p 2-3).

In this sense, students become resources to the community where they are practicing place-based education as well as to communities beyond this education experience in the Swan. Students can carry with them into the future a greater sense of how their actions are connected to communities in what they are trying to create and support. Place-based education is a pedagogy of place that “recontextualizes” education locally. “It makes education a preparation for citizenship, both locally and in wider contexts, while also providing the basis for continuing scholarship” (Rural Challenge Research and Education Program, 1999).

David Sobel (2004) has written extensively on place-based education as a researcher and practitioner and puts forward place-based education as a process that encourages students to think outside the bounds of what they are accustomed to in
traditional education settings. For example, place-based education challenges the
meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the
nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-
storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground
so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within
the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become part of the community,
rather than a passive observer of it (Sobel, p iii).

Sobel (2004) describes how this experience can create a “joyful realization of the
ties that connect a person with nature and culture in her place” (p ii). Embedded in this
realization is love – “love of nature, love of one’s neighbors and community” and this is
“a prime motivating factor in personal transformation and transformation of culture” (p
ii). An implication that can be drawn from this is that people hurt as they become more
disconnected from nature and their community; by reconnecting in direct ways, one is
more likely to experience a healing from this disconnection, hence love, that enables a
person to be more connected with themselves, nature, and their community.

Place-based education allows a student to be in place. Place is whole. It is the
embodiment of interconnectedness and integration. There is no compartmentalization.
There is no abstraction. Wholeness, interconnectedness, and integration are an ingredient
for opening to new ways of learning – ways of learning that are more grounded,
connected and meaningful to the student and the place, which includes the land and
community. Part of the history of the Swan Valley and what seems to be occurring via
Landscape and Livelihood is popular education.
Popular Education

Paulo Freire is a key figure in popular education movements in the 20th century. His most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, brought to light the political nature of education, showing how the “popular masses”, who are oppressed by socio-economic-political systems, can empower themselves through revisioning what constitutes knowledge and ways of knowing. Empowerment leads to freedom, which allows people to live authentically (1970). Part of what is meant by freedom is naming and acknowledging a history and people, both of which are often unrecognized by willful neglect. In a community forestry context and specifically in the Swan Valley, these would be the “forest dependent” people who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised due to the legacy of Progressive Era policies, which favored trained experts over local ecological knowledge. Freire’s philosophy evolved over several decades culminating in his final book, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, which encompasses a broader look at what it means to provide education for all people, no matter what their demographic is, outside and beyond the systematic reproduction of a dominant ideology.

Freire regards education as a process of moral formation and as a political act. He writes,

[I]t is not possible to imagine the human condition disconnected from the ethical condition. Because to be disconnected from it or to regard it as irrelevant constitutes for us women and men a transgression. For this reason, to transform the experience of educating into a matter of simple technique is to impoverish what is fundamentally human in this experience: namely, its capacity to form the human person. If we have any serious regard for what it means to be human, the teaching of contents cannot be separated from the moral formation of the learners. To educate is essentially to form (Freire 1998, p 39) … If teaching were not a political act, “it would mean that the world would not really be human” (Freire, 1998, p 101).
Ultimately, Freire says that all teaching should come from a place of love.

“Integral to right thinking is a generous heart, one that, while not denying the right to anger, can distinguish it from cynicism or unbalanced fury” (Freire, 1998, p 40). He also does not relegate teaching only to the professionally trained educators who move through a system that is often designed to benefit their demographics and class; rather, he emphasizes that teaching can come from anyone, no matter what their training, so long as they are aware of and follow basic principles he puts forth.

Some of these principles include the importance of critical reflection on practice and the recognition of teaching beyond the transference of knowledge. If a “teacher” is to be effective, the person must realize there is no teaching without learning, and there is no learning without teaching (1998). This realization creates the space for a reciprocal relationship between student and teacher in what they discover together. In more eloquent terms, “a correct way of thinking that goes beyond the ingenuous must be produced by the learners in communion with the teacher responsible for their education” (1998, p 43). Curiosity is essential. Freire (1998) describes how critical reflection moves a person from ingenuous curiosity to what he calls epistemological curiosity, wherein the curiosity does not appropriate or own itself but rather contributes and adds to more curiosity.

Curiosity as restless questioning, as movement toward the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive. There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making. In fact, human curiosity, as a phenomenon present to all vital experience, is in a permanent process of social and historical construction and reconstruction (1998, p 37-38).
And having this “dynamic and dialectical movement between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting on doing’” helps to support this “correct way of thinking,” one that is holistic and vital.

Freire expands the notion of what it means to teach by saying, “Teaching preparation should never be reduced to a form of training. Rather, teacher preparation should go beyond the technical preparation of teachers and be rooted in the ethical formation both of selves and history” (1998, p 23).

In honoring this process, Freire points to the joy and hope both “students” and “teachers” experience. Having this kind of integrated education, similar to what Sobel describes, inspires feelings of joy and hope (1998). It is an indication of living more authentically within oneself and externally. For Freire, being able to live an authentic life is an expression of freedom. This is in contrast to what Freire (1998) observes as the bureaucratizing of the mind where institutions insist “in the name of democracy, freedom, and efficacy, on asphyxiating freedom itself and, by extension, creativity and a taste for the adventure of the spirit” (p 101-102). Education, to Freire, “as specifically a human experience, is a form of intervention in the world” (p 90-91).

Freire (1998) argues humans are in a state of “unfinishedness”, always in a process of discovery and creation of who they are. “The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming” (Freire, 1998, p 72). More so, hope is what drives this process. “Hope is a natural, possible, and necessary impetus in the context of our unfinishedness. Hope is an indispensable seasoning in our human, historical experience. Without it, instead of history we would have pure determinism” (1998, p 69). Embracing this concept changes what it means to teach and what is possible in teaching. In the Swan context, I focus in Chapter 5 on how this applies to the relationship between students and
community members. Now I turn to a discussion of process education theory, which helps inform the place-based and popular education theories that seem evident in the Landscape and Livelihood experience.

**Process Studies**

Alfred North Whitehead was a philosopher and educator in the early to mid part of the 20th century. Whitehead (1938), similar to Freire (1998), posits the notion that all things are in process, and the potential for all actions is a creative advance in the ever-unfolding universe in all its possibilities. His philosophy is a driving influence in what is now known as process studies.

Process Studies, a refereed journal published through the Center for Process Studies at the Claremont School of Theology, attempts to apply “Whitheadian conceptuality to other fields, such as aesthetics, biology, cosmology, economics, ethics, history of religions, literary criticism, mathematics, political thought, psychology, physics, social science, and sociology.” For the purpose of this research, I am particularly interested in Whitehead’s philosophy of education and how contemporary process thinkers interpret and apply this in theory and practice.

Whitehead’s basic premise about education is: at the center of all teaching efforts should be the intent to expand imagination, for the individual and the group. Whitehead provides a philosophic framework that shows the need for a constantly expanding imagination and the weaknesses and limitations of dogmatism. Whitehead occupied a career teaching at Cambridge and Harvard. His controversial impression of how an
unimaginative ideology shapes educational institutions, particularly universities, is later echoed by Paulo Freire (1970, 1998).

The justification for the university is that it preserves that connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. The university imparts information but it imparts it imaginatively. At least, this is the function it should perform for society. A university which fails in this respect has no reason for existence (Whitehead 1929, p 93).

Imagination is political. It is political because it is a process of exploring the multiple landscapes of our minds, known and yet to be known, and these landscapes are shaped by our subjectivity. Our subjectivity is a combination of influences: culture, family, environment, social norms - all of which are political. They are created out of choices of what is acceptable and what is not – what is real and what is not. Therefore, it is also quite amazing that imagination, due to its transcendent nature, has the ability to deconstruct the politics of these influences and provide space to re-imagine other ways of thinking, knowing, and living, hence loving. This requires what Freire describes as epistemological curiosity or what Whitehead talks about in the phases of learning: romance, precision, and generalization. Romance is the stage, much like Freire’s laymen’s curiosity, where one is free to explore ideas without constraint. Then, as a person becomes more critical of these ideas, applying more rigor in developing the ideas and seeing interconnectedness of things, a person develops what Freire calls epistemological curiosity, which appears to be a combination of Whitehead’s precision and generalization. Precision is the ability to grasp concepts wholly, and generalization is the ability to integrate them into the larger world, a process that does not seem like discrete experiences in time; rather, in order to attain “precision” in its purest
manifestation, a person, by definition must also be able to think integratively about those concepts.

Why is imagination important? Whitehead and other process thinkers emphatically make claims as to why it is not only important but also absolutely necessary for there to be any real and meaningful education. Whitehead’s statement about the university carries the belief that it is the University’s job to preserve a “connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning” and this is the function it should perform. This still does not provide a deeper answer to why imagination is so central. One process thinker, Regnier (2005), interprets Whitehead’s beliefs about imagination by saying, “Imagination holds the promise of calling our best of possibilities of learning into being, of disclosing faces of reality, of unconcealing hidden truths, of realizing important values, and of actualizing potential” (p 178). Regnier (2005) goes on to elaborate upon Whitehead’s observations in that not acknowledging and opening to imagination leads to scenarios where “enduring educational procedures and structures in various societies and cultures over long periods can culminate in paradigms of learning in which ‘orthodoxy suppresses adventure,’ ‘staleness then sets in,’ ‘repetition produces a gradual lowering of vivid appreciation,’ ‘the society in question lacks imaginative force,’ and ‘convention dominates’” (p 180). Ultimately, without imagination in education, Regnier contends:

[L]earning and societies decay, a decay that takes place in the everyday life of learners who become disconnected from the very ground of their experience, the ground from which imagination soars. Because students have been criticized for their own thoughts, ‘intuitive convictions have wilted in the face of criticism.’ Denying the subjectivity of student intuition deprives imagination, undermines the possibility of attaining wisdom, and alienates one from the power of subjective self-creation and self-discipline to diminish intellectual and moral capacity (p 180).
Moore (2005), another process thinker, builds on Whitehead’s notion of imagination in education by offering, “The purpose of imagination is finally to move creation through time and space. In the case of human educational systems, its purpose is to move the learning community and the communities with whom they relate into the future” (p 195). Going further, process thinker Jay McDaniel (2000) discusses how empathy is part of the experience of imagination; through imagination people are better equipped to empathize and connect with one another. With this in mind, it begs the question: what futures are communities crafting? It is a political act. It is an ethical act. As Freire argues in Pedagogy of Freedom, the fate of education is not deterministic based on institutional ideology. To think this way reduces “the human person to nothing” (p 103). “The recently proclaimed death of history, which symbolizes the death of utopia, of our right to dream (hence imagine!), reinforces without doubt the claims that imprison our freedom. This makes the struggle for the restoration of utopia all the more necessary. Educational practice itself, as an experience in humanization, must be impregnated with this ideal” (Freire, 1998, p 103). It is up to us, to our imaginations to recreate possible futures. As Moore says, though, this is no easy task at any level of traditional education institutions.

Granting agencies and donors drive colleges and universities, as do governmental and religious bodies, boards of trustees, and administrators and faculties. Just as in primary and secondary education, these bodies can suffer from lack of imagination or fear of adventure, most often in the name of protection – protecting a popular social agenda, a deeply ingrained political or religious philosophy, economic security, or canons of knowledge. Further, the complex power relations among these bodies further undermine imagination, making transformation difficult (Moore, 2005 p 196).
Visionaries need not be deterred, however, Moore continues. Further, she explains imagination is not “one simple thing to be named and enacted in one simple movement” (p 196).

Visionaries need to discern and uphold the protective roles of education that are justifiable. Further, they need to communicate their visions in ways that people with competing agenda will understand and find compelling, thus linking visions and building toward social knowing and social imagination. To do this, many pathways of imagination need to be considered, whether focused on an institutional mission statement, a collaborative educational project, or the content and approach to teaching (Moore, 2005 p 196-7).

These pathways toward institutional transformation are a process of “planting seeds, conducting bold visible experiments, and personifying visions through charismatic leadership, which eventually spreads through a community of leadership” (Moore, 2005 p 97).

**Synthesis and Connections to Community Forestry Education**

A connecting theme among all of the above thinkers, philosophies and movements is that education is about self-actualization and making a (practical) difference in the world. Education that supports this creates conditions for students to “flourish” where their work, as Sobel contends, is more genuine and meaningful, and inspires hope, as Moore discusses, leading to further creativity and contribution. “Imagination inevitably stirs movement and transformation, however slight” (Moore, 2005 p 196). Some of the common threads these theories share that seem to be significant for self-actualization, flourishing, and making a contribution is gaining awareness for the interconnectedness of all things (place-based education and process
studies), a process that allows for questioning and curiosity (popular education and process studies), which then can lead to an expanding imagination and moral formation (popular education, process studies, place-based education) as well as a sense of love and joy (popular education and place-based education) that further fuels a continuing quest for knowledge and growth (process studies and popular education). Process studies explicitly notes the importance of intention, specifically empathy, in helping to catalyze this process. Through empathy, a person is better able to listen and connect with others and ultimately with themselves, helping to expand a person’s self-awareness and ability to navigate complex and messy social dynamics.

In the case of conventional education history, education without imagination or disciplined curiosity harms the innate lure for every student the quest for the “greatest good” (Regnier, 2005 p 181). What these philosophers and educators seem to be aiming for in their ultimate message is peace. Or as one Whitehead scholar claimed, “We seek ecological, social, and religious peace” (Faber, 2006 p 11).

Popular education is not just about the extreme cases of voiceless, marginalized, often overlooked, peoples rising up to take ownership of their truths. Popular education is not just about the peasant, the miner, rancher, or logger. It includes all those who are within the education system, no matter what their background is, because all people are deserving of an education that encourages the search for authenticity and recognizes and addresses the inequities systematic education perpetuates. Place-based education takes this a step further by contextualizing the education experience in a community and on the land. Sobel (2004) refers to this as a pedagogy of community and pedagogy of place. Doing so expands the learning horizon to what Freire (1998) argues for in developing the
connection between history and personal formation. It alleviates what Freire (1994) describes as the disintegration of the human spirit, which systematic, conventional, education often produces within the confines of the classroom and externally in the broader society. Popular education for the student is about introducing integrated ways of learning and thinking. Place-based, experiential education is a form of integrated education, for the students and the community members.

Popular education, place-based education and process studies have much to offer in terms of education for community forestry. As in popular education, community forestry is about people taking power, responsibility, and self-actualization in order to find and maintain their voice in forest decisions and ultimately their livelihoods. By proactively staking a claim in creating their history, people in the community forestry movement move from being disenfranchised and marginalized to being capable participants in their communities. Place-based education is an expression of popular education in that it re-imagines the role of students and teachers by expanding learning beyond conventionally trained teachers. Place-based education includes the community as a teacher to students, and in community forestry, these “teachers” are people with lived experience on the land. Place-based education is also philosophically driven by the crucial need for the imagination both popular education and process studies advocate as essential to an integrative education experience. Expanding imagination is also a process of expanding a person’s heart to incorporate a broader worldview. In the community forestry context, this broadening worldview is necessary for breaking down the historically created stereotypes and polarization that has ultimately disempowered forest communities. As in process studies, community forestry is a process. Specifically, it is
not linear by any stretch; rather, it is complex, messy, and slow. This is in part due to the amount of time to develop trust and credibility with federal and state land management agencies. This process is slow because it is ultimately attempting to shift a paradigm rooted in the Progressive Era. Re-imagining the role communities play in land management decisions is slowly emerging from grassroots community organizations and projects to federally mandated collaboration programs. Popular education and place-based education in a community forestry context are signposts for this new emergence.

Hence the specific concepts that I have drawn from the literatures on popular, place-based, and process education that will inform how I interpret the findings from my research in the Swan Valley include the following:

- Freire’s notion of learning as a communion between student and teacher and the importance of intention in this process
- Freire’s resulting notion of joy and hope
- Process Studies’ and Freire’s development of moral imagination through questioning and connecting
- Process Studies’ and place-based education’s notion of interconnectedness and integrated education
- Place-based education’s emphasis on the relevance of learning in a community, on the land, and in an experiential way.

These concepts seem to be integral to developing a nuanced understanding of what social well-being and especially the oft-mentioned “empowerment” means in
community forestry and how resiliency can be nurtured for making them happen. They
also seem to resonate with the major conclusions in a 2005 report published by the Aspen
Institute and the Ford Foundation. The report said that recognizing and nurturing
relationships, specifically as a way to nurture resiliency, is a fundamental step in building
capacity to practice community-based forestry and was emphasized strongly in all 13
communities that participated in a community-based forestry demonstration program.
With futures uncertain in many forest-dependent communities, the ability to navigate
challenges is important. Relationships appear to be a pivotal ingredient in the success
and failure of community forestry experiences. In this way, the report provides useful
ground-truthing information about what community forestry means in particular contexts.
Diversity, long-term sustainability, and resiliency, which is the ability to weather
challenges, are identified by the 2005 report as necessary opportunities communities
should have access to. My research in the Swan Valley aims to provide a kind of ground-
truthing on what it means to take a “bottom up” approach that builds resiliency and
empowerment for people within communities and what implications this may have. It
seems to me that the literature on community forestry has much to learn from the
literatures on key figures in the fields of place-based education, popular education, and
process studies.

**Chapter Conclusion**

In addition to the technical skills necessary for managing forests and the social
skills for people to effectively interact with one another, community forestry is built on
individuals who respect and appreciate other people and attitudes and feel inspired and
confident to participate in (social) movements such as community forestry. This raises
the question: how can educational experiences be organized to teach people from within and beyond rural areas to want to and be able to work cooperatively and skillfully in community forestry? This is the main question that drives this thesis and the examination of a particular educational program. This also leads me to ask something that is often not emphasized in the community forestry literature, and that is: what drives people to be and stay involved in community forestry? What type of education experiences can nurture and spur hope and joy? For many people, community forestry is about losing and rediscovering hope. What role does LL field semester play in the important process of individual self-discovery and passion for topics related to community forestry?
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology I used to prepare for and conduct field research in the Swan Valley and subsequent analysis. As noted in Chapter 1, my primary research question examines the contributions of Northwest Connections (NwC) to community forestry education in the Swan Valley watershed, focusing on its Landscape and Livelihood (LL) field educational program. I resided in the Swan Valley from July 2004 until October 2004. While living there, my field methods included photography, interviews with LL founders and teachers, former LL students, Swan Valley residents who participate in the LL program, participant observations of current students and community activities, and personal reflections. I was a student in Landscape and Livelihood before completing my undergraduate degree in Resource Conservation at The University of Montana (herein UM) in 2003. The experience left me with a strong desire to give something back to the Swan community, and this eventually led me to apply to the graduate program at UM. The tremendous impact I felt from living in the Swan and being in the LL program, and wanting to understand that experience better, as well as assist LL in any way I could, led me to seek out a masters thesis topic that would enable me to do this. Having been in LL as a student adds to the complex and dynamic roles I integrate into this research. I am a former student, a researcher, and an observer. In this way, including personal reflections and journal entries as a former student are an essential “data set” and part of my multiple methods. However to keep my own personal experience separate from analyzing how others experienced the field semester, I provide them in a separate, later chapter.
The following section discusses the philosophic underpinnings of my research methodology, namely participatory research. Before I begin, it is important to emphasize that my research methodology is informed by participatory research. By “informed” I mean that the research does not necessarily follow all or even many of the approaches’ tenets. But rather it does reflect key features of participatory research, notably the relevancy of the question asked to a particular group of people who are expected to use the information and research using an alternative to hypothesis-testing in favor of seeking emergent themes and theory. The identification of my research question evolved out of conversations I had with NwC founders, Swan community residents, and former students of LL such as myself. NwC founders have never instituted a formal evaluation of their LL program, neither for assessing its impact on student participants nor on the Swan Valley homestay families. NwC was interested in having me examine how the different participants in the program were making meaning of their experience and in particular, how their interactions and other activities were or were not contributing to what they and the literature were calling "community forestry." Given that there is limited literature and theories on community forestry education and that there are multiple realities or meanings made by the different participants I would be studying, I did not follow standard scientific protocols of hypothesis testing. Rather I tried to develop rigorous procedures for letting themes and theories emerge from the data, which I expected to find multiple perspectives. Managing my own multiple positions within this effort as student, researcher, and impassioned observer also complicated but eventually complemented the effort as well. Participatory research is particularly attuned to the tensions of normal
scientific protocols in such situations and provided a useful framework for my choice of specific methods.

**Defining Participatory Research**

Participatory research (PR) has been defined as a methodology where sample populations are involved in defining the research question(s), designing, and implementing research results as well as benefiting from the research results (Russell and Harshbarger 2003). Rather than approaching communities as objects of study on questions pre-determined by the researcher informed largely by the existing literature (standard scientific methods), participatory research approaches the process and the people to be studied as active subjects and partners. The PR research paradigm runs counter to positivistic traditions that do not recognize the socially constructed nature of research, and often (though not always) avoids hypothesis testing in favor of seeking out emergent themes and theory. This is particularly the case in situations (such as in this research) where there is a limited literature and theories to actually test and where there are likely to be numerous meanings and realities involved in how key questions are answered. Brydon-Miller et al. (2003, p 13) succinctly describe PR as rejecting "the notion of an objective, value-free approach to knowledge generation in favor of an explicitly political, socially engaged, and democratic practice." The community to be studied is actively involved in many, if not all the spheres of the research process. Participation involves an exchange, an interaction that allows room for questions and "data" to emerge or be created. The goal is for the process as well as the product to be educational, meaningful, and relevant to those involved in the research. Indeed many...
suggest that the whole point of taking a PR approach is to strengthen the well-being of communities. The underlying assumption to a community-based or partnership-based approach to research is that rural peoples and communities are aware of the problems facing them and have a significant knowledge base to share (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Their contribution to the entire research experience is critical. Cornwall and Jewkes describe PR as being (1995, p 1671) “more of an attitude or approach than a series of techniques” thus raising questions about the tensions between theory and practice.

Some issues regarding the implementation of PR to date involve the tension between theory and practice in the sense of how to develop theory through practice (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Not only is developing a strong theoretical foundation challenging, but putting theory to work in the field also proves difficult given the complexity of reality and context. Hence PR is less concerned about generating universalist theory than producing statements that help to guide research, make comparisons, and above all be sensitive to new ways of thinking about people, well-being and in this case, forest conservation and use among a particular community in a particular place. PR and community forestry advocates emphasize theory grounded in pragmatism - that is, what works for people managing forests for a variety of purposes. This is in contrast to the more traditional positivist approaches that use theory to generate hypotheses to test in research and contribute to a more generalized knowledge system.

For these reasons, those using the PR approach must be very sensitive to being open to the many ways different types of people (such as those involved in community forestry efforts) understand and value forests and forest-community relationships (Reason, 2003). As a practitioner of community-based research, it is important to
recognize that the “community” is not a homogenous group, but rather a “heterogeneous group of people with multiple interrelated axes of difference, including wealth, gender, age, religion, ethnicity and, by implication, power” (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995, p 1673). However, we must remember that participatory research and participatory development still operate from within the paradigms to which they are reacting, albeit paradigms that try to be alternative (Simpson 2000, p 141). Indeed, PR does not create new methods. Rather, as stated earlier, it is the attitude of the researcher and how these methods are used in the research process that makes the paradigm alternative within a suite of existing research methods.

To what degree PR meets its goal of being participatory and for whose benefit is a common question raised by critics. While it is understood in the literature that degrees of participation wax and wane throughout the research course, the level of participation described as true colleagues is “rarely, if ever achieved” (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995, p 1669). This goal can be viewed as “researchers and local people” who “work together as colleagues with different skills to offer, in a process of mutual learning where local people have control over the process” (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995, p 1669).

**Problematizing Participation**

In researching the contributions of NwC to community forestry in the Swan Valley and the broader questions regarding community forestry education, I reviewed literature on community forestry, popular education, place-based education, and process studies. Leanne Simpson (2000, p 139) raises concern for what she describes as “separating the knowledge from the entire context that gives it meaning.” Here, Simpson
is referring to the choices western researchers have made in the past to incorporate specific expressions of indigenous knowledge into western paradigms, thereby co-opting and “scientizing” the knowledge (Simpson 2000). Local or traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is not about principles that can be extracted from the living people who use them. This is a living process and practice, not a list of terms and principles. I have tried to remain true to this insight in the way I connect what I have learned continually back to particular people, places and actions.

Within the context of NwC’s program, Landscape and Livelihood, the outsiders (students) are not researchers, but they are still outsiders who may be subject to similar pitfalls Simpson describes. Students live in a community for two months where the community participants are their teachers and vice versa. In this case, students spend intimate periods of time seeing the land through their local host’s eye, on their land. Is there a two-way interaction and between whom? If so, is this knowledge sharing or something different? How do the students “see” or interpret their experience? How are their impressions influenced by conversations and interactions with their local hosts in the Swan and surrounding communities?

Sherry Arnstein (1969) discusses gradients of participation and the imperative to inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities as a way to address the varying roles of power in participation. Community participants who participate in LL are invited to do so and are told the assumptions under which the program is operating. To what extent the local community participants actually feel that their participation is appreciated by the educators and students is a question this research sought to answer. To what extent they feel their knowledge and experience is respected is less an important question to the
research as to what extent the knowledge sharing and interactions create change within each other, measured by their own reflections and my observations.

As discussed in Chapter 2, popular education literature, particularly that of Paulo Freire, informs the community forestry movement and the questions I raise with regard to activities in the Swan Valley. Consistent with the goals of popular education, my research at its root sought to understand how NwC is alone and/or in combination with SEC and other entities in the Swan valley fostering popular education for community forestry. That is, how is the learning that is occurring through programs such as LL, which are place-based, contributing to consciousness raising and education and leading to more citizen engagement and involvement in community forestry efforts in the Swan?

Essentially, NwC is asking deep questions of its own actions and of community forestry: how can education and change be connected to community forestry goals, and how can this understanding inform and improve existing educational programs to nurture community forestry? Current education paradigms, such as place-based education, have evaluative processes in place (PEEC), and in these cases, evaluation depends on the context-specific goals of a particular place-based education program. Because community forestry as an education process is a new and emerging perspective in the U.S., however, there are no formal case-study evaluations of community forestry education in particular places that would help to create and refine an understanding of what community forestry education entails.
Field Research Methods

Field methods for this research consisted of several stages, including introducing the research project to people in the Swan and surrounding communities, conducting interviews, observing current students and other community activities, and incorporating my own personal experience and reflections as a former LL student. As soon as I moved to Condon, Montana, where I lived during the summer and fall of 2004, I obtained a list of former LL students and community participants from Northwest Connections. The list of community participants included all of the homestay families and guest speakers that had participated in the field semester up to that time in 2004. In addition to a description of my research, I sent former students and community participants a letter of invitation to participate through interviews over the phone or email. I also sent letters to people in the Swan Valley, which Northwest Connections helped me identify, who did not participate directly with Landscape and Livelihood activities but are familiar with the program. Included with the letter was a self-addressed stamped postcard to indicate interest and contact information.

At the time of the field research in 2004, 3 LL field semesters had taken place with the current 2004 semester in session that I observed during my field research. The first LL field semester took place in 2001. As I did not have contact information for this group of students, I was not able to send them letters inviting them to participate in interviews. Also, the 2001 semester participated in homestays, 4 of which did not participate in the following semesters leading up to 2004, and because I did not have the 2001 information during the field research, I was not able to contact those 4 homestay families for interviews. Out of the 44 letters I sent to former students from the 2002 and
2003 LL field semesters and community households (17 for the former students and 28 for the community members), 15 community households (2 of which who do not participate directly in the LL activities) and 6 former students participated in interviews. 15 of the 28 households participated in the homestays, and 10 of those 15 are included in the households that I interviewed. Out of the 14 community members who did not participate in interviews, 8 responded that they would like to, but due to various constraints, we were never able to schedule an interview. Out of the remaining 11 students who were not interviewed, 7 responded saying that they would like to participate in interviews, but due to various constraints such as work, moving, and overseas travel, we were never able to schedule an interview. For all interviews, I either took notes by hand or typed them on my laptop computer. Tables 1 and 2 help to further illustrate the interviews with community households and former students.

Table 1: Former LL students at the time of field research in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># LL Semesters</th>
<th># Total of Former LL Students</th>
<th># Contacted</th>
<th># Who Responded Yes to Interview</th>
<th># Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Community households at the time of field research in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Contacted</th>
<th># of which are Homestay Families</th>
<th># Responded Yes to Interview</th>
<th># of Homestay Families Interviewed</th>
<th># Total of Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Interviews

Community participants I interviewed who interacted with students did so through homestays, independent study projects, field trips, citizen science projects, and community activities such as public meetings, potlucks, and fuelwood gathering.
Because LL activities extend beyond the Swan Valley to other communities, I also interviewed community participants in the Flathead and Blackfoot valleys. During interviews with many of the community participants we often shared a meal together. I asked the community participants the following questions:

- Were there any specific events or comments made by students that changed your impression of them?
- Have your views on forest change/management changed since interacting with NwC and/or the students? If so, how?
- How, if at all, has your behavior changed since interacting with the students and/or NwC in terms of community based conservation and environmentalism?
- How do you view NwC’s role in the valley in terms of their presence and the programs they offer?
- How does your participation fit into the bigger picture of community forestry in the valley or western Montana?
- Are there other things occurring in the valley that may be influencing your views on community-based conservation or participation in related activities? If so, how are these things connected to NwC, if at all?
- Does the stipend influence your participation as a host family?
- Do you have any recommendations to improve the experience of you and the student?

I also interviewed community members who did not participate directly with Landscape and Livelihood activities but are familiar with the program to determine if their perspective shed different information regarding perceptions of Northwest Connections, Landscape and Livelihood, and community-based forestry in the Valley. The Northwest Connections educators helped me identify these people. For these interviews, I asked the following questions:

- What role do you see Northwest Connections playing in the valley?
- What role do you see Landscape and Livelihood playing in the valley?
- Would you like to be involved more in conservation related activities in the valley, and in what capacity?
- Has the organization impacted you at all?
I conducted interviews with former students by phone and email. These were students from the years 2002 and 2003 field semesters. I asked them the following questions:

- Were there any specific events or comments made by a speaker or host family that changed your impression of them?
- Have your views on forest change/management changed since interaction with speakers and/or your host family? If so, how?
- How, if at all, has your behavior changed since interacting with speakers and/or your host family in terms of community based conservation and environmentalism?
- How, if at all, do you think Landscape and Livelihood has affected your decisions about your future?
- How do you feel your experience shaped you in terms of your land ethics?

2. Personal Observations

While living in the Swan Valley, I observed LL students during the 2004 semester as well as community activities, which included, among other things, public community forestry meetings in Condon. First, with regard to observations of the 2004 LL students, I introduced myself and described my research on the first day of their orientation. I interacted with, observed, and photographed the students on several field trips, their independent study presentations, and during unstructured time such as meals. Several of the students also gave me permission to photograph their biogeography entries in their journals. Through my interactions with the current students, I was able to engage in discussions with them regarding their experience in the program; I took notes during and after these interactions. It should be noted that I did not conduct formal interviews with the current students as I did with the former students.

I also enjoyed entry into the Swan community through renting a cabin from the executive director of SEC and interacting with her and other community members during
meals and community events. One of the community members I interviewed who did not have direct contact with LL activities often took me on hikes in the Swan Valley to show me forested areas he identified as natural and others as unnatural due to corporate timber land-use practices. These visits also often included sharing a meal together.

3. Personal Experience and Reflections

As a former Landscape and Livelihood student, reflections on my own experience in the program coupled with journal entries and photographs, form the third leg to the data I collected. This is a process that began as soon as I completed my field semester in Landscape and Livelihood as a student. When I began my field research, I started re-reading my journals that I kept as a student and looking at the photographs I and other students took. The journal entries, in particular, capture a fresh moment in time that help speak to the reflections I have had since finishing the LL field semester. I share these reflections, journal entries, and photographs in Chapter 6.

Data Analysis: Determining Themes and Building Conclusions

When I completed the field research portion at the end of October 2004, I began reading through interviews and observation notes while also keeping in mind my own reflections as a former student. To analyze the qualitative data I did not use a computer program. Rather, I relied on thorough and repeated readings of my field notes for patterns and themes. Data from the interviews and my observations with non-participant community members also helped to substantiate the patterns I found and inform my broader understanding of community-based forestry in the Swan Valley.
I identified themes by grouping related quotations and observations together. These involved statements that I interpreted as conveying similar feelings, sentiments, and experiences. I gleaned these from notes from interviews, observations, and personal reflection. All of the student and community participant interviews revealed several shared experiences and feelings. Observations in the community and of the current students, particularly through independent study presentations, correlated with these shared experiences and feelings. Once I determined the themes based on these groupings, I returned to the literature on popular education and place-based education to see if there were any connections between the themes and the literature, particularly in the relevance these education theories may provide for determining the various influences that create the Landscape and Livelihood experience students and community participants describe and what I observe and perceive as a researcher. I built on concepts included in these literatures because I saw them as having an important connection to the educational experience of community forestry in the Swan Valley and possible implication for creating similar opportunities elsewhere. In doing so, I encountered process studies, a philosophy movement connected to the writings of Alfred North Whitehead, which helped me to probe even deeper into informing how I interpreted and discussed the themes I discovered in my fieldwork. The education theories behind popular education, place-based education, and process studies seem to be significant in making suggestions about the impact LL has on students and community participants. I found in the literature distinct and striking connections between themes and the arguments within the literature. In this way, interweaving the literature informed and affirmed the themes I had discovered. In addition to helping me gain a language for communicating my own
conclusions, these literatures also helped me to further problematize my results by showing how the conclusions I draw relate and speak to the arguments already published in these research areas.

**Chapter Conclusion**

In sum, the methods I utilized included extended residence in the study community, which enabled me to conduct personal interviews and engage in participant observation. My own personal experience as a LL student is also an important aspect, one in which I discuss separately from the results chapter. Rigorous reading and cogitation of notes, interviews, and observations enabled me to identify patterns and themes from these multiple data sets. Literature from community forestry, popular education, place-based education, and process studies provided additional concepts and concerns to better understand these themes. I now turn to a discussion of the goals and philosophy behind Landscape and Livelihood.
CHAPTER 4  DESCRIBING THE LANDSCAPE AND LIVELIHOOD EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first provides a full description of the Landscape and Livelihood (herein LL) field semester, and the second section fleshes out the philosophy of the LL instructors and their goals for the program.

Section 1: Landscape and Livelihood on the Ground

In this section I discuss the design of Landscape and Livelihood. I discuss the major activities which include courses, journaling, field trips, homestays, involvement and selection of community participants (or “experts”), and how students are evaluated. Before I begin, it is important to remember that on the surface, Landscape and Livelihood (LL) is a semester long program that involves five college-level courses in Biogeography of Northwestern Montana, Watershed Dynamics, Forests and Rural Communities, Field Skills for Conservation Work, and Independent Study. However, the courses are not discrete but often overlap, as does learning in various settings and with varied teachers. A particularly useful way to understand the Landscape and Livelihood program is to think of it as a series of layers. There are the courses that provide the core of the field semester. Within these, the students participate in various activities. Some are oriented to the students individually or as a group with little contact with the community such as journaling and the backpacking trip, while others are directly linked with other students, families, and organizations in the rural landscapes. The activities provide a vehicle for exchange and different types of interpersonal experiences, which are yet another layer, whether they manifest as personal reflection or an exchange of stories and ideas or both. As will be discussed below, a key goal of the semester is to enable students to become
more personally reflective about what they learn, to develop a system of ethics, and to identify everyday practices for living according to these ethics. The research is interested in how these experiences mutually influence students and community participants as they relate to each other and the broader context of community forestry in the Swan Valley.

Courses and Activities

As soon as students arrive at the Beck homestead where NwC is located, they begin their non-conventional two month educational semester by exploring the homestead’s 80 acres to find a special journaling spot they will return to throughout the semester to reflect on and write about their experiences.

![Figure 1. A journaling spot in the Swan Valley](image)

Students also begin preparing for their 2-week backpacking trip in the Swan range and Bob Marshall Wilderness by learning field journaling techniques and Wilderness First Aid basics they will utilize throughout the semester.

The backpacking trip is the designated “Biogeography” course of the semester where students are introduced to the flora and fauna as well geologic and ecological processes of the area. Students have the entire semester to write about the natural history
of the flora and fauna they encounter. Examples of these entries are in the Field Journals section of this chapter. While backpacking, students also learn other field skills such as using a map and compass and animal tracking. These are part of the “Field Skills in Conservation” component. This course was inspired by the LL teacher’s observation that many students graduating with forestry and environmental related degrees lack a knowledge and awareness of these orienteering skills. It is also while backpacking in the Swan range that students learn how to conduct a Whitebark pine survey on behalf of Northwest Connections’ monitoring efforts in partnership with the Swan Ecosystem Center’s citizen science efforts.

After returning from their backpacking trip, students put on their waders to spend two weeks learning watershed dynamics in the Swan and Blackfoot valleys. Once again, their journals are used to demonstrate their comprehension of concepts. In particular, they create an instruction section of their journal on how to conduct a stream survey. One day is devoted entirely to culverts where they travel back roads of the Swan Valley learning how to determine proper culvert design as they relate to stream health. This section of the course also includes a stream survey in partnership with SEC’s citizen science efforts. Additionally, the course includes a weekend field trip, included as one of the homestays, to the Blackfoot Valley where students stay with a third generation ranching family and talk with local conservationists.
The course on “Forests and Communities” builds on what students have been learning from biogeography, watershed dynamics, and field skills by placing their knowledge in a context specific to the relationship between rural landscapes and rural communities. This is an opportunity for students to learn more about the community forestry history of the Swan Valley, particularly via the Swan Ecosystem Center and the oral histories it has collected. Students also meet and talk with a local mill representative.
as well as spend several days as a homestay with an independent logger in the Flathead Valley where they visit, among many places, restoration logging sites and a family-run mill.

Figure 4. A LL student talks with a Flathead Valley restoration logger.

Figure 5. LL students and instructor, Tom Parker, talk with an owner of a Flathead Valley family-run sawmill.

All of these courses provide time for students to talk with community members and see their lives through the eyes of residents. This is especially the case when students spend a weekend with a volunteer, resident family known as the “homestay.”
For many students, this is one of the most intense experiences of their semester since they are spending more time individually with community participants as opposed to the group homestays in the Flathead and Blackfoot valleys.

As noted above, while the field semester is divided into particular courses, with certain weeks devoted to specific subjects, these subjects are not experienced in discreet blocks of time, except for the Independent Study. The program is designed to inspire critical thinking about how all of the subjects are interwoven, connected, and present in a particular place. Thus, the intention of the field semester is to be more aligned with “real life” in the community. For example, even though the course on “Forests and Rural Communities” does not begin until much later in the semester, early in the semester a day is devoted to community firewood gathering for people who need assistance. Firewood collecting needs to occur before winter sets in, so this time with the community occurs then. Also, courses overlap and serve multiple purposes. For example, students learn a field skill by learning how to conduct surveys, such as the stream survey, which is connected to the greater community forestry efforts in the Valley, so in this sense, students are participating in three courses at once: “Field Skills for Conservation Work”, “Watershed Dynamics”, and “Forests and Rural Communities.”
Figure 6. LL students conduct a stream survey in the Swan Valley.

Figure 7. LL students conduct a Whitebark pine survey in the Swan Range.
Each year, LL students also spend several days participating in a rustic furniture class taught by a LL instructor who relies on building this kind of furniture as a source of income in the Swan Valley. Students learn how to collect necessary materials in the Swan Valley landscape. They research uses for the materials, design the piece as a group and build it with the instructor’s guidance. Completed pieces become part of the barn’s living environment where the students reside. The semester I was conducting my field research, the students decided to give their piece to the family they stayed with in the Flathead Valley.
The final part of the field semester entails the Independent Study Project (ISP), which students themselves research, design, and implement. This involves spending a week working and possibly living with a family or person connected to a community organization. Students are encouraged to pick a project connected to their interests and passions. Independent study projects vary in that some are intended specifically as a benefit to the community while others can focus more on the student’s own individual growth. For example, one student chose to spend her time designing an informational
brochure for Valley residents on watershed health and pond construction; this was made available through the Swan Ecosystem Center. Another student did his internship with a Native American elder on native uses of plants and demonstrated his knowledge of this at the community presentation where students share their internship experiences. Students keep a journal during their time to reflect on what they are learning and the challenges they are facing. The independent study projects were one of the activities I observed as a researcher, and I will use these observations later in this chapter on key themes.

Selection of Community “Experts”

Students interact with a wide variety of speakers on the land. In past semesters they have had opportunities to talk with a soil scientist, several biologists, an archeologist, a fire scientist, mill owners, loggers, and professional environmentalists and conservationists. Landscape and Livelihood instructors are intentional about who they expose the students to. Their selection of community “experts” is defined by who they deem ethically inspiring, though they also acknowledge this does not imply that the community participant does not struggle with ethical questions about maintaining their livelihoods. This, however, is part of the very core of Landscape and Livelihood - that being to expose students to people they still may not agree with after interacting with them because there is still value in the interaction in how it may contribute to building more trust and respect and the possible aggregate effect over time. Ethically inspiring people does not equal “perfect” or “ideal” people; it implies people who, for the LL instructors, work and struggle with actualizing their ethics on the ground intentionally as they navigate hard questions about what they are capable of doing and what they want to
do. Also, the community experts vary in background. Some are government employees with the federal land management agencies. Some work for local non-profit conservation organizations. Some are local loggers, trappers, and ranchers. In this way, there is no division between people who have received formal, scientific training and people who have acquired their knowledge through working and being on the land. This does not reduce, however, the significance of how “local knowledge” or “place-based knowledge” and “scientific knowledge” may differ and how important questions are raised regarding land-use decisions and how different people are included.

**Evaluation**

Student evaluation is field based and practiced in real time. Teaching, fulfilling journal requirements, a final mock exercise, and general participation are ways students are evaluated. In addition to field skill-specific journal entries, students are also evaluated for their knowledge of the field skills they have been learning throughout the semester by teaching the field skills to Swan Valley elementary school students. LL students design a field skills course for grades 5-8 in which they are invited to spend a day on the Beck homestead. LL students lead them in experiential exercises based on what they learned in their own field skills component of the program. These skills include using a map and compass, animal tracking, wilderness first aid, and field journaling. One interesting observation I made as a LL student is that many of the Swan Valley students knew as much as we were teaching, if not more, because the landscape we were teaching is their home, and a place where they and their families recreate, work and have known their whole lives. The experience, therefore, was more of an exchange,
a give and take of knowledge between the LL students and the Condon students. Here are some photographs to illustrate this field day further.

![Figure 11. A Condon student shares his field journal with a LL student.](image1)

Figure 11. A Condon student shares his field journal with a LL student.

![Figure 12. A Condon student practices first aid on a LL student.](image2)

Figure 12. A Condon student practices first aid on a LL student.

Journals are a place for students to demonstrate what they have learned. Field journaling is just one component of the journal requirement. Students also use their
journals to respond to essay questions LL instructors periodically prepare; kinds of questions include summarizing key points from evening readings to prepare for the next day’s lesson and responding to questions about community participants they interact with who may have competing values or perspectives. Students are also asked to draw various watershed features as a way to show their comprehension. Students also are asked to write poems regarding their time in the program and to draw and illustrate the flora and fauna of their special place.

Figure 13. LL students share their field journals.

Figure 14. LL students write in their journals during watershed dynamics.
For the independent study projects, students use their journals to track their progress, what they are learning, and challenges they may have. In this way, journals serve multiple purposes, and they are a large portion of how students are evaluated in terms of the effort they put into all aspects of the journals. Journals are a way for the LL instructors to see how students are engaging with the experience and their thought process in a format that provides continuity over the course of the semester. Here are some photographs to illustrate the examples of field journaling as part of the biogeography, watershed, and field skills courses.

Figure 15. Field journal entry on Whitebark pine and Clark’s nutcracker
Figure 16. Field journal entry of landscape sketch identifying geologic features

Figure 17. Field journal entry on a black bear
Figure 18. Field journal entry on a Cooper’s hawk

Figure 19. Field journal entry on mountain ash
Figure 20. Watershed dynamics entry on different kinds of pools

Figure 21. Field skill entry on how to hang food properly in bear country
Students do not have any formal tests, though they do have a final assignment. This entails a mock conflict resolution exercise that takes an entire day. Students assume roles assigned to them and they must “act out” with each other and develop a plan to address a pre-determined question developed by the LL instructors. This question involves issues the Swan community is currently grappling with, emphasizing collaborative decision making around community forestry efforts amidst competing viewpoints and agendas.

In addition to teaching Condon students, fulfilling journal requirements, and participating in the mock exercise, students are evaluated overall for their participation in discussions, field trips, and activities. Students are encouraged to ask questions and engage with each other, instructors, and community participants, doing so respectfully.

At the end of the watershed component (mid-way through the semester) and at the end of the semester, students receive a letter grade and a narrative grade. The narrative grade provides students with feedback including the instructor’s observations of their participation and the quality of their effort throughout the course, which includes their journals.

Section 2: Landscape and Livelihood Philosophy and Goals

In this section I will discuss the philosophies, goals, and hopes of the Landscape and Livelihood (LL) educators. First, I elaborate on how LL fits into the greater context of Northwest Connections’ philosophy. From this, I discuss how LL emerges with its own specific philosophy and goals.
Landscape and Livelihood Nested within Northwest Connections

Landscape and Livelihood’s mission does not represent the entirety of Northwest Connections (NwC), though it pulls in parts of the NwC’s overall organizational philosophy. According to the organization’s mission statement, NwC attempts to provide current and site-specific information to inform management decisions on the landscapes of western Montana where such information is lacking. Northwest Connections is particularly committed to providing holistic information about the ecosystems that involve the actions and concerns of local people in the process. NwC is filling an important niche by finding ways to provide decision makers not only with rigorous site-specific information, but information gathered and validated by local people who then become part of the decision-making process. According to NwC educators, the organization immediately faced and continues to grapple with gaining credibility with the government land management agencies and being able to provide guidance in the decision making, whether it be determining hunting quotas or designing fuels reduction plans. How much influence NwC actually has seems to vary from project to project, but they continue involving citizen volunteers in collecting social and ecological data and monitoring changes in the ecosystems they live in locally and regionally.

Through different funding sources, NwC is also able to hire local people to conduct their various monitoring projects, which raises the issue of how different people in the community benefit from NwC. Interviews with community members who do not directly participate in LL activities expressed a distrust they feel toward NwC. Distrust of NwC comes from recognition that this organization has gained some power to pursue an agenda that can affect the community without the latter’s consent, and that NwC’s
values may be different from their own. Tom and Melanie, along with other LL educators, created Landscape and Livelihood in large part to make connections between students, community members and themselves. This research has found that Landscape and Livelihood is successful at building bridges through demonstrating the value of community interaction especially through community-based collaboration for conservation. The education process within the field semester is designed to ultimately teach this message.

Landscape and Livelihood Field Semester Philosophy and Goals

According to the organization’s founders (i.e., Melanie, Andrea and Tom), their motivation for LL came from their observation of a gap between university knowledge and local wisdom from “the rest of Montana.” They noticed local people feared and were suspicious of people affiliated with a university. In their experience, academics relate to the rural communities as the “expert” who walks in, drops his or her key points, leaves, and is a major influence with the government management agency. In contrast, the rural community, which is directly affected by those decisions, has little power to influence these decisions. Their knowledge of ecosystems, the interactions among its parts, how it has changed and how they would like to see it preserved or changed in the future counts less than that of academics derived through a university education. The founders also observed that even students who grew up in different ecosystems and have only a few years of classroom experience, are somehow expected to have more and better knowledge than residents and are often afraid to listen to rural residents because they will look afraid. As a reaction, students assume the stance of a distant expert, thus creating
social discord and disconnection with local people and communities. This is particularly disturbing when the student or others assumes that knowledge about one place or process is transferable to another place. Community members often find this insulting. It is relevant to point out that this social distance and failure of academically trained professionals to respect the local knowledge of rural residents is often a characteristic of professional forestry and a tension that community forestry seeks to soften by valuing multiple forms of knowledge and knowledge holders.

For the founders of NwC, caring for the Earth requires the best of both academic and local knowledge while all the time remaining humble. Specifically, they think there is a need for local knowledge and good scientific understanding with humility and reverence for rural places and an appreciation for how ecosystems change and are different across different landscapes. Thus, a founding goal of Landscape and Livelihood is to provide educational experiences that respect and integrate science and local knowledge towards conservation. This cannot be done in a week or by only NwC educators. It occurs through a combination of places and peoples from the Beck homestead to the adjoining wilderness areas which provide settings for students to live, learn and study, and which as I will show below, leaves a lasting impression on the many young people and community residents with whom they interact.

One of the goals LL educators begin working on immediately is orienting students to be receptive to thinking in complex ways – to show there are no black-and-whites, that thinking critically and asking hard questions goes hand-and-hand with also being respectful and learning to listen to others who appear quite different from themselves. In this sense, the courses and place provide a framework for encouraging dialogue, and
students are “primed” to interact with the community with this intention. Again, these are also key goals of community forestry. In an interview, Melanie Parker, one of the founders and educators at NwC, described how NwC is a bit dishonest in how it advertises Landscape and Livelihood because it is more spiritual than people are led to believe. By this she is referring to the fact that the organization has a core philosophy behind the program that is about becoming ethical and humble toward other people and the land. The founders are especially looking for the students to experience the same struggle they do themselves in searching for deeper, ethical connections to people and land. Part of forming these connections is the ability to empathize. They think advertising using this type of language would be difficult, and that focusing initially on the courses and credits provides a more accessible language for sparking student interest. The LL educators aim to offer an integrated education approach - between spirit and on the ground technical, environmental skills and knowledge, something I try to illustrate further in the results.
Chapter Conclusion

Landscape and Livelihood educators want students to leave the field semester with a broader set of tools for learning how to engage the world around them in ethical and conservation-oriented ways. Some of these tools are physical skills students learn like wilderness first aid, animal tracking, and using a map and compass. There is the concern that students are graduating from natural resource programs never having learned basic field skills, so these lessons are a way to keep this knowledge alive. There are the skills students learn for conservation work like conducting a stream or amphibian survey, a road or tree survey. Students have an opportunity to teach. And, there are the thinking and communication skills they use the entire semester, whether they are self-reflecting by a stream, debating a controversial essay with others, attending a public meeting, or talking with and listening to a rancher as they uncoil barbed wire together. Collectively, these tools are valuable assets to students, depending on how engaged and willing they are to participate. I now turn to a discussion of the themes that emerged from my research in the Swan Valley.
CHAPTER 5 RESULTS: ASSESSING THE MEANINGS AND IMPACTS OF THE LANDSCAPE AND LIVELIHOOD FIELD SEMESTER

This chapter presents and discusses the results from my field research in the Swan Valley. I identify and discuss key themes that emerged from the research on how participants made meaning of their LL experience. Briefly, key themes for the students are included under the categories of: 1) Understandings of people in rural landscapes 2) Views on forest-based livelihoods 3) A sense of joy, hope, and inspiration and 4) Desired participation in conservation related activities. The key themes for community participants involved: 1) A sense of joy, hope, and inspiration but also 2) Role as a community forestry educator. In the final section, I discuss how I see all of the reflections and concerns of the participants connect to form a picture of community forestry education, one that fosters a deep understanding of a particular place and raises awareness and desire for engagement and participation in community forestry.

Student descriptions of their experiences and their own self-reported lessons figure importantly in reaching my conclusions. Using all of my methods, I weave this material together to build on and illustrate the themes I have identified. They are organized below in the following themes, which I think capture their key meaning. These include “understandings of people in rural landscapes,” “views on forest-based livelihoods” “a sense of joy, hope, and inspiration,” and “desired participation in conservation related activities.” At the beginning of each theme, I define it, discuss why I think it is important, and describe how it emerged. I then turn to the participants’ own words. I have tried to include sufficient quotations so the reader may see for him or herself the reasons for my interpretations.
As noted in Chapter Two, the literature on popular education, place-based education, and the education aspect of process studies have strongly influenced my thinking and provided useful insights and concepts into how I examine and describe the themes I have drawn from the research. As I explored the data, I was interested in how they connected with the following key concepts:

- Freire’s notion of learning as a communion between student and teacher and the importance of intention in this process
- Freire’s resulting notion of joy and hope
- Linked to the above two is Process Studies’ and Freire’s development of moral imagination through questioning and connecting
- Process Studies’ and place-based education’s notion of interconnectedness and integrated education
- Place-based education’s emphasis on the relevance of learning in a community, on the land, and in an experiential way.

Examining how the data I found resonates with these key concepts from the education theories helped me to better understand the experience the students and community participants had. Also, looking at the education theories as interconnected and related to the themes seems to suggest implications for meaning that can be drawn further from the themes. Specifically, the significance for nurturing human connections and relationships seems to be connected to how these theories play out on the ground in the LL context, and they seem to provide useful insights into what qualities other community-based education organizations could benefit from learning more about.
**Student Experiences of Landscape and Livelihood**

The research identified four themes among how the students experienced the Landscape and Livelihood field semester. I examine each below. It is important to note that while I present each as a separate theme, they are very interconnected and influence each other. Particularly, “understandings of people in rural landscapes” and “views on forest-based livelihoods” are so much so, that they can appear the same. I argue, however, that each one has important differences even if there is overlap. Perhaps a helpful way of looking at these two is to see “views on forest-based livelihoods” as a sub-theme to “understandings of people in rural landscapes.”

**Theme 1: Understandings of People in Rural Landscapes**

“Understandings of people in rural landscapes” refers to how student views and/or stereotypes about rural peoples and livelihoods are affected by their involvement in the LL semester, particularly through interactions with community participants. This theme encapsulates attitudes and beliefs such as: they (rural peoples) have a part to play in conservation efforts; they have important knowledge to share; and they have a knowledge I did not know existed. In particular, there is a sense that the student has learned to recognize the importance of rural culture and knowledge, as well as the ability of rural, resource-based livelihoods to be tied to the land in a sustainable way. It also has produced changed feelings that rural people and communities do have a legitimate role in making decisions about how forests in their valley are managed.

This theme is important for several reasons. First, it is one of the main goals of the Landscape and Livelihood semester. Specifically, LL educators observed that college
graduates were entering conservation related fields with a bias against rural peoples and their resource-based livelihoods. Rural, western landscapes are dominated by federally managed, public land. Accordingly, many of the jobs for young people are in government agencies. Too often, preparation for a government position in land management continues to privilege professional forestry training and graduates and fails to include learning of how rural peoples, communities and traditional resource-based livelihoods have contributed to sustainable forestry and forests. This is a particularly limited factor in a day and age where land managers are expected, whether mandated or through a history of collaboration in a particular place, to work with communities cooperatively and respectfully. In practice, how this is actually occurring on the ground varies from one context to another. A prominent conservationist in the Swan Valley shared the view that people in the Valley can be critical of others who do not have a lot of practical or experience-based knowledge and that there is little trust for people who get their knowledge from books. In particular, the person noted how environmentalists have a lot of power and can be very destructive, so they need to be aware of what they are doing, especially when litigating because so often they are using limited facts and have not been to the place that is contested. LL educators want the students to become aware of the local, grounded knowledge that rural people and communities often have, and stretch beyond stereotypes or limited knowledge they may have about a person or place and open themselves to what they can learn from the experience of interacting with real people. They want their knowledge to be grounded in the context of the real place they are experiencing while also integrated with their own academic training.
Referring back to Melanie Parker’s comments about how Northwest Connections is a bit dishonest in how they advertise Landscape and Livelihood, I can understand Melanie’s viewpoint when I consider the theme of ‘understandings of people in rural landscapes. Students come into LL with a set of preconceived notions about what their experience will be like, in part, because it is advertised as a field semester where students earn college credits that can be applied to their degree requirements. The way it is advertised does not come close to capturing the deeper attitude shifts NwC is aiming for and which I have found in my research. As one former student reflected, even students who are already primed to think in an integrative way and to value collaboration are still challenged in the field semester.

“We all bring our own particular prejudices to any learning exercise such as LL. Ideally, one would check those and really listen to what people had to say but probably what happens more often is searching for something that will confirm first impressions or preconceived notions of a speaker. I’m certainly guilty of this. I can’t honestly remember any such specific instances. Part of this might be due to the fact that after growing up in rural Idaho I perhaps came into the program with a slightly different perspective on these things than some other people. Here’s the thing, though – nearly every speaker, I do remember that they seemed committed to the place, and the continuance of the place, even if their view of what was right for the place might have differed from my vision. Most people who cut down trees for a living or trap and skin little furry creatures enjoy being out in the forest and don’t live out in the woods because of chance or because they couldn’t get a job at the Missoula Wal-Mart but because they like the bloomin’ woods. And when they look at a clearcut or raccoon they don’t see the same thing that more classically ecologically minded folks do, but that doesn’t mean they don’t value the resource. And so someone else appearing and telling them their view isn’t valid, and they don’t care because they can’t talk at length about trophic cascades, hurts.”

The process of interacting with community members, coming to a place students perhaps would not ordinarily engage with, forces the students to compare their stereotypes or pre-conceived notions with real people and places and thus re-evaluate
their prior conceptions based on abstractions learned in a classroom text, media or their own sub-culture (often urban). Abstraction and removal from specific, real-life contexts limits the depth students can integrate concepts into their whole selves, in contrast to “acquiring” information that is disconnected from their own development. The concepts students are learning in courses, like watershed dynamics and biogeography, are connected to a place, a people, and a history. Separating these out, again, seems to limit the depth of the learning experience. The kind of interactions afforded LL students with members of the Swan community allows for the kind of “ground-truthing” that is included in the reflections of the above quotation from a LL student. For this student, the ground-truthing included realizing the importance of continually reminding oneself to be open-minded and look beyond the surface, as he implies people consciously or unconsciously form pre-conceived notions, even with good intentions. As this student noted, though he may not have agreed with some of the community member’s viewpoints, he was able to learn something valuable about these people by witnessing their commitment to place. Below is another observation to further illustrate how LL students were coming to understand rural people and places in a more nuanced and positive manner.

One student chose to do her independent student project on art and conservation. She mentored with two area artists, one of which who lives in the Swan Valley. She decided to create a conservation poster to promote community forestry efforts in the Valley. The poster was also a place for her to express the new ways of understanding communities and conservation that she reached during the semester. Included in the images she painted was a deer with an orange eye. The orange, she said, is symbolic of
hunter’s orange which symbolizes her own transformation about coming to see hunting as a valued practice, one that is not deserving of harsh judgments. Specifically, people who hunt are not barbaric. More so, judging a person based solely on a practice such as hunting hinders connection with that person and the possible growth and creativity that could sprout from the connection.

![Poster created by a LL student for her ISP](image)

**Figure 23.** Poster a LL student created for her ISP

This kind of awareness emerged from the opportunity she had to interact with community participants through activities. One of the activities that influenced this specific student’s impressions was a field trip to the Flathead Valley, where the entire group of students spends a weekend staying with a restoration logger and his family. The restoration
logger is also an avid hunter. Another student on this field trip described to me over a meal how the experience with the restoration logger was beginning to show him that rural culture does not mean everyone has the same values, but many people who live in rural places have tremendous amounts of knowledge that seems to go unnoticed most of the time and what a tragedy this is. The student expressed how he had never thought about this way before specific to rural landscapes in the U.S. He went on to say he wondered about all the small, rural places around the U.S. that have these “knowledge keepers” whose wisdom will die with them for various reasons including marginalization.

During the individual homestays, one of the current students resided at the home of the person whose cabin I was renting. The student shared with me her unexpected experience of feeling at home with her host. For her, it was a surprise to come to a rural community to discover a diverse group of connected of people. Her host in particular left an impression with the student because of their shared environmental backgrounds. For the student, her host represented an example she was now hoping to live by. The experience also broke down a stereotype about environmentalists. The environmental background the student came from was urban-based. It was a lesson for the student to see an environmentalist role model, who also hunts, an activity she previously associated with “rednecks.” She also was able to see this environmentalist tirelessly commit herself to building connections between people with different viewpoints rather than fostering divisive community dynamics. The host, in essence, helped to provide an alternative picture of a conservationist and hence “conservation” to the student whose history with advocacy had been guided by polarization and not collaboration.
This student found a voice publicly for these lessons at her independent student project presentation where she had mentored with an area community-based conservation organization. She described her experience of looking at a map of the Swan Valley before arriving for the field semester. She said in her presentation, “Looking at a map of the Swan showed a rural valley with Wilderness on both sides. I knew this was a unique place and that I could learn new things here that would help me understand rural communities and how to better communicate.” Through her experiences of her homestay, interactions with community participants, and her project, the student focused her presentation explicitly on the lessons she learned. On one particular walk with an elder activist and forest practitioner and based on her interactions with her project mentor, the student shared these lessons. “If you aren’t willing to sit down and compromise, you might as well not be at the table; you might as well be on another planet and talking to people from different walks and mindsets is difficult, but their views are legitimate and we need to work with them.” Ultimately the student discovered that “listening and having an open mind and a willingness to learn and understand another perspective” helped her to understand her own.

Another transformative experience for many students occurred in the Blackfoot Valley where they visited a trapper, walking the land with him and hearing his stories and philosophy. Several of the students, myself included, did not know trapping was still a viable livelihood. This trapper also hosted a student for a homestay. Two former students reflected through interviews about their experience with the trapper. The first student shared her impressions based on the field trip, and the second student shared her
experience based her homestay with the trapper. Here is a quotation from the first student.

“The one that really stands out was _______. I thought trapping was outdated, a relic of the 1800s. What are these people thinking? Such a cruel practice. Wreaked havoc historically, bringing fur trapping into this country and a market for furs. Just meeting with him and talking, you really grew to appreciate his knowledge of the ecosystems of which he was working. You still don’t have to like the practice of trapping, but I definitely gained an appreciation of it. Even if you don’t agree with it, you still understand and have an appreciation. If it if came up in conversation, I would be in a good position to defend fur trapping.”

Here is a quotation from the second student.

“My host, ____, surprised me from the beginning by asking me questions about myself and my goals for my education. His occupation as a trapper made me think many of his opinions were one-sided and biased due to his sources. So his interest in me and my ideas, his willingness to learn and understand new and different perspectives, changed my initial impression. Watching ____ in action, our field trip and around his home during my homestay, I felt I saw a different side to the person I initially met. The skill and diligence he demonstrated while tracking revealed his interest in the habits of the animals and that trapping is not just a blood-thirsty sport. I was able to see his spirit and love for the land come shining through. I remember one night at the dinner table during our homestays that ____ and his wife and I began talking about wolf reintroduction and they threw out a few comments about wolves that I definitely didn’t agree with. I realized how important it is to just sit back and absorb rather than create an opinion immediately.”

Both students describe how their preconceived ideas about trapping and what kind of person practices it evolved during their interactions with the trapper in the Blackfoot Valley. Specifically, both students shared their surprise at how connected to ecosystem processes the trapper was and how he demonstrated a sense of humility and respect for his work. The second student in particular made a telling point in her last sentence. First, however, I want to make clear that the LL educators are not trying to convert students over to their belief systems. Rather, they are trying to help students develop skills in
listening and respect for other belief systems – ones, that for example, include trapping. This is the power of the experience because these two students realize they do not have to agree with the person in order to form a real and meaningful connection and/or a more grounded perspective on the issue. More so, the last sentence of the second student’s quotation gets to a more difficult yet fundamental step for human connection. What this student is tapping into is that by listening to the comments they don’t agree with, they are creating the space to better understand the trapper’s position, one that is likely connected to a complex historical relationship with the land, his community, and himself, making the trapper more of a whole person and less of a stereotype. This kind of willingness to resist judgment and listen leads to a stronger potential for mutual understanding. After all, as shown in the second student’s quotation, the trapper wanted the student to share as well, and he listened. Also, it seems that is was significant for both students that they were able to interact with people on the land, in the environment that is their home and familiar to them; in this way, it seems place-based education has much to offer in allowing for a dialogue to occur that would not necessarily happen in a classroom. It also seems like popular education is occurring in that the community members and the students are teaching each other; for some it may be skills and for others it may be broadened ideas.

There are many more examples of how “understandings of people in rural landscapes” emerged through the different methods. These are a handful that came out of homestay and field trip experiences. They involve spending time with a logger, a trapper, a forest practitioner, and an environmentalist. These labels are not helpful in that students learn that each one comes with a different set of baggage that does not come
close to giving color and life to the actual people behind the labels. Being with them on
the land, in their communities, and in their homes, students gain a richer, more vivid
understanding of the people they only understood previously as an abstraction connected
with superficial labels. Embedded in this growing awareness of people in rural
landscapes, students also begin to see a rural community’s connection to the land
management decisions regarding the forested landscapes around them.

Theme 2: Views on Forest-Based Livelihoods

“Views on forest-based livelihoods” refers to how a student’s preconceived
impressions about forests and communities shifted over the course of the field semester.
This theme draws upon a dynamic understanding about how communities are connected
to places around them, through different types of people land-use practices, and how this
interaction can be recognized. The Landscape and Livelihood program believes that
people are intimately connected to the places where they live, work, and play and often
have developed rich ecological knowledge that is missing in scientific descriptions of that
place. Appreciating the close connections between rural peoples and place raises
important questions, then, of the role of rural communities in land-use decision-making.
This theme overlaps with “understandings of people in rural landscapes.”

The theme of “views on forest-based livelihoods” is important because, as I
discussed earlier, there is a close connection between local peoples’ livelihood and land-
use choices, which makes them particularly vulnerable when decisions about forests are
made. Part of the process of understanding the link between forest-dependent livelihoods
and their role in land-use decision making is the place-based ecological education
students receive. Students learn about ecosystem processes such as the role of fire, insects and disease, watershed dynamics, and wildlife. Learning about these processes from LL instructors and community participants, whose livelihoods are connected to ecosystem functions, broadens the forest knowledge students receive and contextualizes it in the livelihoods connected to these ecosystems.

The understanding one has of forests determines whether or not it is even possible to acknowledge there is a legitimate connection between forest health and sustainable, rural livelihoods that demonstrate forest stewardship. The failure of outsiders to understand how particular forests work, and the way local peoples have used these forests over time, can undermine the ways local peoples use and manage forests over time, and may limit the legitimacy they are awarded in forest management decisions in the future. Paulo Freire (2002) acknowledges that disenfranchised peoples’ “ailment” is their desire to participate; bigotry and neglect are symptoms that participation is not valued; rather, it is considered by others to be a problem. Official land managers empowered to make land-management choices in forested communities are setting themselves up for potential conflict and polarization if the connection between communities and the forests they depend on is ignored. Forest managers need to recognize the potential outcry when they do not understand or involve residents whose livelihoods depend on nearby forests in forest management decisions. As noted earlier, the LL educators, particularly Tom and Melanie Parker, would like to raise awareness of the presence and value of local ecological knowledge and practice, and encourage the shift to thinking of rural communities in natural resource management as partners rather than as obstacles.
Community forestry has been very useful for reemphasizing the possibilities of sustainable timber harvest and especially the impact on local livelihoods when timber is no longer a viable local livelihood. For many in the LL program, recognizing this link was an important turning point for students in expanding their views on forest-based livelihoods. Understanding that forests can be sustainably harvested opened the window for them to seeing some types of logging as legitimate, and as such a greater openness to let timber extraction be a legitimate option rather than to exclude it as a possible forest management option. Understanding the renewal basis of forest use is a key entry point for helping students realize the stake rural people have in natural resource management and the validity of their involvement in the decisions that affect them in such an intimate way. LL educators promote collaborative processes and its benefits, rather than divisive ones, as a major vehicle for building this broadening view of forest-based livelihoods.

The LL program was able to nurture this understanding by providing opportunities for students to observe and interact with community participants whose livelihoods are connected to sustainable timber harvest, ranching, and trapping. As one former student reflected, views of the forest that do not include sustainable timber harvesting as a possibility severely limited her ability to understand and connect with the contested issues of logging, and the damage done to both forests and people when those people are excluded from this debate:

“Before my Montana trip, I was a regular extremist with no basis for my views. I thought all logging was bad and all prescribed fires were terrible. Meeting with ___ and ___, who taught us about fires and natural regulation, made me realize that both of those acts are very important, and while they can be done a wrong way, with education and environmental awareness, they could also be very helpful.”
Students were also able to see that even rural people whose livelihood depends on logging care about the greater concern for ecosystem management. Students were able to see that these community participants who work in the woods have also developed ecological knowledge that informs their land-use practices. Coming to this understanding is even more of an affirmation that people in rural landscapes can have a necessary and legitimate right to maintain their livelihoods and participate in the decision-making process. One former student described the dramatic shift she experienced as a result of her interactions with local participants as well as her overall education experience in LL.

“Being of the urban intellectual background that I am, I’m aware that we’ve wreaked havoc with this country’s forests, and they’ve been way over cut, and in bad shape, and I think, in a sense, my knowledge pre-Montana has stopped there, and I don’t think I was anti logging, but something like the Sierra Club’s zero cut program wouldn’t seem crazy to me, but post-Montana Northwest Connections, the Sierra Club thing sounds ridiculous to me, and I’m appalled that a national environmental organization is advocating something so ill-informed, because Northwest Connections made me realize if you want to protect these huge areas that are what makes our country wild, you absolutely have to work with people that live in these places, and you have to give them credit, trust, and power to make a living off the land without destroying it. You have to give them that ability. Otherwise they can’t live there authentically, having an authentic working relationship with land. And that’s what Northwest Connections is all about. It’s not about, “Ooh that’s pretty, let’s go there.” It’s about an authentic working relationship with the land.”

This quotation also raises an important philosophic underpinning of Landscape and Livelihood. The LL educators do not prime students to assume all local ecological knowledge is well founded and that all local loggers are good forest stewards. Rather, the message students receive is to spend time and interact with people who work in the woods – listen to them and think judiciously before jumping to conclusions about what they are doing and the kind of person they are. They are also able to build on the technical skills that LL provides regarding principles of sustainable forestry. Still, LL
educators aim to expose students to ethically inspiring forest practitioners; even so, they do not expect students to agree necessarily with the people. What is more important is developing strong listening skills that lead to a greater connection and a more integrated perspective on the different ways people maintain forest-based livelihoods. With that said, it is also important to note that LL educators do have a definition of local ecological knowledge they are working with. It involves a person living in a place over many years, being on the land and observing the ecosystem processes and thinking about them critically. For example, Tom Parker, whose livelihood at one time depended on outfitting, is able to teach students about animal tracking due to his multi-decade experience of observing wildlife.

Another student I observed during my field research shared with me during a meal after the Blackfoot Valley homestay that she realized, as a result of being on the land with the rancher and talking with local conservationists, that she did not have to agree with them completely in order to learn from them. She expressed that this was a surprise for her in that she was not expecting to feel this way about a livelihood (ranching) she originally had strong misgivings about. More so, she said that the time on the ranch and the day walking with a local trapper, also in the Blackfoot Valley, made her realize how little she understood of the nuances behind sustainable, resource-based livelihoods. Specifically, she commented on how the experience revealed a distinction between people who maintain livelihoods on a sustainable “small” scale and the larger, less sustainable scale that occurs with more industrial operations. This student lamented the observation that so often this distinction is not made by “outsiders” or “environmentalists” and the people who are living ethically (or trying to) on the land are
lumped into the damaging reputation category that industrial, ethically dubious companies often find themselves in. In this example, it seems apparent that the student’s “moral imagination” is expanding to encompass a more nuanced and mature understanding of rural livelihoods. Also, it seems this was able to occur through discussions with the rancher and trapper – a dialogue between the students and the community participants on the land.

Discussions with local loggers enabled students to begin to understand the complexities these people have had to deal with as a result of rural economic restructuring. A particularly difficult aspect involves marketing forest products. As the above quotations and descriptions suggest, the students were learning about scale issues in community forestry. Coping with the shifting market trends in forest products is difficult for small-scale loggers in remote locations. The students were learning the difficulties of achieving economic flexibility, which involves factors beyond the control of local people and especially the challenges of how to keep more of the product in the local community. As one former student noted,

“No party has all the answers. Most profits go elsewhere. Value-added products and a more methodical approach to harvest help keep more of the benefits in the local community. Good forest management is as limited or more by economics in the current system as it is by any lack of understanding of the forest.”

To illustrate the opportunities and challenges involved in maintaining a sustainable and profitable logging operation, LL sponsors a field trip to a family-owned and operated, value-added sawmill in the Flathead Valley. For many students, this was a tremendous lesson. The mill owners shared their story of how their operation and especially their land ethic evolved over time. They entered the timber field as teenagers.
At first they were involved in a conventional logging company, which at that time, extracted timber through clear-cuts. What they learned is that this method only provided short-term benefits for their business and long-term degradation of the forests. They began to develop an understanding of and commitment to forest stewardship. They searched for the best possible use of their wood: looking for what will bring the most value based on what their harvesting practices provide. This is also an example of their development of local ecological knowledge through on-the-ground practice. In over 20 years they have demonstrated how their land-use practices are good for the forest and their business. They have been particularly adept at showing that certain sustainable forest practices are economically competitive as well as beneficial for forest health. The experience at the mill also spoke to the issue of cooperation with different landowners. Given that the timber for their mill comes largely from nearby State lands, the mill owners devote much time to developing connections with State foresters. Specifically, the mill owners are trying to demonstrate that forest stewardship in old growth fir and spruce forests is possible and economically viable. Providing this alternative example to State foresters is contributing to their capacity for developing collaborative efforts in land management practices on State forests. The degree to which the State foresters incorporate the concerns of the mill owners is a process that has required years of effort by the mill owners to demonstrate their forestry practices on the ground. For the students on this particular field trip, this is a space to wrestle with hard questions the mill owners voice their own struggle in. The field trip is one vivid example, among many, of the complexity one has to hold as a greater sense of interconnection develops in their perceptions of the world around them. As one student noted,
“It’s not just about having your logging operation and getting a paycheck, and then you go home, and that’s it. No. Everything is connected. (One of the mill owners) is thinking about this stuff all the time in everything he does. For him, what he does in the woods is connected to what ends up in the mill and the thought and care that goes into what kind product will be created, and all of this is part of how he sees life, his ethics, and his responsibility on the planet. He holds it all together. That’s amazing.”

Students learn the history, stories, and land ethic of residents through field trips and homestays. During the homestays, students have the opportunity to visit sites where the mill owners are working in old growth, so they are able to see how their land ethic translates into practices on the ground. One student in particular, who returned to his forestry studies at university following the LL program, suggested to his wood product’s professor the relevance and benefit of visiting this mill as a class field trip. They were touring other large-scale mills, and the student suggested that visiting as family mill would provide a more diverse perspective on economic possibilities as well as forest stewardship practices. This student who made the suggestion to his professor is one example of many who expressed their surprise at seeing a sawmill business remain economically vital while being connected to sustainable logging practices which are compatible with maintaining old growth – that is, it is possible to log in old growth stands while maintaining those stands. In addition, the student thought it was important to show the mill owners are trying to stimulate change in how the state foresters in their area practice forest management by showing them through example how it is possible to generate profit without the State’s traditional high-impact harvest practices. Ultimately, this field trip to the family mill provides an example to students where they come to see how exceptional it is in the context of the large-scale timber industry in western Montana. As one student noted, “The mill owner’s livelihoods are actually improving the forest,
making it more healthy. That’s amazing. I didn’t know that was possible.” As discussed above, it seems important that these interactions occur in the contexts of the community participant’s environment. Having the experience place-based seems to provide richer opportunities for people to connect and interact, and it is an expression of popular education in which students and community participants seem to be learning from each other.

The process of rural communities and the small-businesses and organizations within them gaining a meaningful role in land management decisions takes time. As stated earlier, a major obstacle for community groups is gaining credibility from the land management agencies in charge. Local ecological knowledge can be an asset for decision-makers who do not have a multi-generational experience of observing ecosystems in one place. In order for local ecological knowledge to be valuable, however, it must marry more rigorous forms of science such as local surveys and studies. Simply walking into a District Ranger’s office and informing them of one’s observations about Canada lynx in the Valley is not sufficient information to influence decisions. This may change over time, however, as the knowledge of key local residents becomes known and verified. This is facilitated by building connections between community members and the agencies through joint activities that build trust and collaboration. Northwest Connections and the Swan Ecosystem Center have accumulated local, ecological data gathered by local citizens over many years. LL students participate in these citizen data gathering projects. These activities, however, are symbolic of something deeper for the students, a transformation they experience in recognizing the role people in rural landscapes can play in natural resource decision-making and how this contributes to
both healthy forests and healthy livelihoods. The interactions with forest-dependent community participants and the citizen science projects they participate in leave lasting impressions with the students. Out of these interactions and activities, in addition to the overall education LL provides, comes the sense of joy, hope, and inspiration students experience.

Theme 3: Sense of Joy, Hope, and Inspiration

“Sense of joy, hope, and inspiration” refers to feelings students described from their interactions with community participants and the overall experience of Landscape and Livelihood. I think this theme is important because it relates to two major and intertwined movements in the Swan Valley: community forestry and popular education.

The complex history of community forestry in the Swan Valley shows that the process has not been linear. There have been ups and downs in developing community forestry throughout the last decade or so. Defining success and what it means depends on who is defines it, because different people have different values and interests in the valley’s forests and other natural resources. Many people across the valley have not participated in nor had a uniformly positive opinion of groups such as the Swan Ecosystem Center and Northwest Connections. Among the people in these organizations and who participate in LL as well as people I observed and talked with directly, I heard comments about how polarization has decreased somewhat, though there are still many in the Swan Valley who are distrusting of NwC’s and SEC’s. Those people who have emerged out of a polarized position to a more collaborative one, again based on discussions and observations with community members, appear to have developed a
foundation for working collaboratively. As discussed in the literature review, Freire espouses some of the necessary elements for meaningful action. For example, by not having hope, Freire (1998) claims that a person loses their place in history because a lack of hope limits a person’s ability to participate meaningfully in their cause. Though there have been great strides made in the collaborative movement in the rural West from grassroots organizations, like the Swan Ecosystem Center, to federally mandated collaborative groups, rural communities and individuals still struggle to make their voices heard. My sense is that Landscape and Livelihood provides a creative, non-traditional approach to place-based education that leaves a lasting legacy in the students and community members that participate in it. A key part of the legacy is a sense of joy, hope, and inspiration that is crucial for any future collaborative efforts because these feelings create a sense of empowerment.

Experiencing empowerment for the students in LL involves two aspects. First, the design of LL is experiential and it is connected to real places and people. Both of these aspects are a sharp contrast to traditional education experiences, which follow standardized curricula, rarely change, and are not well grounded. LL offers instead a deeply experiential learning that enables students the space to learn things differently and from different people; it is a space for sparking epistemological curiosity, as shown by Freire (1998) in the literature review. The students are exposed to different kinds of teaching methods and modes of learning, including group discussions, readings, journaling, field observations, and spending time with community members. These methods are purposefully designed to highlight and integrate different forms of expression including experiential and academic knowledge informed by drawing,
personal stories, reflective essays, community-volunteer activities, and individual projects. Having a diversity of learning opportunities with a diversity of people and modes of expression has the effect of students feeling more integrated in themselves. This can be compared with experiencing learning in compartmentalized subjects that are removed from context where there is a more tenuous connection between the students and the subjects they are learning. The design of the LL program facilitates a learning process where students can engage with activities more as whole people, drawing on different parts of themselves and using multiple senses and intelligences, rather than focusing on one way of learning such as memorizing facts. In the course of a day, a student may participate in the learning process through reflecting in a personal essay, drawing a new flower, measuring the length of grizzly bear tracks, debating a controversial community issue with peers, and listening carefully to a community member whose views challenge their own.

Second, this sense of empowerment as a result of the joy, hope, and inspiration is connected to what students take away from the program. Again, joy, hope, and inspiration are feelings that can contribute to a sense of empowerment. Students who responded to the LL experience with a growth in their understanding of rural peoples and forest-based livelihoods are more likely to also experience a growth in their respect for community-based collaboration, community forestry, and processes that break down barriers that impede such cooperation. In this way, these evolved ideas carried with them the students’ simultaneous feelings of joy, hope, and inspiration.

The other movement this theme is connected to is popular education. Learning leads to joy, hope, and inspiration, which lead to empowerment. Freire (1998) connects
the joy of integrated learning, as discussed in the literature review, to the hope and inspiration students experience, bringing them to a more capable place for making positive contributions in the world around them. In the case of Landscape and Livelihood, students can be seen as fighting for authenticity in the sense they are searching for meaningful experiences through which they can grow as young adults. One way in which LL educators try to facilitate this more integrated learning experience is through students connecting with the community and their instructors.

In Pedagogy of Freedom, Freire evolved his argument from his original observations of oppression in Latin America to a broader, more inclusive way of looking at education for all people, in all contexts. In this sense, Landscape and Livelihood is a form of popular education for the students and for the community participants, which I will illustrate in the section on community participants and their experience of joy, hope, and inspiration. Where this process begins is with the LL educators.

Success in getting students to feel joy, hope and inspiration as a result of the Landscape and Livelihood program is due in large part to the uniqueness of its educators in their particular knowledge, their ability to communicate and share, and their own sense of joy and hope. The LL educators have specific goals they are trying to achieve, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. Part of what helps them achieve these goals is their core values. The educators’ strong belief in humility, respect, working cooperatively and collaboratively, and nurturing one’s spirit infuses their outlook and how they teach. The place they are coming from within themselves colors what place-based, experiential education is for the students. Fundamentally, the educators are coming from a heart place. The LL educators aim to expose students to community
members who share these ethics, especially people who live by example in maintaining a sustainable livelihood connected to the land. The educators themselves are ethically inspiring by demonstrating a commitment to and knowledge of how to live in a place while conserving it. Their core values play a large role in guiding their efforts to achieve this balance. Several students observed this connection. Here is an example of a quotation that captures this dimension:

“It’s not that I just think it was a cool semester. I did. I think about these ideas all the time, and I think it was inspiring to have Mel and Tom there, and hear their stories, and seeing them living there, and the challenge for me will be finding a place like that. Mel and Tom have decided where they are living and work to preserve that.”

Why is this quotation important? Because it suggests the inspiration and hope students experience in the LL program. Seeing Tom and Melanie struggle to make community-based conservation work and seeing them wrestle with the issues and not give up seems to leave strong impressions. The instructors are not pontificating on stewardship theories. They appear to practice what they preach by being actively involved in community forestry efforts in the Valley from their citizen science projects to the committees they are on at the Swan Ecosystem Center to help establish a community forest. The authenticity of Melanie and Tom’s lives is an expression of what Freire (1998) suggests is necessary for teachers to strive for in order to made the kind of differences in student’s lives that lead to purposeful action.

One of the goals of LL educator, Melanie Parker, is the desire for students to struggle with the questions and issues she and the other LL educators confront. For example, even with the best local ecological knowledge and science, there will always be uncertainties about how much impact on the land is okay. In what ways and to what
degree does a person consider the multiple factors influencing their land-use practices?

Also, at what point does a person put their personal interests aside to support a community-generated vision that may embody many of their concerns but not all? The LL educators provide inspiration in their commitment to this struggle – to continue questioning, searching, and reaching out. Freire shares a statement on his role as an educator that is strongly aligned with how the LL educators present themselves to the students in their program:

I am a teacher full of the spirit of hope, in spite of all signs to the contrary. I am a teacher who refuses the disillusionment that consumes and immobilizes. I am a teacher proud of the beauty of my teaching practice, a fragile beauty that may disappear if I do not care for the struggle and knowledge that I ought to teach. If I do not struggle for the material conditions without which my body will suffer from neglect, thus running the risk of becoming frustrated and ineffective, then I will no longer be the witness that I ought to be, no longer the tenacious fighter who may tire but who never gives up (1998, p. 95).

Connected to the issue of inspiration is the challenge communities face from loss of people dropping out due to emotional, spiritual, and/or physical burnout. Staying positive and keeping hope alive are the emotions the LL educators try to infuse into their teaching. The nature of place-based, experiential education (which includes the relationships between students and community participants) combined with the instructors’ commitment to ethically inspiring values has the potential to create what Freire (1998) and process studies scholars (Faber) describe as an “adventure of the spirit.” The united experience advances an ever-unfolding, creative process where students can become increasingly integrated within themselves, giving rise to feelings of hope, joy, and inspiration, which can lead to a more grounded confidence and sense of empowerment. This is also connected to process studies as students seem to develop
their imaginations through encouragement to explore, debate, and reach beyond their intellectual comfort zones. In a former student’s words:

“This program and its speakers, host families, experiences, the entire curriculum, the setting, all reinstilled hope in me about the future of natural resources. The experience is empowering.”

This student shared in discussions how important it was for her to have the opportunity to participate in LL because of her struggle to stay positive about the future of communities and natural resources, and this hope returned for her by being a part of LL and the Swan community. Specifically, being in the Swan Valley showed her one example of how people in a community are working cooperatively to find sustainable solutions. She also shared that for this to be her “education” made her feel more empowered because the courses were tailored around real-life, on-the-ground issues that she could be part of and witness; for her, this sense of empowerment was linked to being part of the process, whereas previous education experiences did not provide this sense of connection to what she was learning. In these discussions, I was able to see how important place-based education (influenced by process studies) was for her because of how her description ties to the theories behind it and also how the experience allowed her to be in a process. It seems like what she is describing, in part, is the benefit of having a place-based, integrated education that gives permission for holding complexity and interconnection.

The student discussed earlier who mentored with area artists for her independent study project (ISP) gave an emotional description of this experience and how she felt they gave her permission to be the artist she aspires to be. She discovered through interactions with the artists the need for balance between honoring group and community ideas while
also honoring herself in that expression. She spoke of the tremendous support she received from her peers and mentors that led her to realize her abilities and create the poster. With tears in her eyes, she shared, “I’ve never been in such a supportive and creative environment. Thank you.” She described how having the opportunity to create the poster was an example of her “dream job”. She was using her passion for artistic expression to support awareness and fundraising for conservation projects. The student said that she gained a new confidence and direction for her gifts.

Again, I see the theories behind popular education, place-based education, and process studies coming together and influencing this person’s experience. First, she had the opportunity to interact with a person in the community through her Independent Study Project. They exchanged stories and ideas. She learned from this person and gained confidence about her abilities and direction. Second, being in the community makes a difference because it provides a richness and a context the student can connect with, engaging in way that allowed her to feel more connected to what she was learning. Third, this was a process for the student, expanding her intellectual and artistic horizons, contributing to her own inner development, which includes her imagination and the increased awareness of the interconnectedness of all things as expressed explicitly in her community forestry poster and presentation I observed.

Another student I observed during my field research shared that at the beginning of the semester he felt skeptical about community forestry actually working functionally on the ground. He said that by the end of the semester, while he did not feel like he had “all the answers” he felt hope for the future and hope for community forestry working based on meeting people who work in the woods, like the restoration logger and the mill
owners, who attempt to practice what he sees as ecosystem management. In this way, place-based education seems to have an obvious role because of the on-the-ground context it provides and being able to witness a person in their environment; in contrast, if the restoration logger made a presentation in a traditional classroom setting, this seems like it would be different experience in what students learn and experience and what the presenter would learn and experience. Being in the community seems to make a difference in how people connect and experience each other.

Several students commented on the joy and hope they experienced during and after interactions with various community members with forest-based livelihoods. One current student in particular shared with me during my field stay her sense of hope about the future and her own ability to make a meaningful contribution in her home community as a result of meeting and interacting with two different loggers who have spent their entire adult lives working in the woods and trying to influence other forest practitioners by example. She described how being with these people gave her a more helpful understanding of how people with forest-based livelihoods are integrating stewardship advocacy into their forestry practices; for her, seeing this happen on the ground gave her a tremendous feeling of joy (at seeing their commitment, passion, and small successes) and inspired her to find ways in her own life to combine conservation advocacy with the forestry profession she anticipated going into.
This desire to give something back is connected to the next theme, “participation in conservation activities,” because there is consistently a link between the hope, joy, and inspiration students feel and how this affects their current and future choices. Therefore, it is natural to have overlap between these two themes.

Theme 4: Desire for Future Participation in Conservation Activities

“Desire for future participation in conservation activities” refers to how a student’s experience in Landscape and Livelihood influences their desire to participate in future conservation activities. This is about intentions because I do not actually measure the student’s future participation. For the current students, independent study projects (ISP) already began to reveal this influence. The theme of participation is important because of the value placed in the LL experience on supporting a link between student experiences in the program and their future conservation work. The founding inspiration for LL, after all, is to educate young people in conservation fields to be more integrated in their thinking and with a greater awareness and respect for communities to which their
work is connected. It is not simply a matter of training young people to be more sensitive to rural communities, though this is critical, but also to understand the importance of community involvement itself. Specifically, LL educators want students to see that the practice of conservation should not be compartmentalized in a way that disconnects it from their whole selves. They want students to see and develop conservation as a life practice, not just as a career. Many of the students who participated in this research expressed how observing the LL educators in their own on-the-ground practices as well as witnessing other people in the community demonstrate their commitment to conservation work, contributed to this evolved sense of how one participates in the place they live.

My field research showed a wide range of how students think they will carry their experiences forward. Many of the students were unsure of what kind of future career they want to pursue. Some came into the program with a clear focus on what they wanted to do and left the program with an affirmation of that focus. Several of the students were enrolled in forestry or environmental studies programs and graduated with these degrees, but later decided to go into health professions. Different students wanted and learned different things. Some were seeking specific guidance on conservation work whereas others approached the experience without a particular agenda but as a general experience to absorb. What connects all of the students, though, is the message they received, which is the greater understanding that comes from making an effort to connect with people seemingly different from themselves and the implications this has for collaborative processes. How this translates into future actions and choices varies because they are unique individuals at different life stages with diverse interests. The
overall pattern, again, is having a greater appreciation for the benefits of being respectful of others in whatever work they are involved with.

The joy, hope, and inspiration the current students described, as a result of their interactions with community participants and the LL educators, all of which are connected to the students’ evolved views of people in rural communities and forest-based livelihoods, oriented them to want to give something back. In the immediate present, students’ independent study projects (ISP) provided this opportunity. Examples of independent study projects included designing educational environmental brochures for the Swan Ecosystem Center, developing educational activities for local home-schooled students, and, as discussed earlier, creating a conservation poster to support the Swan Valley Community Forest effort. All of the ISPs for the current students involved participating in conservation activities in some manner. As discussed earlier in this chapter, students were encouraged to select an ISP that is not only related to community-based conservation but also connected to their own passion or interest. The people, activities, and issues students are exposed to throughout the semester naturally influenced their ISP choice.

The student who mentored with a local conservation education coordinator and instructor learned how to develop a Whitebark pine education activity for home-schooled students, aged 6-17 years old, in the Swan Valley. Inspiration for the project came from the student’s initial exposure to the Whitebark pine study they conducted while backpacking in the Swan range. The Whitebark pine study is connected to the branch of Northwest Connections’ conservation work that seeks to encourage citizens’ involvement in local monitoring programs. The student’s passion and enthusiasm for the topic came
out strongly in the presentation. The activity included telling the story of Whitebark pine, students picking a role, researching the role, making a costume, and then teaching the Whitebark pine story through their role to their class. The student also commented that most of the home-schoolers did not have prior knowledge of Whitebark pine, and they left the education activity saying that it was their favorite tree. This experience also inspired the student to want to create an education trunk for the local elementary school as well as a Whitebark pine community nursery to raise awareness and increase involvement in its conservation. In this example, it is clear that the student made a positive contribution to the Swan Valley community based on what she offered the home-schoolers in her ISP, and this is influencing her plans for future involvement. Specifically, her professional work now involves forest restoration through tree planting efforts.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 25. Re-enactment of an education play on Whitebark pine designed for home-schooled children in the Swan**

The student who mentored with a community-based conservation organization and local forest practitioner shared the lessons she is applying to her present conservation work based on her evolved attitudes about forest-based livelihoods and understandings of
people in rural landscapes. Here are some of the strategies based on the lessons learned that she is now incorporating into her present work in wilderness advocacy:

- Communicate about wilderness with diverse audiences
- Learn from another organization and share strategies and successes
- Split a proposal up into smaller more comprehensible parts instead of one large bill.
- Work on it piece-by-piece and specific to the region and community
- Consider all stakeholder opinions and bring everyone to the table.
- Be respectful.

In sum, the student reflected on how the independent project enabled her to process what she had learned up to that point, and specifically how her thinking had evolved from more divisive processes to collaborative ones. She concluded by saying that LL provided a solid foundation to create change in her own wilderness advocacy work by learning practical communication and collaboration skills from her mentors in the Swan.

For another former student, the experience in LL influenced her decision to enroll in graduate school to acquire more science education related to ecosystem restoration. She related this transformation to a specific field trip in the Blackfoot Valley where students participate in local restoration efforts. Here is an excerpt from my interview with her that illustrates how the experience changed her:

“The time spent in the Blackfoot completely changed my future. I didn’t know if I was going to go to graduate school, I didn’t know what I would study. Just seeing how successful restoration could be, and how it could affect a whole community, watershed, and ecosystems and for these things to work together inspired me. Now I love coming to work, I work in the Bahamas, and I never would have been here if it wasn’t for my experience in Montana. My experiences in Montana really changed my life. The people I met, the values I had to reconsider, the lessons I learned have shaped my life forever. I wish everyone would get a chance to experience what we did together. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever gotten the privilege to do, and hopefully I will get to involve myself in similar activities in the future.”
For students who were less sure about future specific work or activities they may get involved with, they were explicitly clear about how what they learned from community participants and the overall LL education experience now influences their people and land ethic. One student in particular, who joined the Peace Corps in Africa soon after LL, shared these sentiments with me.

“I’m looking for authentic relationships between people and land. That’s what interested me most in Africa, and it will continue to interest me. The program helped to develop strong convictions, and I wouldn’t want to betray them. I don’t know if I’ll go into that kind of work. What really stuck out was developing the social skills in getting past stereotypes to help appreciate and/or tolerate each other. I don’t want to lose that.”

Another former student shared how her experience with her independent study project and her overall experience in LL provided more direction for wildlife rehabilitation as well as a guiding framework for the kind of educator she would like to be in her future work. Like many other students I interviewed and observed, she expressed how listening and communication skills she learned may not be used exclusively for conservation related activities and projects. Rather, she views these newly gained skills and insights into human respect as fundamentally relevant to all situations, whether or not they are conservation related. Here is an excerpt from my interview with this student.

“I learned more in 8 weeks than I had in 3 years of college. I have only a vague impression of what I’d like to do when I graduate, but I know that I will carry what I learned in Montana into everything I do. I realized that my love of birds, specifically the rehabilitation of raptors, is a passion I would like to pursue, even if it’s not an easy part of the field to break into. I devoted my independent study to the Grounded Eagle Foundation, and along with providing me a mentor for life, the opportunity showed me an area that I would like to invest more of my time. My main interest is in education, especially in the education of children, and seeing how Melanie, Tom, and the rest of our professors, guides, and mentors have developed a program to give so much to college students is extremely
encouraging. Oftentimes I’m not sure I’m making a difference to the students I’m teaching, but if I can come close in even the smallest way to what they have given me I will feel a great sense of accomplishment.”

For many students, they are still trying to figure out where “home” is for them. As discussed earlier, the LL educators serve as inspiring role models as people who are committed to living long-term in a particular place, and to the conservation of this place. Witnessing this way of living provides a foundation for LL students to aspire to in their own lives. One student, like many others who are trying to take the fullest advantage of exploring opportunities before settling into a career, described this further.

“Someday, I hope to settle somewhere. I hope to develop my knowledge about that place the same way that so many of the people we interacted with in L&L know about their place. And I hope to contribute to that place’s future well-being in a way that I think is only really possible with a history in that place.”

Again, however, having not yet settled in one place does not mean students are not engaged in conservation activities where they happen to be, as in the case of the student who joined Peace Corps. On one level there is the ethic students carry forward into whatever projects or activities they are involved with. On another level this may occur in a place where the student has made a commitment to stay, thus experiencing participation in the community at a much deeper and perhaps sustaining level. As one community participant noted, “A local person is not defined based on where you come from. It’s how long you plan to stay.”

This community participant’s comment relates to an insight shared by a former student as a result of his time in the Swan Valley and LL. Here is an excerpt from my interview with him.

“I’ve been thinking a lot about societal and culture conditions that make community-based conservation possible. I think they’re largely absent in
our society today. Everyone’s too busy. Everyone works by themselves, shops in faceless stores, goes home to the TV after work, zips around on their motorized fun-thing on the weekends. There’s no common ground, no neutral ground, no public space for people from different sectors of society with different, sometimes competing interests to interact. And most people feel like they have no stake in their locality. We expect the government to do these things, and it’s always easier to bitch about what a “bad” job they’re doing than to take any proactive action. The Swan is less like this than many places. Paved roads came late to the valley. Life is slower. People have more incentive to depend on their neighbors. Everyone goes to the Merc.”

This student has realized the importance of interdependence and reciprocity in collaborative efforts. He learned that particular people in rural communities, though not always, have a history of identifying themselves as interconnected because they need each other. People in urban settings tend to have more tenuous connections to the land and with each other because it is easier to live a more individualized life. Therefore, a community’s identity can be shaped by the interdependence of its members. This could translate into helping each other meet their need to connect with each other through a social activity like the Scottish dancing event I attended in Condon. Or, it could mean more survival needs like helping neighbors gather fuelwood like the LL students assist in every year.

In essence, the students learned the lesson that we all need each other; helping each other is an act of reciprocity, and rural communities are often good practitioners of this frame of mind. These are lessons many of the students expressed. In this sense, this is a helpful insight for this particular student in how he may approach future residence or participation in community-based conservation or other community related activities. The comments of former LL students suggest that the experience of witnessing and interacting with community members taught them the value of participation in one’s
community, particularly in conservation-related activities. In this way, a person is more invested in a community, sharing in their interconnectedness.

Conclusion

The multiple experiences created by LL fostered changes in attitudes, including an inclination regarding a desire for future involvement in community and conservation. The activities that had the most impact on the changes involved homestays, the independent study projects, and the speakers; the monitoring projects, the community meetings, the fuelwood gathering days, the hikes with different landowners, and the spontaneous interactions that occur living in a small community also were influential.

Figure 26. A LL student rests during a hike with a Flathead Valley restoration logger.

All of these activities, to varying degrees, helped to create experiences where students learned skills to practice citizen science, forest ecology and how this relates to forest communities, and the listening and communication skills valuable for collaborative, community processes. LL’s place-based, experiential learning seemed to reach students
in a deep way, more influential than lecturing about these concepts. The data suggests that the LL educators’ goals to help students rethink the role of rural communities in natural resource decision-making and developing the listening and communication skills to facilitate this practice were in the process of being met. Student comments helped me to conclude that the change in attitude was fostered as a result of the LL activities and discussions they were engaged in during the field semester. Whether the changes are lasting cannot be known at this time. The theories behind popular, place-based, a process studies education seem to be helpful in understanding some of the ways how and why these shifts are occurring. How the activities were interpreted by the community participants is what I will now examine.

Community Participant Experiences

In this section I will discuss two related themes that pertain to the community participants. These include their “role as a community forestry educator” and, once again, “a sense of joy, hope, and inspiration”. As in all of the themes, I weave together interviews and observations together to illustrate each theme. At the beginning of each theme, I define its meaning and discuss why it is important followed by how it emerged as well as the interpretation I offer.

Theme 1: Role as a Community Forestry Educator

“Role as a community forestry educator” refers to the community members’ sense of facilitating a teaching and learning process between themselves and the LL students. The research here suggests that experiential education enables a different kind of learning
experience between students and community members beyond what is discussed in the literature regarding the benefits of place-based education. Specifically, I am referring to how being on the land or in a community, embedded in a particular place, is a vehicle for richer, more meaningful connections between student and community participant. By being in a place with community members, the students join in a process of creating a history together. Part of what they are creating is a shared learning experience in which they are teaching each other. This kind of learning experience is unconventional compared with conventional classroom learning. Before I explain this in more detail, consider what Freire proposes in the following quotation regarding the perspective teachers should be coming from.

[I]t is essential that during the experience of teaching preparation, the prospective teacher must realize that a correct way of thinking is not a gift from heaven, nor is it to be found in teachers’ guide books, put there by illuminated intellectuals who occupy the center of power. On the contrary, a correct way of thinking that goes beyond the ingenuous must be produced by the learners in communion with the teacher responsible for their education (Freire, Freedom, p. 43).

I share this quotation as a way to begin talking about the learning experience between students and community members. Community members may not identify themselves as educators responsible for the student’s education, but this appears to be happening. The formally designated LL educators recognize and support the notion of the community as a teacher. This is part of their goal. In this setting students and community participants are creating their education together through story sharing, knowledge sharing, and joint activities involving working on the land.

This theme of community forestry educators is important because it provides a space for community participants to share their knowledge and make their voice heard in
outlets not ordinarily available in their daily lives. The involvement of Swan Valley residents in the LL program offers a highly affirming experience regarding who they are as individuals and the meaningful and positive contributions they have to offer to the Swan community in general and to community conservation efforts in particular. It also enabled connections with young people they did not necessarily anticipate getting to know. It is significantly tied to the following theme on joy, hope, and inspiration in the feelings they experience as a result of sharing their stories and knowledge with students who are keenly open to them, their community, and ultimately community forestry.

Landscape and Livelihood, due to its place-based education nature, provides many opportunities for community participants to demonstrate their ecological knowledge and share their livelihood stories with LL students. This has happened through community-based activities including visiting a community participant’s restoration forestry project in the Flathead Valley or walking their land where they practice ecosystem management. Having this opportunity to share their knowledge with the students validates the community participants as valuable experiential knowledge holders. How and why they express this knowledge varies for different community participants. For example, during the Blackfoot Valley homestay where LL students assist a third generation ranching family in stream restoration, one of the ranchers expressed their surprise in finding themselves in the role of a teacher.

“The students coming down to the ranch to work is a message, ‘Welcome to reality.’ I think it’s great. Who thought this up? It’s amazing. Students want to come here and listen to us and learn? The fact that they’re here, wanting to talk to us, I mean, wow, that’s amazing.”

These activities provide a place for community participants to share their local ecological knowledge based on their long-term intimate connection with the land around
them, which they have managed over the years for their livelihood. One forest owner wrote a book that describes his way of managing his private forest based on the principles of ecosystem management. For him, the students who come to visit him are “participating” with him on the land. This is because they are walking his land with him and participating in an ongoing discussion on land ethics and the role of humans on the land. He learned from each encounter. Part of managing his forestland includes the energy and insights he receives from interacting with the students. This forest owner/author confirms these points in the following comments.

“The way I look at the student participation is that it’s part of our outreach. (The book he wrote) is my bible. That’s my learning curve. How we got there and how we might go forward. Tells us where we’re at, where we came from, and suggestions for the future. Since I wrote it I’ve been trying to implement its lessons in a small sphere. (The book) has led me to ecosystem management. The students come into that. They’re one important part in our extension work.”

The “our” in extension work refers to the various community members and organizations that support this person’s vision for what he is trying to accomplish on his land.

Participation in the Landscape and Livelihood activities is a process for many community participants. There are several cases of community participants initially expressing uncertainty about their role with the students, what useful things they could share, and how they would connect. Now, years later after participating each year through field trips, one community participant in particular carries no trace of uncertainty; rather, he is excited to share and looks forward to the opportunity.

As he shared in an interview, “This is one of the few times in the year when I get to really talk about these issues and work on them with the students. I don’t get to talk about these things much, and it really helps me to hear what the students have to say, and in the
beginning, it was such a shock that they actually wanted to hear what I thought.” For this person, he seems to be suggesting two things: 1. It is important for the development of his own ideas to interact with the students. 2. The process of validation through interactions with the students is affirming.

Another example of feeling that their involvement in LL provides a type of validation arose in an interview with a homestay family that has a forest-based livelihood and who was deeply affected by the policy changes and social polarization of the 1980s in the Swan Valley. They have hosted LL students over several semesters. The hosts shared their surprise and delight at one of the student’s willingness to participate in their daily livelihood activities. For another student who stayed with them, the hosts shared their sense of privilege at having the opportunity to share their perspective and local ecological knowledge. These thoughts are reflected in the following interview excerpt.

“I do the homestay because I like meeting the kids and giving them a different perspective. No one else is going to give them a Western perspective. I felt privileged to share time. What she absorbed and took into account. To share something I’m so passionate about, I felt privileged.”

For this host family, sharing their “Western” perspective meant showing the student the particulars of “western” ecosystems and conditions, and how they have adapted their livelihood to these conditions over the generations. This was a way for the hosts to talk about the complex balance they try to achieve in using the land to support themselves. They are proud that rural westerners have developed a particular and much admired culture that has, in many cases, successfully achieved this balance.

For other community participants, the experience of interacting with the students forces them to reexamine their own beliefs to ensure what they say reflects their truth instead of sharing attitudes they may no longer hold valid. During a field trip at the Swan
Ecosystem Center, the center’s executive director shared a lesson she learned while walking the land with the LL students and Tom Parker.

“What I gain and others do is the opportunity of a broader dialogue that you just wouldn’t have if you weren’t set up to think about. When the students are here, you’re thinking about what you’re saying to them. For example, I went up to the Crazy Horse Burn with Tom this year and the students. Tom was saying after the burn, they logged it. Tom was pointing out that there wasn’t much for wildlife in terms of nutrients because fiber had been taken before the fire, and I remember saying, ‘Well Tom there is something here for wildlife because you can see tracks,’ and then having an agonizing time because both of us were showing one narrow part of the truth and saying them in front of the students, so I had to apologize to him later, but if those students weren’t there I wouldn’t have tried to fix a simple comment and talk to them about the complexity, so just the fact the students are in the community forces you to think harder and learn more yourself. I thought Tom and I had simple-minded comments. I talked to Tom later in front of the students. I understood that he was right too; I wanted the students to see more of the whole, the complexity. I have to think harder about what is really happening on the land, so that what you’re saying expresses as many of the truths as possible because what happens on the landscape we have is so complicated and we need to see them all together and weigh them. Without the students we would be more inclined to be lazy with our thought processes and not think about it as a whole.”

This quotation is also a clear example of how students are not only validating community participants as experiential knowledge holders, but also their mere presence catalyzes a process in the community participants to ask themselves questions about their perspective and how they want to communicate them with others. They feel as if students are a mirror for what the community participants are trying to understand and honor within themselves. And for other community participants, they described an experience with the students that they identified as a need in their lives, much like Freire’s notion of teachers in communion with learners. On a field trip to the family owned and operated sawmill in the Flathead Valley, the mill owners shared how
important it was for them to connect with the students and that by interacting they were creating a kind of collaborative knowledge. Here is an excerpt from his interview.

“Talking with the students provides outside opinions to interact with mine to formulate a better approach because I’m looking for a perfect solution to coexist with nature without destroying it. My obsession is doing everything filtered through that. I don’t get to interact with diverse groups much. Conversations don’t go far. Not that meaningful. I don’t get to talk with people with diverse opinions much that really care. This is something different.”

This comment, like what other community participants shared, seems connected to Freire’s (1998) notion of a “dynamic and dialectical movement between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting on doing’” helping to support a “correct way of thinking,” one that is holistic and vital. This seems to be what this participant is doing by interacting with the LL students. It also seems to be aligned with what the restoration logger in the Flathead Valley and SEC executive director also shared. Specifically, the experience of interacting with the LL students seems to act as a catalyst for community participants to challenge their own ideological comfort zones for that they may have developed and re-evaluate what they believe in order to express themselves more truthfully in the interactions.

The comment by the above community participant also touches on a deeper experience that community-based activities seem to produce. Humans are part of the landscape. They are connected to the land. This is something place-based education is rooted in and certainly has direct ties to popular education (human history of culture and livelihoods interwoven with land) and more theoretical ties to process studies (the interconnectedness of all things). The human experience is different for different people, especially for people who work and live close to natural resources. In this research, there
are the students, the community participants, and the LL educators, and there is the land. When students and community members come together on the land, the land is a mediator. It is a kind of communion for students and community members to be on the land together, because the land seems to have the power to remind them of their commonality – they are all connected to the land. Being together on the land is an act of creation; people are creating a story together, and they are remembering a story, the story of their elemental connection. Students and community participants are engaged in a discussion, they are sharing stories, and they are practicing an elemental need to connect. I am reminded of Freire’s advice on teaching and learning that seems to be happening in these interactions between students and community participants. “What is really essential in this process is that both the teacher and the students know that open, curious questioning, whether in speaking or listening, is what grounds them mutually” (Freire, 1998, p. 81).

For many, this is an experience that cannot be simulated in a classroom. Furthermore, this connection goes beyond the more tangible land connections like earning a livelihood that depends on the land and other natural resources. Much like sharing a meal together helps bring people together and be respectful; being on the land together creates the possibility for a deep connection with one another that moves people beyond perceived differences to a common story they are creating together. The comment above by the community participant at the sawmill was speaking directly to this point.

“There is a relationship between the joy essential to teaching activity and hope. Hope is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce
something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy" (Freire, 1998, p. 69).

**Theme 2: Sense of Joy, Hope, and Inspiration**

“Sense of joy, hope, and inspiration” refers to the feelings community participants described based on their interactions with the Landscape and Livelihood students in specific activities including fuelwood gathering, homestays, and field trips. I think this theme is important for the community participants because it is connected to their own empowerment. In the popular education literature, these are feelings connected to validation and connection. Forming connections is a healing process in light of the divisiveness that often drives rural communities whose histories are characterized by a sense of feeling disenfranchised from public processes and lack of access to forests they are dependent upon for their livelihoods. Validation is also a healing process because it recognizes and honors the humanity of the knowledge holder. These combined create feelings of joy, hope, and inspiration. They are part of the roots of empowerment. This process raises questions for a broadening definition of health in the community forestry literature.

This theme is also closely connected with the previous one. The feelings of joy, hope and inspiration that community participants described flowed from their experience of sharing their knowledge. In this way, “sense of joy, hope, and inspiration” is more of a sub-theme. There are several examples in this section that reflect both themes. Not wanting to dissect them, I discuss them here as they came out in interviews.
The theme of joy, hope, and inspiration was apparent for many if not most of the community participants I interviewed in the Swan, Blackfoot, and Flathead valleys. Here are examples representing how this theme emerged during field trips, community activities, and homestays. Included below is my interpretation of the theme based on their comments.

During a field trip to the family owned and operated sawmill in the Flathead Valley, one of the mill owners shared a comment that indicated his attitude shift about people who identify themselves as environmentalists. On this particular field trip, several of the LL students were environmental studies majors, which they shared in a round of introductions with the mill owners. Interacting with the students gave him a wider breadth of understanding of what they believe and caused a shift in what he interpreted as “environmentalism.” He was impressed with the thoughtfulness and depth of their questions, and especially that they were more open-minded then he had expected. Here is an excerpt from his interview that reflects these sentiments and the hope he received.

“I see hope on the horizon in kids like that. They’re open-minded. A person doesn’t have to think exactly how I do for me to like them. They were open-minded. They’re basics were set that leaned to environmentalism, and that in itself isn’t bad.”

Earlier in my discussion of the role land plays when people come together from diverse viewpoints and spend time together on the land, I stressed how land has the power for creating a space for connection. Out of this connection come many feelings. LL students visit a forest practitioner and walk with him on his land, listening to his stories about the land and discovering he or she indeed has a strong land ethic. Over the years, a particular community member has hosted homestay students and mentored them for independent study projects. Many students in interviews and during my field stay
expressed how much they receive from interacting with this particular person and the
desire they have to give something back to him. In an interview, the community
participant described what he receives from the students in terms of the tangible
contributions; his emphasis, however, is on the inspiration and energy he receives based
on their enthusiasm and spirit as well as his belief in them as capable, inspiring people.

“I tell the kids that I’m getting more out of it than they are, but I get
different things...lots of energy, contacts with the kids. With some they
are binding contacts. They want advice or they just like the way we live; they seem to be more interested about that. We deal with the
fundamentals of life here right out in the open. It kind of takes them back
a bit. What I get out of it? What could be greater than coming out and
talking with all these kids. Tom and Mel opened my eyes by sending me
these comments by kids, comments from courses; the kind of comments
from me: ‘___ has faith in us; he knows we can do it.’ That’s what I see
more than anything else. Straight from the heart. I can see myself in their
role. I grew up from homesteading in the wilderness, and I’ve never left
that, and that’s why and see what they’re doing is important. I tell them,
‘You better do it.’ It’s like someone coming out of the past. I see that in
the kids. Mostly what I see, I’ve come to realize, every time I interact,
there is subtle change that happens because they become a little part of
me. I’m different. I’m on a high, more energized, more faith in the
future...given a chance to hammer it out and talk to kids.”

These kinds of interactions seem to lead to feelings of joy and hope in the
community member, and ultimately to a greater sense of personal empowerment. One
homestay host articulated this experience in connection with how he identifies his role
with the students.

“There is a real sense of empowerment. As budding professionals, the
experience is profound, because these students are taken from modernity
and presented with a lab in the wilderness to play with ideas and see what
happens. I can perceive impacts and sense the empowerment that will
make leaders out of conventional notions. My hope is to plant seeds that
will come into fruition later.”

This is clearly linked with his role as a community forestry educator. In particular, it is
connected with a sense of mobilization to serve as ethically inspiring leaders in
conservation. Feelings of joy, hope, and inspiration motivate community members to continue participating with the LL students, but what is this experience connected to at a deeper level? It seems to be connected to health. The community forestry literature makes the argument for healthy forests being linked to healthy communities, but what does this really look like on the ground? How is health defined? Often, it is connected with thriving economies and strong social institutions. But, what do people need in order to have these things? Health. This is about a broadening definition of health. The community forestry literature claims the connection between healthy forests and healthy communities. So far, economic health is the typical leading indicator of health followed by vague notions of social health. The experience community participants and students are describing helps to foster healthy spirits and bodies, which is directly connected to emotional health. These experiences seem to suggest that positive, connecting experiences promote healthy bodies and healthy relationships.

One example that has stayed with me about the explicit connection between human health and community and land health is through the documentary, *Whose Home on the Range?* In this documentary, the local family doctor in Catron County, New Mexico, begins noticing patterns of declining health in community members who are in intense conflict amongst themselves, similar to the Swan Valley in the 1980s and early 1990s. If communities are polarized, this can have ill effects on peoples’ health personally and socially, leading to disconnection and conflict.

What joy, hope, and inspiration are ultimately tied to is a person’s awareness of their “heart” knowledge, the ability to communicate from a place of empathy and humility. Freire discusses the necessity of this in *Pedagogy of Freedom*. “Integral to
right thinking is a generous heart, one that, while not denying the right to anger, can distinguish it from cynicism or unbalanced fury” (p 40). Having a heart appears to be important for what keeps people motivated, inspired, and re-invigorated to keep participating in the community forestry process. One community participant, who is also a forest practitioner, looked at a group of LL students while walking his land with them, and playfully said, “Do you see all the positive vibes you’re giving me?! I’m putting them in my pocket to use later!” This participant’s exclamation also connects with process studies, particularly in writings of contemporary process scholar, Jay McDaniel, who writes that “happiness is contagious” and “that the universe is an interconnected web of life and that all living beings ‘feel the feelings’ of one another in varying ways and degrees” (p. 91). Further, McDaniel emphasizes community projects lacking in a “joy factor” risk losing interest and participation because joy (or happiness) has the power to motivate and inspire people. Joy, hope, and inspiration: these are themes that emerged from interviews and observations and in my personal experience, which I discuss in the following chapter. These seem to be a fuel to keep growth, connection, and creativity alive in a person and in a community.

**Chapter Conclusion**

I have tried to show that students come into Landscape and Livelihood with pre-conceived ideas or no conception of rural livelihoods and their connection to forest-based livelihoods. From this place, the LL programs help to move students to wanting to interact with community members and hear their stories and to do so with respect. In this way, I see a genuine interest in LL students wanting to connect meaningfully with community members. The various LL activities provide opportunities for community
participants to demonstrate their knowledge and connections with the land and to connect further with the students. This is a process that expands the imaginations for both students and community participants in showing them what is possible in their ability to transcend stereotypes and wounds and move toward greater connection with others and themselves, at least during the short time they are in the Swan. Their comments also suggest that their lessons may have more lasting power. Research with former students from at least 3 semesters suggest that LL has indeed influenced their choice to enter Peace Corp, forestry and environmental graduate programs, and environmental education fields.

I have tried to show that the strength of the LL educators and the design of their place-based, experiential education program sparks student epistemological curiosity, defined as being critically curious about the world around them and how they are part of it. This kind of learning experience is also a healing process for many in light of former learning experiences. As students learned more about the complexity of forested communities and the politics of place, they expressed a hunger to know more and connect more in search of greater awareness and direction to find peaceable solutions in whatever conflicts they may face in the future as well as a genuine interest in honoring the place where they are in the moment. There is the example of several of the current students who chose to cut and split wood for a valley resident on their day off to, in their words, give something back and just be with him. What I draw from these kinds of examples is the observation that the students and community members desire a deeper appreciation and understanding of nurturing relationships. How are people authentically connecting? Helping each other on the land is one way. Sharing stories and knowledge is another.
The former provides a clear sense of the interconnectedness indicative of many rural communities. To me this is the essence of community forestry. It also raises the question of, “How sustainable are communities and their endeavors to practice community forestry if connections are tenuous?”

Figure 27. LL students help a local Swan resident gather firewood on their day off.

Popular education (for community forestry) takes on many flavors in the Swan Valley. It expresses itself broadly in the explicit actions of people associated with forming the Swan Citizens’ ad hoc group and their evolution into the Swan Ecosystem Center. The formation of the ad hoc group came out of a handful of residents realizing the connection between the Valley’s polarization and the declining sense of community health. In this way, these residents were addressing their observation of the destructiveness of the polarization by inspiring people to empower themselves and begin working collaboratively, leading eventually to a more intentional and organized practice of community forestry. Tom Parker, Melanie Parker, and Andrea Stephen’s vision for Northwest Connections is part of this community forestry history, but they saw the
community as needing something else that was not necessarily provided in SEC or other community forestry enterprises. They explicitly strove to follow an education and teaching philosophy that provided a popular education experience for the students. They wanted to provide a program that would lead to students and community members experiencing a new kind of learning that empowers them to be more thoughtful, engaged citizens and to be aware of value of local, ecological knowledge combined with science to create working solutions for official land managers and forest communities.

There are several ways this education for community forestry exists via LL. It involves citizen science projects, where students make contributions through data gathering like the Whitebark pine survey as well as the stream and amphibian surveys. Citizen science is one expression of community forestry. It is popular education: people mobilizing to participate democratically in natural resource issues, as in the case of the students providing the data to the Swan Ecosystem Center for use in collaborative projects including federal land management choices in the Valley. This is empowering. And there is the strand that generates the less tangible effect. I am speaking of the consistent message of joy, hope, and inspiration students and community participants conveyed as a result of community-based activities that involved being on the land with each other and sharing meals. Freire, process-relational thinkers, and place-based educators all have this in common in their acknowledgement of how important these feelings are for a community’s and person’s sense of empowerment. Naming this experience rehumanizes the learning process and helps to heal the wounds caused by fragmented learning philosophies and the polarization so often found in forested, rural
communities. It provides a more vivid ground-truthing about the importance of human connections in community-based forestry processes.
CHAPTER 6  REFLECTIONS FROM MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In this chapter I discuss reflections from my personal experience as a former LL student as well as my time conducting participatory research in the Swan Valley.

Reflections of a Former Student

Reflecting on my own experience as a student in LL, coming to a landscape I had never been to before and experiencing it with the community participants, who have a history with that land, was a kind of baptism for me. It was an initiation into an emotional space where a wider range of possibilities for connection and growth exist. Humans are defined and shaped by the land, and in the process, they are helping to create knowledge and ultimately, their selves together. Out of this experience come many feelings. For this research, joy, hope, and inspiration are a prominent theme. These feelings figured prominently into my experience. Freire also noted this in his experience of teaching and learning with students – further, joy is significant for our health, and forgetting this can create burn-out and exhaustion in people. Freire’s notion of joy as a result of the learning process in combination with learning as experiential and contextualized was very clear for me. This joy came out in the interactions with community participants on the land and in the design of LL.

In terms of LL’s design, I felt it was the first time where my education was connected to my whole self. This sort of affirmation gave me tremendous enthusiasm to participate as much as I could in the lessons and activities. The joy, for me, was having an experience defined as education that enriched my spirit, which was in contrast to having repeated experiences in education systems where I felt inadequate because I could
not perform as I was instructed. The basis of evaluation for students in LL is not their ability to perform well on tests; rather, it is a combination of their level of participation and the effort they put into discussions and journals. Grades are based on how students integrate what they learn, not their ability to regurgitate facts. Students are judged on their participation in activities as well as the depth of thought and effort they put into their journals, which includes assigned essays in addition to keeping a record of what they learn through activities. At the end of the program, students are given a narrative grade that describes the instructor’s observations of their work and participation throughout the semester. This also includes how well they incorporate concepts like stream and amphibian surveys into their journals. Place-based, experiential education fits with how my mind works and processes information. In this way, being in on the land, in a particular context, learning hands-on, expressing myself in multiple ways, and connecting with people in the community – all combined as a learning process - was a healing experience for me.

In addition to this healing experience, I also experienced joy, hope, and inspiration from many of the community participants, particularly ones who made careers of community-based collaboration and are still passionate and committed to their work.

In one of my journal entries as a student, I shared my surprise at meeting a federal land management employee who is connected to a community in the Blackfoot Valley and devotes himself to collaboration. Here is an excerpt.

*September 27, 2002*
*A day of removal of my weight in my head. A day of renewal. Seeing what I hope for materialized. Somehow bridging gaps, tensions, differences. Gaining respect and trust. I want to know more. Blessed with knowing the right thing to do. ___ is one of the only federal employees I’ve met who seems real, being himself and doing it all for the right reasons – because he loves it. It’s his life, not his job. I dream of being part of*
something like this. The meaningful work I’m drawn to but don’t know the job title for. And it’s all happening here. Here. Here. Can I be part of this too? I am called to give something back to the land, to the people who’ve educated, supported, raised me. Looking for a voice, an outlet. ___ is an inspiration. His words and ideas are on pages in this journal. This is the beginning of something. Seeds on pages. Be patient. Keep your eyes open. Gestate. Germinate. Be patient. Keep learning.

The LL educators aim to offer an integrated education approach - between spirit and on the ground technical, environmental skills and knowledge. A simple example of practicing interconnectedness of these qualities is reflected in the concept map students are asked to draw in the program. Part of the purpose was to integrate how the experiences of students’ personal lives into how they have shaped their land ethics. Below I provide a photo of my own concept map.

![Figure 28. Concept map of my land ethic as of October 14, 2002](image-url)
This map draws together important places on the land I have visited briefly or have had consistent contact with over the course of my life. Around each place I label my particular experiences and lessons unique to each place, all of which connect back to a core understanding of the ethical obligation people have, as I understand, living on the Earth. The process of creating the map forced me to connect what seemed like discrete moments of my life into a more integrated and holistic picture of how these places, viewed collectively, are interrelated and transformative. Creating the map, therefore, helps students trace the development of their land ethic. This naming process carries with it a broadening of a person’s sense of himself or herself through a clearer sense of how the places and the experiences in those places are interconnected across time and space.

Another example of how this sense of interconnectedness made an impression on me was the Flathead Valley homestay with the restoration logger. Having come from a hunting background, I was not as surprised by that practice as I was by seeing a person who identifies himself as a logger while also defying my most evolved stereotype of what loggers are like. Seeing that this was not just a job for him but rather a way of life, and one that is infused with his core values and beliefs, helped to reorient how I now approach people that are (seemingly) different from me. Here is a journal excerpt written during my homestay.

October 10, 2002
What I’m about to write is a little embarrassing. My time with ____ is yet another example of seeing how media, used broadly, has misshaped my perceptions. Though I’ve known in the back of my mind that all loggers are not the same kind of person, it never occurred to me that I might be so much like one! Hearing ____ talk about his work on the pilot project seemed as natural and thoughtful as someone talking about land ethics and being a good steward. In fact, I suppose it was his land ethic. Frankly, in all my time as a forestry student, I’ve never seen the blending of logging and restoration. You
hear about it in conversation, but to actually see it on the ground and put a face and identity to it – this is something entirely different. If only this example were more accessible in the mainstream. The more time I spend with ____ and his family, the more I see our similarities. How much time and patience this takes! I feel there is so much more to learn.

More so, I learned from my interactions with this person that we indeed had much in common in our shared interest in intuition and dream analysis, and he was the first “logger” who taught me there is more to harvest than cutting trees. He taught me that, for him, his livelihood and approach to forest restoration is deeply connected to his core life values and his identity, and that his work and land ethic are part of his whole self, not separate.

Another major lesson I drew from interacting with him and other ethically-inspiring people working in the woods is that it is possible to connect with nearly any person based on one’s attitude and intention. I remember a feeling an unexpected sense of completeness, groundedness, and joy. I felt good throughout my whole body. It gave me the assurance that a person has the ability to reach out and connect with anyone. It inspired me and opened my imagination to consider connections that cross socially constructed boundaries such as class, particularly as I now relate to wherever I live, especially as I observe people limiting themselves to these boundaries.

**Reflections on Experiences with Participatory Research**

Living in Condon, Montana, and conducting participatory research (PR) meant many things to me. Among the more obvious aspects of PR, this experience included renting and living in a local resident’s cabin. The resident, as I stated earlier, is the executive director of the Swan Ecosystem Center. Staying on this person’s land was
more than just paying the rent. We chopped wood together to prepare for winter, we walked the land together to pull noxious weeds, we shared meals together, and we did household projects such as chimney sweeping and insulating her attic. Living there also involved collecting raspberries from the garden to make jam and composting food scraps. It meant spending evenings by the pond talking about what the community struggles with, her professional work, and finding my place in the community as a researcher and short-term resident.

Figure 29. Cleaning my host’s chimney
Another way I found myself emerging as a member of the community was through meals I shared with families who hosted students in their homestays. On one hand, this was a way for me to conduct interviews, but I also came to realize the process of my being there was part of their and my experience of integrating with the community on a personal level, not just as a researcher. Furthermore, the actual interview process, in many clear cases, became an extension of the experience they often described having with the students, that being a sense of energy renewal and surprise in my wanting to hear what they had to say.

By sharing these reflections, the implicit message is my effort to make positive and useful contributions to the community while conducting the research. I hope I was able to do this. Upon completion of this thesis, I hope to make more contributions such as community presentations on the research and condensed documents on what the research found, so that people and organizations in the community can utilize them in whatever way they choose. In the following chapter, I discuss the conclusions I have
drawn from the research and the implications these conclusions suggest for the future of community forestry and how place-based education can play a sustaining and effective role.

**Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to share some key insights I drew from my personal experience and reflections of Landscape and Livelihood. The education design of LL and the place-based experiential nature was important for me in that it complimented my learning style, inspired me to participate as fully as I could, and was a healing experience. I experienced joy, hope, and inspiration from the learning experience, which included my interactions with community participants. Also, through these interactions, my ideas about rural livelihoods and forest views evolved. Learning as defined as connecting with a person empathetically, listening and engaging respectfully taught me a new way of education in that I can learn something from nearly any person. What seemed to make a difference in allowing me to have this experience, in addition to the place-based nature and design, was my intention and attitude. Having the intention to be empathetic, interested in connecting and listening, and be respectful seemed to make a significant difference in what I received and how people interacted with me. Returning to McDaniel’s words on the interconnectedness of things and empathy, this seemed important for all the students, and this certainly was my experience.
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I discuss implications of my research for Landscape and Livelihood student participants, the homestay families, and community forestry education in general. As variably described in this thesis, the Landscape and Livelihood field semester creates opportunities for students and community members to participate in a number of activities that connect to forestry and resource management in the Swan, Blackfoot, and Flathead valleys. These include fuelwood gathering, citizen science projects, field trips, homestays, and independent study projects. I suggest that each of these activities speaks to a particular dimension and goal of community forestry. For example, the fuelwood gathering activities addresses the fuelwood needs of community members, and provides a “community forum” for residents to assist each other to obtain fuelwood from private and public lands. Citizen science, oft written about in community forestry literature, integrates local experiential knowledge with more conventional scientific methods, and helps to validate residents’ sense of knowing something and contributing to broader efforts. Field trips, homestays, and individual projects provide opportunities for students and community members to learn more deeply about individual households’ forest histories and concerns and management objectives as well as how groups in the Swan Valley are addressing issues of public forest land management. Homestays, independent study projects, and field trips are what students and community members reflected on most in their Landscape and Livelihood experiences. They overlap in that speakers on field trips are homestay hosts or project mentors later in the semester. I explain below why the thesis concludes that these activities in particular provide important opportunities for students, homestay families and Northwest
Connections to foster the goals of community forestry, which I defined above as “forestry by and for (local) people.” What NwC and the LL experience may be most significant in accomplishing is nuancing the individual experience of community forestry, and the literature on place-based, process, and popular educational theory seem to provide a useful framework for discussing this. This chapter also provides a space for me to discuss some of the limitations of the research and what it does not enable me to conclude on as well.

**Landscape and Livelihood’s Impact on Student Participants**

I begin with some important caveats regarding my research methods and results. The results I report above are not based on truth per se, but rather they are based on what students (and others) reported as their experience. I did not set out to prove the meanings and experiences they described. The fact that these are personal experiences, values and reflections rather than facts, raises some critical issues that color the results that I found.

The first issue is about sample size. At the time of my field research there were 25 former LL graduates. I tried to contact 17 of these or 68% of the total LL graduates. Of the 17 I contacted, approximately 6 or 35% agreed to be interviewed for this project. Thus 24% of former LL students at that time were interviewed for this study. (It should be noted that 76% of the former students I contacted enthusiastically expressed interest in participating in interviews, but due to travel, moving, and work constraints, only 35% actually found time for the interview.) This small sample suggests two questions: why did some agree or refuse to participate and what bias does this introduce to the study; and secondly, is the sample size sufficient to make valid generalizations about the impact of
the LL field semester on student participants? It could be that it was largely the students who had a positive experience in the program who agreed to participate in interviews. If this is the case, the results could be heavily biased towards students who felt positive about their LL experience, and it helps to explain why I did not receive major negative feedback from the students I interviewed. In fact, there was one student I observed not during my field research or the semester I was a student who expressed negative comments about their LL experience, particularly being expected to do physical labor for restoration efforts on a ranch. This person’s experience could have been shared, but the study cannot comment on it. Another student during the semester I observed expressed disappointment because he was expecting the semester to focus strictly on field skills; his interest was watershed restoration. I did not interview him, but my observation of him suggests there may be students I did not interview or observe who could have more critical perspectives.

This discussion leads to the question if LL is a self-selecting program. Students with an intention, desire, and openness to participate are generally going to have positive experiences. Even these students often have difficult or even negative moments, but overall they report the semester as teaching them the joy and hope-inspiring interactions where insights seem to occur for students. However, due to the limited student sample and their overwhelmingly positive evaluation of the field semester, the thesis is not able to conclude on LL students who did not participate in the research and may have had more critical comments about the experience. Of the major impacts LL had on students who were interviewed for this research, developing understanding and connection to rural households, livelihoods, and concerns were key achievements. Interviews revealed that
some of these students may not always agree with the beliefs or values of their homestay families, but they were able to see a valuable knowledge and appreciation of the land the homestay family had, and could still form a connection with their homestay family. The LL instructors were aiming to foster students’ abilities to see the world through the eyes of rural residents who are likely to have different experiences and values than themselves. By developing understanding, the LL instructors also aimed for developing an ability of students – now and into their futures – to be open to and appreciative of the concerns and knowledge of rural residents and for this understanding to contribute to an openness for working with rural people in collaborative conservation efforts. Developing and expressing respect is an elemental part of this process and the data suggests that students developed a respect and appreciation for rural and forest-based livelihoods and the people they engaged with. Freire (1997) affirms this kind of kinship that emerges when people are learning in communion with each other. As in the instance of one student discussed in the results, the student described her desire to learn from her homestay family and her surprise at the homestay family wanting to hear her stories as well. What is happening and what place-based education (Sobel) contends, is that the learning is contextualized in a community and with people of diverse backgrounds that students engage with intimately. This is distinct from having a guest speaker in a classroom or visiting a professional forester in an office – not to suggest these experiences are not meaningful, and in fact may occur within the semester. The focus, however, is on spending time with people on the land and in their homes who are trying to live sustainably. Having opportunities to hammer out difficult issues with each other and develop respect in the process seem like important building blocks for community forestry, and these
experiences could have long-lasting implications for community forestry should these students go on to develop careers in community forestry. Whether or not they do remains to be seen, and it could be these experiences become life-long learning lessons not necessarily specific to community forestry, depending on the path students pursue.

A second important implication relates to the subject of local ecological knowledge. Teaching students about local ecological knowledge is an integral part of Northwest Connections’ philosophy and goals. My research suggests that they were able to do this through teaching field observation skills, discussions with instructors, and course readings. This is difficult since the topic let alone the pedagogy of local knowledge is not well known. As such, I think it important to examine how LL students are taught what is local ecological knowledge and to identify it apart from local lore, prejudice or individual anecdotes. In other words, how does LL enable students to identify what is local ecological knowledge and what is not? I think the answer to this question is woven into the entire curriculum of LL.

The LL instructors emphasize that local ecological knowledge is observing place, people, and nature through the seasons, over time. The LL instructors teach students about local ecological knowledge in the following ways: 1) through the actual experiential course work, students learn about ecosystems and their processes through observations on the land, course readings, and discussions with instructors; 2) students further practice the observations through writing and drawing in two structured ways: keeping their journals and being involved in Northwest Connections citizen science projects. To clarify, though citizen science is a process of volunteers gathering scientific data, in the case of these projects with Northwest Connections, LL students are also
learning to value and work with local ecological knowledge. This type of knowledge is learned by residents living in a place observing and adapting to changes in their environment over time and passing on that knowledge through oral and other types of usually non-written processes. Through projects, LL students learned from both academic and local ecological knowledge holders how to identify flora, fauna, and ecological attributes necessary for forest management and conservation.

As discussed in Chapter 4, students record their observations, lessons, essays, and self-reflections in journals. Observations are an important aspect of the journals: they occur from the beginning of the semester on the backpacking trip in the Swan range to the field trips, homestays, independent study projects, field work, and personal time students spend on the homestead and in the Valley. The biogeography section of the journal includes observations of flora, fauna, geologic, and forest change processes, including human-influenced processes – all expressed in writing and drawing. The watershed component also includes observations through writing and drawing on riparian and riverine ecology and how humans influence watersheds to their detriment and for their restoration. In the forests and communities section of the journal, students are asked to reflect philosophically about their observations with people they engage with in the community and to reflect on complicated questions or scenarios these people may or could struggle with. An example includes asking students to explore through writing how they could mitigate the limitations of economic security when trying to practice a sustainable livelihood. The field skills portion of the journal is also a place to write and draw their observations; animal tracking, in particular, is important as students learn to identify tracks, the animal’s size, and the animal’s possible behavior in that location. The
instructors teach these observations skills. A major way observation skills are assessed for students is through their journals. As discussed in Chapter 4, students, through incorporating course readings, discussions, and experiential field learning, use writing and drawing to show what they are learning. For example, in the biogeography section, students must collect a certain number of flora and fauna observations throughout the semester, and in these written and drawn observations, they must follow natural history field journal guidelines they are taught at the beginning of the semester. In the watershed portion of the semester, students are expected to write and draw instructions for how to conduct a stream, amphibian, and road survey. They are also required to draw watershed characteristics they have been reading about, discussing, and observing in the field. It is expected, therefore, that by the end of the semester, students should be capable in observation skills regarding flora, fauna, and ecological processes which include watershed dynamics and all of which may include human influences.

The citizen science projects are embedded in the courses I just briefly described. Again, observation skills are taught through scientific criteria through course readings, the instructors’ scientific background as well as experiential field learning from local ecological knowledge instructors. By developing observations of flora, fauna, ecosystem processes, watershed dynamics, and the human influences on all of these, students have a foundational knowledge for particular projects like the Whitebark pine and stream survey. In addition to providing support for local monitoring efforts, the citizen science projects demand that the students know and apply their newly forming local ecological knowledge in order to participate. In this way, the citizen science projects are an outlet to
express this through the observation skills they have been learning in the field, through discussions, and in course readings.

For the LL instructors, there is more to observing place, people, and nature through the seasons and over time. They want students to be able to distinguish on their own between what is good ecological knowledge and what is opinion or prejudice. Instructors do this by establishing criteria based on both the literature and insights from local knowledge holders who participate in LL and through illustrating examples on the land, which exemplify good land management and conservation based on these criteria. Evaluations and judgments are based on whether or not the land/forest in question has ecosystem integrity intact. Ecosystem integrity is the ability for self-renewal and nurturing and maintaining diversity. Choices that take away from ecosystem diversity hinder its integrity. While ecosystem integrity is a highly contentious topic, meaning different things to different people, in the case of Landscape and Livelihood, its meaning is colored by the instructors’ approach to rural and forest communities. For the instructors, a major indicator of ecosystem integrity includes sustainable human use, recognizing that not all ecosystems require human influence and that human influences must not hinder fundamental ecosystem processes that have developed over time. Some questions LL instructors pose to students include: What is the forest type in this place? What was it historically? How has it changed? How have humans influenced this? What kind of habitat does it provide for animals? What is the role of insects and disease? How does this place fit in with the ecosystem processes of the surrounding landscape? What role does fire play? Could this land benefit from fire or harvest? Did the human choices here nurture or degrade the land? Simply put, instructors are asking students to
think in terms of historical ecosystem processes and how humans can continue to live and work in these ecosystems sustainably, in a way that does not degrade the integrity of the ecosystems.

Primed with these observation skills and ways of looking at the land and ecosystems, students are better equipped to think more critically (instead of making uninformed judgments) about what is good local ecological knowledge, based on the criteria just described. Students are not told by the instructors which people in the valley they think demonstrate good local ecological knowledge and which do not. The instructors intentionally expose the students to people they think demonstrate a commitment to sustainable land-use and livelihood practices well (based on the criteria described above) while keeping in mind that rural communities are not homogenous in their values and land practices and also recognizing these particular people may not be “perfect models,” though for some students, this was their impression. The point here is that even people who are tirelessly committed to sustainable stewardship ethics can still struggle with practicing them for such limitations as financial resources, time, labor, or even knowing what is the “best” choice. The LL instructors want the students to be able to recognize these nuances, and again, they are encouraged to explore these complexities through discussions with instructors and the people they engage with on the land and in their homes and the essays they write in their journals.

In summary, in addition to learning observation skills and how to practice citizen science, the LL students also learned the value of listening, being respectful, and thinking critically with diverse, complex individuals. Part of this critical thinking includes learning better how to identify local ecological knowledge versus local opinion, which is
an explicit goal of the LL semester. Though the data can not comment on if students made this explicit distinction in their reflections with the homestay families, the data can suggest that students recognized the importance of listening and being respectful with homestay families and the subsequent feelings of joy, hope, and inspiration in allowing space for a connection. It is based on my observations, reflections, and interviews with instructors that students are indeed learning how to identify local ecological knowledge, even if the former students are not reflecting on it specifically in the interviews. Students also learned about the complexity of ecosystems and how people are part of these places and should be part of the decision-making process regarding these places. All of these lessons and skills are important for community forestry because they speak to many of its goals: the importance of involving local people in the decision-making process regarding the land they live and depend on, using citizen based science to inform their credibility and position in the decision-making process, and having the observation and technical skills to know how to conduct citizen science. While much emphasis is placed in the literature on the importance of technical skills like conducting citizen science, the results for the students included these as well as less tangible skills – the value of communicating with people respectfully, thinking critically, and including people that are often overlooked in land-management decisions. The joy, hope, and inspiration students described help fuel these abilities, as the results suggest. Community forestry, from this perspective, seems to suggest implications for how the individual experience connects with nurturing community forestry, which I will discuss in the final section of this chapter.
Implications for Homestay Families

In total, I was able to interview 53% of the homestay families from the 2002, 2003, and 2004 LL semesters. It is beyond the scope of the research to know why the other homestay families did not participate in my research, and what bias that may introduce into my results. Nonetheless, this research suggests that the LL experience enabled some homestay families to gain additional insights into themselves and young people that could help build and nurture community forestry. As noted in the literature review, community forestry practitioners suggested the importance of understanding one’s self before being able to engage with other people (The Aspen Institute 2005). The process of interacting with LL students provides space for some households to self-reflect, refine their opinions and beliefs, and share them – ultimately they are sharing their stories, their histories. The process enables these community members to know themselves better and validates them as knowledge holders. While the community members were not explicit in how the interactions with LL students influenced their specific participation in community forestry, they were clear that the interactions with students gave them more inspiration and energy to keep working and participating in community-based conservation, such as their involvement with projects at the Swan Ecosystem Center, specifically through the effort to create a community forest in the Valley, and their own private and State land-use efforts to practice ecosystem management and forest restoration, which their livelihoods are tied to. These homestay families were also explicit in their desire to continue being part of the LL semester in subsequent years.
The Aspen Institute (2005) report indicated community forestry does not necessarily mean a “community” is involved in all activities but rather groups of individuals. This raises important questions regarding the difference between community and groups of people and the characteristics of community that are supposed to exist in community forestry. Since 2001, there is an emerging group of people who participate in Northwest Connections’ activities, including Landscape and Livelihood. Each year, these families, among many things, come together to share a meal during the homestay potluck, to help each other gather fuelwood, and to attend community forestry meetings. Participating in LL adds to what they share in common. These small successes, as the Aspen Institute (2005) report also affirms, of increased inspiration and energy and a desire to keep participating in LL are not to be underestimated, as they can have a cumulative effect of building more hope and confidence. As the community forestry literature notes, this is a slow, subtle process, and only time will begin to reveal more explicitly the depth of the LL experience for homestay individuals and families. An awareness the families did express is the seeds being planted for each semester that passes through the Swan Valley. Again this amounts to 14 households out of 600 in the Swan Valley. Do their numbers matter? Only a few families are participating in this experience, but it could be important over time, though this study cannot predict if and how it will be important. For the homestay families, they say it is important. What this means explicitly for community forestry in the Swan Valley is less clear. The data does not provide these answers, but it does make strong suggestions for the role of individual relationships as a way to nurture building blocks of community forestry. Again, this research asks if these sporadic shared meals LL hosts for community members are
enough to build networks of mutual trust, help, and organizational skills necessary for
community forestry. I argue that this kind of activity is a small and important component
of community forestry, though it may not be sufficient for building a movement on its
own.

In sum, the homestay experience is an important part of the LL experience for the
homestay families. It provides opportunities for community members to connect with
other homestay families, students, and LL instructors and to share knowledge and stories.
In this way it contributes to their sense of joy, hope, and inspiration that seems to keep
these people motivated in their community based forestry work as in the projects at the
Swan Ecosystem Center and work on private and State lands. Homestays provide
opportunities for shared hikes, working on the land together, sharing meals, and sharing a
home. They occur through the group homestays in the Flathead and Blackfoot valleys,
the individual weekends, and often through independent study projects where individual
students spend prolonged periods of time with a local mentor. These interactions are
often the only opportunity some community members have to share their knowledge with
engaged and interested people. The interactions help community members better
understand their own positions as forest and community knowledge holders and realize
the significance of what and how they convey their knowledge and stories. This kind of
interaction creates inspiration and energy that could become essential building blocks of
community forestry (The Aspen Institute, p 7).

**Implications for Community Forestry Education**

This research highlights how an educational program fosters processes that
nurture self-knowledge, confidence and inspiration among people that I suggest could,
someday in the future, nurture community forestry efforts. Elemental to this process is having communication and listening skills that foster trust and respect, which can lead to building relationships. This kind of education is occurring for individual LL students and homestay families. Examining the results through the lens of community forestry, popular education, place-based education, and process education studies begin to suggest unique implications for what can be called community forestry education in a particular place.

In the Swan Valley, NwC’s place-based education program, Landscape and Livelihood, offers new ways for people in the community to participate with a community forestry education program. Visiting students and other homestay families can contribute to community forestry through hiking and working with people on the land, living in their home, and sharing meals and stories. It offers new opportunities for community forestry through inspiring individual level transformations, which can make students better equipped to understand and appreciate the value of rural and forest-based livelihoods, local knowledge, and the role of rural communities in natural resource decisions. Being in a rural community is important because the people in these places are often overlooked; rather what the natural environment can provide (from resources to recreation) often is the focus. In this way, students spend time with people they may not ordinarily have exposure to or think to make an effort to connect with. Also, being in a community (as opposed to a classroom) provides a context to connect with and a history to be part of. Embedded in this experience is the goal LL instructors are aiming for: if you want to work with people, no matter what the context is, you must have basic skills in communication and the ability to demonstrate empathy and respect. Field trips,
independent study projects, and homestays, in particular, are vehicles for these opportunities, and all of these taken together are significant for providing these kinds of opportunities.

Baker and Kusel (2003) suggest community forestry “entails a radical revisioning of how we as a society structure relations between people and forests” which involves “diversity [in community forestry] is not just nice, it is necessary” (p. 193). Missing is an explicit emphasis on nurturing relationships and individual development within the community as part of this process and a deeper discussion of what sorts of processes are helpful for creating individual changes that can support an aggregate movement to practice community forestry. The Aspen Institute (2005) report emphasized the importance of keeping motivation and energy alive for a community’s resiliency. This study cannot make conclusions based on a community level, but it can suggest through the popular and process education theories (Freire, 1997; Moore) that individuals have the ability to influence each other. I did not set out to prove if and how people in the community are influencing each other, but the data does suggest that the students and some of the homestay families influenced each other in the feelings (joy, hope, and inspiration) and new ideas (challenging stereotypes, developing stewardship ethics) that resulted from their interactions. At this level of analysis, the research suggests significance in deep, personal changes at an individual level. How and if this may increase in scale cannot be determined from the data, but, again, the process and popular education literature suggest its importance.

It is important to remember that LL attempts to teach students about the complex social and ecological dimensions of ecosystems, conservation, and management. The
conclusions reached in this thesis were strongest about individual-level philosophic and personal changes. This is not to say that technical and interpersonal skills (e.g., building community capacity, collaboration, ensuring open and inclusive participation, equity and benefit sharing, resource stewardship and restoration, economic health at multiple scales, adaptive management and learning, and networking across groups) were not learned or are not as important - only that the data regarding them was less conclusive. While these factors are more commonly understood tools for conducting community forestry, they are included in the LL curriculum to various degrees. My research results suggest they are background for what appears to be a prominent experience of more personal, transformational experiences. Here is where process educational studies, popular education, and place-based education suggest the importance of individual-level change, which I argue is critical to the process of community forestry, specifically for fostering individuals more confident in their beliefs and desire to maintain connections between their lives, livelihood and the land, and to some extent, relations with others in the Swan community.

Where the community forestry literature lacks and what NwC and LL experience may be most significant in accomplishing is nuancing the individual experience. Process educational studies, popular education, and place-based education provide theory for better understanding its relevance and meaning. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, these three theories recognize the importance of the development of the individual. Process educational scholars insist on education experiences that encourage the “flourishing” of individuals, developing of imaginations, a spirit of curiosity, and a greater sense of interconnectedness – all within a landscape and a larger community.
context. Freire (1997) acknowledges the importance of teachers and learners being in communion with one another, where there is a reciprocal relationship and how this contributes to validation, hope, and joy. The community forestry literature and history is shaped by a sense of disenfranchisement, isolation, and disempowerment. There are countless stories of frustration, hopelessness, anger, and burnout – crippling individual and community resiliency. Even with existing community forestry networks, such as the ones in the upper Swan Valley, they are not immune, as the community forestry literature notes, from these debilitating pitfalls.

Networks are comprised of individuals, thus suggesting individuals must come together to form them. Many of the homestay families are already part of existing networks. These vary and overlap and include collaborative groups at the Swan Ecosystem Center, monitoring projects with Northwest Connections, and other community organizations. Also, by participating in LL each year, the homestay families are emerging as a group. It is not clear if they identify themselves this way or see reason for leadership in this way. The implication here, though, is that the experience with the students is leaving a legacy over time with these community members and families, which may influence them in their existing networks or could possibly inspire new networks. In other words, interacting with the students seems to create new inspiration, new energy, and this has the potential to call “new possibilities into the future” as the process studies literature suggests. Process studies is important because it gives permission for the student’s education experience as an unfolding process where they are able to increasingly see the interconnectedness of things while expanding their imagination in the process. Important to the notion of interconnectedness is also scale,
which is something I have already pointed to place-based education emphasizing. (It is significant that Landscape and Livelihood is community and place-based. This “bottom-up” approach to experiential learning provides a more accessible way to see and learn these interconnections.) Process studies also gives permission to consider empathy as an integral ingredient to building stronger connections among people. For LL, this translates into the instructors’ focus on respect, humility, and listening to what people in rural landscapes have to share.

Thinking back to the literature on process studies and imagination specifically, I am trying to suggest that LL is creating a kind of learning community of students and community members based on this experience of expanding and developing one’s moral imagination, which they participate in together and is connected to Freire’s notion of learning in communion. For the community members, many participate every year. I am trying to suggest that LL is also influencing how this group of participating families as a whole moves forward through time, though I am not able at this time to point to specific on-the-ground changes, I can suggest that it may be happening and may happen more explicitly as semesters occur each year, which is something community participants also noted in interviews.

Renewed inspiration and energy, experienced individually with the students, has significant implications for community members’ continued participation in community forestry efforts. While they did not express what they were doing differently, they did describe how the interactions gave them new energy and hope to stay involved. The Aspen Institute (2005) report identifies keeping motivation and interest in being involved
in the community forestry movement as an important strategy for its long-term sustainability.

This discussion of the individual experience leads to the question: how could community forestry education be constructed that includes more at the community level? In fact, the education accommodates a community level: community fuelwood gathering, citizen science projects, the annual bird count, assisting in SEC projects with other community members, attending public meetings, giving public presentations, and volunteering (through independent projects) with SEC and other non-profits to name a few. The data, however, reflects the more personal, transformational experiences students and people in the community described. Something I observed during my field research is the lack of awareness or interest, based on interviews with people in the community, regarding the effort to create a community forest. It seems as though advocates are still trying to garner larger community support and interest; as this develops, this could be a venue for LL students to participate in more, which would enhance their involvement at a community level in a way that is explicitly defined as community forestry. The students do, in fact, learn about the community forestry history of the Swan Valley (historical land-use practices and ownership, government and state land management history and policies, conflict and tensions from timber declines, formation of the ad hoc group, formation of SEC, the role of a private industrial timber company, and the effort to create a community forest) in their course readings, field trips, and discussions with instructors.

Another question this research raises is: who is or are the best people to provide community forestry education? Is it community-based organizations like Northwest...
Connections or others such as professional forestry schools? In asking these questions, I want to avoid dualistic thinking that this is a debate between place-based ecological knowledge and scientific knowledge. The LL instructors explicitly state this is not their purpose; rather, they aim to integrate both, recognizing that both are useful and together can provide meaning that they do not necessarily provide when taken separately. While professional forestry has a reputation for privileging themselves as the trained experts, not savvy to the needs of rural communities and unwilling to recognize their local ecological knowledge, this does not imply all professional foresters are this way or that all professional forestry schools train their students to think this way. Likewise, just because a teaching organization is community and place-based, does not automatically make it stronger academically because of its experiential nature or more sensitive to the people and needs of a community. Both kinds of learning environments face challenges and have pros and cons. I am not in a place to say one is in a better position than the other to teach these concepts; rather, I argue that the real key is integration of the two. The research provided here suggests that the field-based and “hands on” nature of the LL semester was very crucial for the learning described above among students and homestay families. Being in the community, I argue further, has the added advantage of bringing in rural peoples who otherwise may not be part of a professional academic setting, unless specific instructors and programs value them and make a concerted effort to include them (which in fact did occur in a community forestry course I took at The University of Montana).

On the other hand, leaving community forestry education to community-based organizations marginalizes it by not making it an integral part of professional forestry
education. LL students are able to gain full academic credit at professional forestry schools and colleges, which helps to legitimize it within the academic world. Including LL as part of professional forestry schools is an important part of growing awareness of community forestry among professional foresters and my research suggests is an extremely important part of LL students’ overall academic program. Thus, while the education experiences are different in the extreme stereotypes of academics vs. entrenched field schools, LL seems to have found a good balance between taking the best of these two types of knowledge systems and educational approaches.

Chapter Conclusion

This research concludes that one of the most profound impacts of the LL field experience – on both students and homestay families – occurs at the individual level while providing a context and curriculum that also speaks to a broader set of personal connections and relationships. Individuals in both of these populations reported changes in how they viewed and understood rural places, peoples, their interactions and implications for forest management. These changes were spurred by the holistic field based, experiential and scientific learning method that is the hallmark of the LL program. As described above, their teaching methods involve a variety of activities that strive to instill practical knowledge of the area’s ecosystems, role of rural residents in living in and making a livelihood from these ecosystems and current forest management issues and approaches, as well as activities designed to spur contemplative and philosophical inquiry such as journaling and spending time with rural residents. Students also have opportunities to give something back to people and organizations in the Swan Valley
community through participating in activities such as fuelwood gathering and in some cases with independent study projects, citizen science projects and homestays.

Community members, and particularly homestay families, have opportunities to engage in new ways with themselves and the LL students. While community forestry education would be incomplete without learning about its history in a place, the technical skills required for forest management, and techniques for collaborative and conflict resolution processes, there is a more fundamental set of skills and attitudes the research suggests a person must intend and practice in order for these more tangible aspects to integrate and sustain themselves in the long-term. These skills include learning how to listen and be respectful to a diversity of people and livelihoods, the contribution they have to offer, a sense of interconnectedness amongst people and between people and nature, and lastly, the significance for joy, hope, and inspiration for sustaining motivation and commitment to community forestry. These are small but important steps toward building potential for community forestry.

Figure 31. LL students host a potluck for the homestay families.
“For a community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on people’s love and concern for each other.” – Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity

Community forestry education usually begins with recognizing the significance of relationships – vibrant connections between community members and other communities. While this is critical, this thesis has also emphasized the importance of an individual’s relationship with his or her self and suggests this is the necessary seed from which to build social relations and ultimately community capacity. Emphasizing a diversity of connections that are intentionally nurtured is an asset for community. Recognition, acceptance, and celebration of diversity are essential because no community is homogenous. LL is a vehicle to begin this process among students and community members in cultivating diversity, reaching beyond our comfort zones and ground-truthing what opportunities can open when people connect rather than stereotype. One intentional way of nurturing these connections is through activities that I have discussed above. These not only include participating in forestry related activities or citizen science projects but also other community activities such as potlucks and special interest gatherings. All of these are legitimate providers to the process and can help to build community. By including students in community building, it demonstrates what is possible to overcome differences among community members. Sharing meals, walking the land, and working on the land, as in the case of what occurs in homestays, is a powerful way to share a common, elemental connection with each other and to the Earth. It is a spiritual practice that can help inspire empathy and dismantle divisive thinking. Thomas Berry eloquently writes of the significance of eating together in a recent collection of essays. “As humans we are born of the Earth, nourished by the Earth,
healed by the Earth.” So, yes, we all have this in common. It is the great equalizer.

Berry goes on.

The natural world tells us: I will feed you, I will clothe you, I will shelter you, I will heal you. Only do not so devour me or use me that you destroy my capacity to mediate the divine and the human. For I offer you a communion with the divine, I offer you gifts that you can exchange with each other, I offer you flowers whereby you may express your reverence for the divine and your love for each other. In the vastness of the sea, in the snow-covered mountains, in the rivers flowing through the valleys, in the serenity of the landscape, and in the foreboding of the great storms that sweep over the land, in all these experiences I offer you inspiration for your music, for your art, your dance. All these benefits the Earth gives to us individually, in our communities and throughout the entire Earth. Yet we cannot be fully nourished in the depths of our being if we try to isolate ourselves individually or if we seek to deprive others of their share by increasing our own; for the food that we eat nourishes us in both our souls and our bodies. To eat alone is to be starved in some part of our being (Berry, p. 139).

So, it is helpful to change one’s perception to reduce the separation between forestry related activities and non-forestry related activities, to emphasize there is interconnection between them. This can give community forestry efforts an enriched strength because it is not a fragmented process, and to view it in such a way limits imaginative thinking and available community energy. One way this is happening in the Swan Valley of western Montana is through the neighborhood potluck gatherings facilitated by SEC. Also, the annual community bird count involves LL students and community members throughout the upper Swan Valley followed by a community potluck. The LL homestays are beginning to connect families across the valley because the weekend culminates in a group potluck with all of the homestay families and students. The homestay families who participate so far include a wide array of livelihoods (related to forests and conservation) and differing personal values guiding their livelihoods. These gatherings I
am describing create opportunities in which new connections within the community are beginning to form amongst community members.

There is the inescapable reality that there will always be people in a community who do not want to participate in any collaborative efforts; perhaps they are even suspicious of what a community group is doing and feel angry or threatened by the power they have gained. For some, it may be tempting to label these people as stubborn and stodgy, but this kind of thinking is detrimental because it then automatically hinders bridging connections. Talking with residents in the Swan Valley who are suspicious of NwC’s and SEC’s role in the valley has taught me that the people who feel this way are reacting to a sense of protectiveness of their own history and culture – a way of living and being. A collaborative group or organization creates change in community, and it can have the ability to create change that affects land-use patterns, just like the historical role of federal and state agencies making land management decisions in a forested community. In this sense, the division of community members at the local level is, in a way, a reflection of the larger phenomenon that has played out in forested communities since the beginning of the Progressive Era.

Perception can be empowering. If a community widens its focus to include the activities that may not have an obvious connection to community forestry, this also can open an emotional and intellectual space for more diverse ways of engaging with each other. When community members become community forestry educators for the students, naming this experience is part of widening the perception of what a community is capable of, the resources it has, and what members can bring to each other. Moreover, relationships are a process: they must be nurtured over time. Even in a community
where connections and respect are strong, taking this state of being as secure is risky. No matter what the circumstances are, whether a community is rife with polarization or with strong connections, these relationships should never be taken for granted. The work of respect and empathy does not stop when things are good. The future of community forestry in the Swan Valley hinges on strong individuals with strong relationships to each other. Having access to financial resources, from federal funding (such as USFS Forest Legacy monies) to the income from forest-based livelihoods, is certainly important and can influence how people interact with each other. Networking with other organizations and communities has also been shown to be an asset in the Swan Valley. Having community leaders at various levels and ways is important. This research suggests that in addition to these factors, community forestry education should include more intentional ways of nurturing, honoring, and supporting individual level skills, confidence and inspiration, which supports inter-personal relationships between community members. The particular case of LL demonstrates that an intentionally structured educational experience with these goals in mind can nurture students and community members to experience these lessons, with the goals that these individuals will go onto to be able to adapt to new conditions and build community resiliency. Citizen ecological monitoring and data gathering, field trips, community activities, homestays, and the subsequent role community members assume as educators are examples of demonstrating community resources, and these processes are affirming, and they provide a mirror for dealing with community diversity as an asset and not a liability.

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I have recently observed a sea change phenomenon in how individuals from the U.S. Forest Service interact with the Swan Ecosystem Center and Northwest Connections. I believe this is emblematic of the kind of transformations community forestry can spur, and which NwC and LL is helping to make happen. In June 2006, I attended a field trip on the land surrounding the Swan Ecosystem Center. The purpose of the field trip was to discuss what trees should be removed to meet fuels reduction efforts. It was not clear to me who was hosting the meeting since it seemed truly collaborative between the Forest Service, the Department of Natural Resources, the Swan Ecosystem Center, Northwest Connections, and the general public. The Forest Service representatives discussed their interest in helping to reduce unnecessary forest fuels; contrary to the more common scenario where the Forest Service has already developed a plan and seeks comments on it, this was a meeting to develop a plan together. People with different perspectives shared what they wanted to see happen on the ground. It struck me how everyone’s input seemed to be genuinely valued and considered. It also inspired me to see how a range of ecological factors were considered in a more integrated approach to the forest; it was not strictly timber focused. Afterwards, Tom Parker said to me, “What you saw today is what we’ve been working on trying to have for the past 20 years.” In the words of Paulo Freire, “I am first a being of hope.”
CHAPTER 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY


