

From Scarcity to Abundance: Illich's Educational Critique and Indigenous Learning

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Abstract: This paper takes as a beginning point Ivan Illich's radical work on education and schooling, which began with his posting to Puerto Rico as vice-rector of the Catholic University at Ponce, in Puerto Rico, in 1956. This work continued with the Centre for Intercultural Documentation (CIDOC), in Cuernavaca, Mexico, through the publication of *Deschooling Society* (1971) and beyond. Three distinct phases in Illich's conceptualization of schooling and education are traced. For the purpose of this paper, I will term them *de-mythologizing*, *radical scrutinizing*, and *re-tooling*. In the third phase, Illich and his colleague Edward Reimer posited that what is actually needed in reconsidering education is to improve human interaction with the *tool* of education. This insight formed part of Illich's 1973 book, *Tools for Conviviality*, in which he explored what such a project might look like. In this paper, this idea is pushed further. I offer some stories of Teme Augama Anishinaabe Elders from Turtle Island (North America) with whom I have worked for several years, along with my reflections, to suggest an altogether different view of learning and education, one which takes place in a context of abundance.

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1. Introduction

This paper derives in part from research done for the Theory and History of Education International Research Group (THEIRG) conference on Freire and Illich. This was held online in May of 2021, and figured presenters from many countries of the global South, as well as from North America and Europe. This paper explores an idea that emerged from my conference paper, but that could not be fully explored in that context – the concept of abundance in education. This idea provides a counterpoint to Illich's insight that scarcity was at the heart of the formal project of education. The first part of this paper explores the intellectual path Ivan Illich followed

to come to his positions on education, which represented a radical critique. The second part explores different ideas of education and learning. Some of these ideas were discussed in conversations with Indigenous Elders with whom I have worked for more than two decades, first as friend and filmmaker, and later as researcher, in the Temagami region of Ontario. These views differ from those normally understood by educators and administrators of public education more broadly understood within neo-liberal contexts. They also challenge even Illich's most radical critiques. These Elders' ideas, along with my reflections on them, prompt the question, has Illich's (and our) critique of education gone far enough?

The focus of this paper is theoretical exploration. It is not ethnography, nor history, though elements of both may appear. My goal in it is to see from different angles and to put into question what are taken for granted as educational norms within neo-liberal contexts. This comes in part from considering Illich's intellectual development, in part from listening to some Elders' thoughts on education, and in part from my own, philosophically rooted thinking about these. Illich's ideas on *education* and *schooling* were in flux for many years. In my reference to them, and to the term *learning*, when writing about Illich I use the terms as Illich used them at that phase in his intellectual explorations.

Broadly, the terms are used here as they are generally used in non-specialized ways, following Illich's own style (Illich, 1971, 1973). For the purpose of this paper, *learning* is some kind of change, too widely varying to be precisely defined here, that happens in the learner. Some, with Dewey, would define the changes as growth (1937); others might challenge such a teleological description. *Education* refers to influences outside the learner, organized systemically to greater or lesser extents, from the personal to the global, that influence the who, what, where, how, and why lenses through which the learner learns. The term suggests formal and informal structures influencing learning. And *schools* and *schooling* refer to the structures (physical and cultural) that *tend to be*, but are not always, the vehicles that express and enact education, in more practical terms. Overall, Illich categorizes education as a commodity – emphasizing its economic function – and schools as institutions (1973, p. 27).

While it is easy to be critical of somewhat elastic and accommodating definitions such as these, that would be to miss the point of this paper. All of the available space for this paper could be taken up in an attempt to be precise about terms that, because of their broad use, can never be precisely defined. The point of this paper is not to artificially stabilize complex concepts with too many cultural references globally to ever be made stable. It is to focus on the relationships and interconnecting strands between these very large ideas, and in so doing, to further contribute to the understanding and alteration of the ideas that are rendered most meaningful only in relationship to each other. In this paper, I also make reference to neo-liberalism and capitalism, and to the modern global North and global South, to emphasize in different contexts elements of the broad tendencies of widespread orientations to education and related concepts. This is not a policy paper oriented toward particular institutional practices or to particular regions. It is a philosophical exploration of broad ideas, rooted in my own practice.

2. Illich's three phases of exploring schooling and education

Illich is especially well known for an intensive period of writing from 1971-1976, which began with *Deschooling Society*, when he was director of the Centre for Intercultural Documentation (CIDOC), in Cuernavaca, Mexico. CIDOC examined various aspects of modernity that were generally considered to be unalloyed successes, including education, medicine, and certain technologies. CIDOC was Illich's intellectual crucible. There were four books written during this time, all of which challenged societal institutions that generally were considered to be above reproach. These included *Deschooling Society* (1971) and *Tools for Conviviality* (1973).

Illich, his colleague, Edward Reimer, and contributors at CIDOC had intellectual encounters with schooling and education in three major phases. Beginning in the late 1950's and leading to the publishing of *Deschooling Society* 1971, Illich's primary concern was with schools as an institution. Later, Illich came to see that education itself also needed to be challenged. In interviews with David Cayley in *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (1992) and *Rivers North of the Future* (2005), published a few years after his Illich's death, Illich reflected on the difference between what he thought he was doing in his earlier work and where these ideas ultimately led, toward the end of his life. The opportunity these texts provided for him to reflect on his prior theorizing from a position of greater understanding is perhaps of more than usual significance in Illich's work: his life was marked by abrupt changes in intellectual direction and careers. One such change was his suddenly resigning his post of vice-rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, due to a disagreement with the Catholic establishment over birth control (Cayley 1992, p. 12). Such changes might appear to some to be as a result of a sudden, *gestalt* awareness, of the kind Jan Zwicky has explored in recent philosophical work (2019). Others have interpreted such alterations in religious terms as a calling Cayley 1992, 3). In any case, the hindsight afforded in Illich's later life provided him with a clearer understanding of his overall intellectual direction. For this reason, this paper refers to both Illich's early and later theorizing.

Deschooling Society (1971) was an attempt to articulate the first of three discernible phases in Illich's and Reimer's understanding of schooling and education¹. This phase might be called the de-mythologizing of schooling. This work emerged from Illich's real-life experience with the contradictory nature of public education, which he experienced in his role as vice rector at the Catholic University at Ponce, in Puerto Rico, from 1956-1960 (Cayley 1992, p. 60). Illich's position of vice-rector automatically made him a member of the governing educational body for the country. Illich examined the successes and failures of the Puerto Rican educational system. He learned from this work that public schooling there consistently failed to meet its stated claims. It did not decrease social inequality, but increased it; it did not uplift those who were socially disadvantaged, but demeaned them; it curtailed opportunity, rather than creating it; and it did not open possibility, but restricted it. In addition,

¹ I am thankful to Rosa Bruno-Jofre and Jon Igueldo Zaldivar (2012) for their clear delineation of these areas of development in Illich's thought, especially as they relate to his later theorizing. .

schooling created «an interiorized sense of guilt for not having made it» (1992, p. 63). In short, schooling in Puerto Rico achieved the inverse of everything it promised (1971, p. 7; 1992, pp. 60-64). The facts, as Illich read them, proved it. And yet, schooling was seen by all, but most emphatically by poor countries like Puerto Rico and Brazil, to be of unquestionable benefit to all its citizens (Cayley 2005, p. 140; Illich 1971, p. 7).

Illich began to see that the kind of faith that was required to justify schooling, to governments and people alike, was similar to religious faith. One way to understand such devotion to a failing social entity such as schooling in Puerto Rico was to see it as kind of ritual grounded in faith. In fact, Illich called this kind of faith in education *mythopoesis*: a myth-generating ritual (Cayley 2005, 143). For Illich, the realization that faith was required to keep the myth of public education alive was deeply disturbing (Cayley 2005, 140). Illich went from being a priest attempting to understand Puerto Rico's focus on education as a key aspect of development, to seeing the unjustified symbolic connection of public education to the kind of ritual that occurred in organized religion. The same kind of faith was required to make both work. For Illich, this was the only way to make sense of the otherwise inexplicable place of honour that public education held both developed and developing societies. This idea ultimately led to Illich's broader insight that throughout modern society in the global West, the forms institutions took could best be explained as a secularized, Christian ritual, or, as David Cayley puts it, «as a mutation of Christianity» (2005, p. 1). The ritualistic faith in schooling explained the broad acceptance of contradictory expectations and outcomes. Each failed outcome could be met with the response that more of the same – namely schooling – was needed.

In his earlier work in Puerto Rico, Illich and Reimer had come up with the question, what is schooling? (Cayley 2005 139). Or, as Illich later would put it, «What do schools do when I put into parenthesis their claim to educate (Cayley 1992, 62)?». This question is similar to Foucault's «what, what they do, does»². At roughly the same time, but in different parts of what was then a much larger world, Illich and Foucault both used similar kinds of investigations to expose the non-neutrality of institutions whose unquestioned value had, Illich argued, been based upon faith.

The correspondence between Reimer and Illich went on for many years until, in 1971, CIDOC provided the critical context in which the first draft could be produced. In the spring and summer months of 1970, Illich distributed chapters each Wednesday to a collective that critiqued them. This collective included John Goodman, Paulo Freire and Gustavo Esteva.

As Illich notes in his Foreword to Matt Hern's *Deschooling Our Lives* (1994, p. vii), it was Harpers that published the book, and was responsible for the misleading, though catchy, title. But, as Illich noted in his conversations with David Cayley, the book was not about eradicating schools altogether (the term *deschooling* suggested this). The book was about changing the nature of schooling by «disestablishing» it. Illich uses *disestablish* in a technical sense, in the same way in which the

² «People are aware of what they do. They are aware of why they do it. But what they do not know is what what they do does». Foucault, M. Personal communication, as cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, p. 187). . .

Constitution of United States of America disestablishes churches. As Cayley notes, its First Amendment of the Constitution states that «The State shall make no law with respect to the establishment of religion» (Cayley RNF, 13). Illich makes a parallel case for how schools should be treated: schools could still exist, but they ought not to be given any particular support by the state nor should they be under the control of the state (1992, p. 64).

Illich and CIDOC believed that disestablishing schools would achieve at least two things. First, special privileges would not accrue to those people who attended schools. Such privileges might include permission to apply for certain positions, or status. Second, disestablishing schools would undercut the expectation of universality of schools. This would countervail the growing phenomenon, both in the developed and underdeveloped world, of formal education being perceived as a necessity, and thus, in a self-fulfilling way, becoming one. Illich believed that the greater good of education was being threatened by these destructive effect of schooling, which deschooling would help to diminish. This was the central idea in *Deschooling Society*. Yet, the book had not even been published when Illich began to re-think this idea.

In the second phase of encounter with the ideas of schooling and education, Illich recognized a theme that was latent *Deschooling Society*, but had not yet clearly emerged. This theme was that schools ought not to be the focus of concern, but rather that it was the Western preoccupation with education itself that was at the root of the problem. As *Deschooling Society* was about to be published, Illich and Reimer theorized that a migration of education into informal settings was already underway. Illich said, «This talk of “lifelong learning” and “learning needs” has thoroughly polluted society, and not just schools, with the stench of education» (Hern 1996, p. viii). Thus, Illich argued in his critique of their earlier thesis, if schools were to be disestablished, the alternative ought not to be the seeping of education into every aspect of life, nor would it be the getting rid of schools altogether, given that schools could sometimes serve a useful function³. Illich's proposed solution would be to encourage a different kind of relationship between people and tools (Hern 1996, p. viii). This statement seems obscure, but in CIDOC's intellectual toolkit, *tool* was a simpler word for *technology*, and education was regarded as just another kind of technology. Recognizing that eliminating schools would not solve the underlying problem of education was the substance of the essay Illich published the week before *Deschooling Society* was published. This insight paved the way for the next phase of Illich's research: historical investigations into education itself. This would lead to the proposing of a new and better «tool» for «conviviality» in the area of education and learning. Illich eventually settled on the term *conviviality* because for him, no other word could convey the idea of co-thriving between humans and technology. In a convivial relationship, humans would consciously choose tools and control the effect these hand on humans.

³ Gustavo Esteva later co-founded Unitierra (Universidad De La Terra; «University of the Earth») in Oaxaca, Mexico. The university does not focus on the awarding of degrees, but on helping mostly Indigenous students to gain particular skills that will benefit their communities. An example of this might be a legal apprenticeship to give working knowledge of property law, so that communities would be better equipped to argue their own legal cases (Esteva, personal communication, 2009).

In the third phase, dating from the late 1970's and into the early 1980's, Illich and Reimer shifted focus away from whether education in its current form was a suitable means for an accepted end. They instead initiated historical investigations into education, in which they began to question the value of education, as a broad societal process, itself. In this research, Illich came to realize that the underlying difference between the intervention of formalized education and the self-supporting process of learning itself was perceived scarcity. Formalized education became societally justified when the possibility of learning was, through artificial means or real limitations, perceived as being scarce (Hern 1996, p. ix). Scarcity is a central principle of neo-liberalism. Perceived scarcity increases value. To some extent, this may be viewed as addressing the conundrum Illich first experienced over what education did, as opposed to what it claimed to do, in Puerto Rico. In Illich's and CIDOC's understanding, *education*, the publicly recognized form of learning, is intended to order and separate the deserving from the not, and the already privileged from the lacking. It is, as with any commodity in the modern, global North, to be consumed by those who can afford it. It is also there to continue to promulgate the notion of scarcity, thus ensuring its own regeneration in a particular environment. Yet *learning* – which involves the (contextualized) learner – does not need education, formally construed. It is without limit. It can occupy and occur in any place it wants. With this idea in mind, we now proceed from ideas about scarcity in education to Illich's proposed solution to this, which is found in *Tools for Conviviality*.

3. A better technology: liberating learning in *Tools for Conviviality*

Tools for Conviviality, published in 1973, followed close on the heels of *Deschooling Society*. It was Illich's attempt to draw parallels between various aspects of society in the modern West, and to examine them in the same way that industrialization had been critically examined. As Illich wrote, «The industrialization of any service agency leads to destructive side effects analogous to the unwanted secondary results well-known from the overproduction of goods» (1973, p. 4). In other words, given their *behaviour*, things like schooling and health can be considered in the same way we would examine the more wasteful aspects of industrialization. What links the two is the industrial, rather than human scale of the enterprise. Illich calls *convivial* «a society in which modern technologies serve politically related individuals rather than managers» (1973, p. 6). Once again, Illich used the term *technologies* for a wide range of applications – from hand tools to medicine. Thus, in public health care, just as in schools, the key was not to let the «industrial» model take over with a will of its own. The key was to control the level of the technology to one that could engage in serving people.

To make the case for a more convivial society, Illich used the example of what he termed two watersheds in medicine. The first was 1913, when scientifically practiced medicine gave a better than even-odds chance of healing, over medical quackery. By this date, medicine had, through scientific discovery, reached the point of serving society in a beneficial way, through systematic understanding of illness. Medical advancements to that time had rapidly improved human health, for what was a relatively moderate societal investment. These advancements included

basic understandings of disease, sanitation, medication and experimental methods. The second watershed was 1955, by which time huge amounts of money came to be spent in keeping more economically advantaged people in rich parts of the planet alive for ever longer periods of time, at a very high cost. At the same time, the sheer size of the medical establishment, including a powerful pharmaceutical lobby, weighed against unbiased experimentation and disease prevention. At this point, medicine, on balance, ceased to serve and began to develop a life of its own (Illich 1973, p. 7). This profit-based, industrialized aspect of medicine is much more pronounced today, in countries of the global North and in privatized medicine, where it tends to be available to more wealthy people, than in countries of the global South.

The same kind of observation was made of transportation technology, with the now-powerful automobile lobby demanding larger and larger societal investment, including physical infrastructure, because people had come to be so reliant on it. It also applied to education, which, because of its universality, held a host of hidden problems. While the goal of equal opportunity for education is laudable, «equal» systems of education in practice discriminate especially against economically disadvantaged students (1971, p. 5). From Illich's perspective, for economically disadvantaged students, educational experiences could not be enhanced through the usual additions, be they distant travel or tutors, that rich students could afford. And the illusion of universal equality put even greater pressure on poor students to achieve. Once schools became obligatory, economically disadvantaged students were required to invest ever more of themselves to even succeed marginally. Today, such a binary division between «rich» and «poor» might seem naïve. It does not take account of the complex nuances of intersectional socioeconomic circumstances. Yet, at its heart, and especially in the context of 1973, such an insight was as forceful as it was revolutionary. Something that had been an unchallenged good had been questioned. Following Illich's argument, the good that schools do is outweighed by the bad. In Illich's words, showing how this came about, «the commodity called "education" and the institution called "school" make each other necessary...the institution has come to define the purpose» (1973, p. 27).

In *Tools for Conviviality*, Illich argues that what is needed is a better relationship between people and tools, such as the «tool» of schooling. In schooling, this would entail revisiting the original ideas of education and schooling to see whether both were serving the polity, or were, possibly without awareness of the fact, coming to control it. Illich writes,

In fact, however, the vision of new possibilities requires only the recognition that scientific discoveries can be useful in at least two opposite ways. The first leads to specialization of functions, institutionalization of values and centralization of power and turns people into the accessories of bureaucracies or machines. The second enlarges the range of each person's competence, control, and initiative, limited only by other individual's claims to an equal range of power and freedom (1973, p. 6).

According to Illich and CIDOC, the latter is the kind of education that liberates. It is education that is not enacted under the pretense of scarcity.

Yet, despite what Illich proposes, and despite the evidence provided that this idea of education may be a better one, I remain unconvinced. In part, this is because I think that there is much more space for learning than even Illich finds, in his iconoclastic encounter with education. I have become aware of these quite separate ideas on learning through working with Elders⁴ from the Teme Augama Anishinaabe, in Canada, for over two decades. The next section addresses suggestions of a different view of education and learning, and in so doing, moves beyond what Illich uncovered.

4. Learning in a context of abundance and kinship relations: Elder learning and stories

This section addresses ideas about learning and education in a context of abundance. With *abundance*, I am thinking of the more-than-human world around us, always open to our learning. I want to ask, might there be a meaning of the term, *education*, that can span the senses of nourishing an infant to nourishing an adult, such that the threat of scarcity is never experienced⁵? Would this permit the two ideas that are obliged to be opposed in the third phase of Illich's critique – education and learning – to be actually allied?

I recall the words of Michael Paul, spoken to me about two decades ago. On Elder Alex Mathias's and his partner Mary Carol's request, I was making a documentary film to help protect a spirit place from clear cut forestry⁶. Alex had arranged for several Elders to come and speak with me so that their voices could be heard in the film. Michael was one of them. He was recalling how for part of his youth, he had been raised away from the broader community, on his family's territory. In the context of a much broader conversation, Michael paused and looked around. Then he made a broad sweep of his arm to what was around us. He said, "This! This was my education" (Beeman, 2006). Before this moment in the conversation, we had been speaking more in the conventional way in which the term, *education*, is used in the modern global North. In his statement, Michael appeared to be using the word to give a point of comparison with the well-known alternative available in the global North. The world as education that he was referring to also went beyond a standard idea of education. This world that was his education gave relevant lessons freely, the subject of which was to support his own thriving and survival. For Michael

⁴ I wish to thank and acknowledge the Elders with whom I have worked in the Temagami region, some of whom I have known for over two decades now. In this paper are the words of Michael Paul, whom I met on Alex Mathias's family territory, while responding to Alex Mathias's request to make a documentary film to help protect the spirit place, Chiskon-Abikong. And Alex's words are part of research that has been ongoing in various forms for many years.

⁵ Illich's etymological exploration of *educare* revealed unexpected traces of another idea. He tracks the term in its current use back two centuries. But the earlier use of *educare*, dating from Tertulius, is breast feeding. So, the idea of nourishing, first from breast milk and later from knowledge, lies latent in the idea.

⁶ Daki Menan, noted in reference list.

to be *educated*, in the way in which he used the term, was for him to be raised (and, as an adult, to encounter the world) in such a way that he was taken care of – even nourished, in the context of, in conjunction with, or perhaps by, the more-than-human world. The education that was really at the heart of things was not merely understanding, but *living* in the context of an ecosystem in which he was a member with equal status to other beings. Considering education in this sense – in a sense of caring relationality – his reciprocal responsibility was to care for the land. The concept of education and the learning engendered therein reflected an understanding of relationship. Perhaps, it could be said that education was not the *learning about*, but the *enactment of a relationship* between people and place (Beeman, 2006; Kimmerer, 2013)

In this way, if Michael paid attention to his “lessons,” his needs would be met, he would on balance enjoy relatively good health, and he would continue to deeply understand and experience himself as part of an ecosystem – as a living being interconnected with all else whose boundary was not only at the superficial level of the human skin.

This conversation with Michael happened on Misa’bi family territory, where Alex Mathias is family head. I have worked with Alex for almost two decades now. Caring for the land is something which Alex also has attended to for much of his life. This is a duty to protect the natural world and in so doing, to maintain a space in which his own *education* – in the sense of co-thriving noted above – can occur.

The word «duty», that I wrote just above is not quite accurate. Duty to care for the land certainly is there, but there is more. The nature of connection with the land that Alex and Michael express goes much deeper than simply a sense of responsibility for something that is worthy on its own – so-called «intrinsic worth». It is more a feeling of deep kinship with and accompanying love for. The global, modern North does not have adequate words for this, nor does it have ideas that fully encompass this. Love and kinship tend to be reserved for humans. Michael and Alex are referring to a way of being in the world in which the depth and duration of an experience of human/place interconnection makes individually-oriented, isolated human thought almost incomprehensible (Beeman, 2014). The kind of responsibility I am referring to then is not a rule-bound duty measured to an external standard. It is one that derives from known and experienced (rather than imagined) kinship. It is not *stewardship* but a loving *relationship* in which human wellbeing and ecosystem wellbeing are ensured because being, itself, is shared. To extend the reflection from *education* to *learning*, then, what is learned in this sense is one’s place and concomitant responsibility, within an ecosystem.

Robyn Wall Kimmerer has noted the quality of abundance that is present in other Indigenous contexts. She writes: «You can’t listen to the [Haudenshaunee] Thanksgiving Address without feeling wealthy. And, while experiencing gratitude seems innocent enough, it is a revolutionary idea. In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition» (Kimmerer 2003, p. 111).

Michael also said in the same conversation, «This place...well it feeds me...and it’ll feed you». He doesn’t say, «You can find food here». He says, «this place will

feed you» (Beeman 2006)⁷. Without drawing attention to it, in this statement, Michael appears to implicitly assume agency in the natural world. This idea has recently gained new momentum with the new materialisms (Beeman & Blenkinsop, 2019)⁸. In a related conversation, Michael said «This land is telling you what to do». Here, again, agency of the more-than-human world appears assumed. Both statements emphasize an agential world, which is both connected with humans also capable of acting independently from human consciousness or intent. Education that occurs in this kind of world might therefore be thought of as including a more-than-human (Abram, 1996) teacher that comes with the context – without there ever being the need for a human one.

I see in these words the coupling of two ideas of education that have come up already in this paper. The first relates to the idea of education in a more conventional sense. The result of *educating* in the sense I am using it in conjunction with the natural world is a mutually-beneficial relationship of care. In this sense of *education*, paying attention brings lessons in how to survive and thrive. And with it, belonging is ensured, because there is no way to thrive over the long term without being actually and consciously part of an ecosystem. The second idea of education centers on nourishment. And, if we follow Michael's words, it is plainly the place that nourishes. Thus, the place gives not only the knowledge of how to live there. It also sustains one in all ways, from the physical to the spiritual while one is gaining knowledge. The responsibility that comes with the learning in this caring relationship is only to care for the place that teaches. Both educative ideas are predicated on the agency of the more-than-human world. The (human) learner/nourished – is the recipient, although there is no true separation between person and place.

We can note the following qualities of this place of learning. We co-learn with place as teacher. The place nourishes by allowing us to gain knowledge that contributes to our thriving, but also gives us belonging. And what is learned occurs through an agential, loving, other, with almost infinite capacity to include all forms of learners.

At one point in our conversation, Alex used the phrase *djoo-djoo n'dakim*. This is the standard Anishinabemowin transliteration (The Algonquin Way. Accessed June 2021) and the meaning is *mother Earth*. This conversation occurred in the context of meeting with Alex to help to write down some stories of Temagami from his childhood. He asked that I write down what he said in his own language «the way it sounds». I understood this as a request to not use specialized symbols that would make the sounds inaccessible to a wider group of people, but also to honour the fact that the language he speaks really is a spoken language, spoken only in a certain area. Alex and those fluent speakers still left from the Temagami area have a different pronunciation from other Anishinaabe speakers'. Alex pronounced the term approximately «*ju-jum dakim*», so I will write it that way.

⁷ I have written earlier about Michael Paul's words, «It's telling you, this world is telling you what to do» (2006). Both statements emphasize an agential world, acting interdependently with human consciousness.

⁸ New materialisms make a case for the agency and vibrancy of the more-than-human world. See specifically Karen Barad.

Aki means Earth. *Ju-jum* relates etymologically to the mother's breast. So, *ju-jum dakim* brings together the land with the nourishment received from a mother. It is a place of sustenance. It is the place that nourishes, just as a mother would nourish. It is the comforting place of the original food, of the most nourishing kind (Alex Mathias, personal communication).

Alex is also hereditary head of his family (Misa'bi) territory. In recent years, Indigenous hereditary governance has become more widely understood in Canada. In the Wetsuweten protest against the Trans-Pacific pipeline, for example, hereditary chiefs, not representatives elected through the Band Council system, have led the opposition to the pipeline. The Band Council system of governance was designed and approved by the Federal Government of Canada, through the Indian Act (1876). Because this governing structure is ultimately responsible to the Crown, it is frequently criticized for controlling First Nations, not simply representing them. Hereditary systems of governance have gained in significance in recent years because frequently they have been associated with resistance to neo-liberal development of the kind that threatens *ju-jum dakim*. What is relevant to this paper is that Alex holds the position of hereditary head of the Misa'bi family territory because his father passed the territory down to him. His father told Alex at the time that he did this because Alex was the only person who knew how to live there.

How could one person alone know how to live in a place? To the mind of *homo mobilis* – the state of being that people, in the global modern North occupy – this might seem baffling. But to a person like Alex or Michael, who comprehends the depth of intimate connection with a place that is needed for something like mutual thriving (or perhaps it would be the same to call it *understanding* between person and place) occur, the meaning is clear. Alex was taught the lessons of this particular land by his father, who is the person who best understood it. He learned this through his family's long history there. In the sense I explored above, Alex has been *educated* in its company. He has learned how to find livelihood, including food and shelter, in this *particular* place. Alex's education was not simply a case of being taught some general skills in hunting and trapping. His education was understanding human/place interactions that are specific to a unique place. What Alex learned has been vetted by generations of people who have lived here, and has evolved through centuries of co-habiting, between humans and a place. Alex's learning is as a result of relationship, between people and place.

Such an education also entails reciprocal love between people and a place. This love is based on careful and conscious living on the part of humans. In this way, the wellbeing of both the place and that of the human participants are secured. This kind of learning is evidently not *education* as it is commonly used in the sense of the global, modern, North. Neither is it education in the way Illich comprehended it. It is surely not schooling. That said, some of the words Illich used to describe the better relationship between people and the tool of education that he referred to are relevant in the way education is considered by Michael and Alex.

Perhaps, in fact, it is because Alex was able, for the most part, to *avoid* schooling in the conventional sense, that he was able to learn this unique knowledge in the kind of *education* I am describing here. With his knowledge of this place, and the educational context of a nurturing relationship, Alex was able to honour his kinship

relations. This is an ontologically necessary act that forms part of his living on and with this land (Kimmerer, 2013).

This all came about because his thoughtful and prudent father negotiated an agreement with the local school that Alex did much of his formal education – required by law in Canada – through correspondence. Alex’s formal education thus occurred concurrent with his informal education in the nurturing context of abundance on the land, at the same time that many Indigenous people were forced to give up living on the land. They succumbed to the overwhelming weight of public education, just as Illich observed would be the case, when schooling was universal.

Illich observed in Puerto Rico that the ill-effects of public schooling were most visible at the margins (1971). In Canada, the sad and predictable outcome was that many First Nations, Metis and Inuit students in residential schools lost their connection both to their families and to the land. Alex’s story shows that even when schools were local, day schools, located within First Nations, the overall structure of schooling still affected the whole family. Public education schedules prevented families from being on their family territory for most of the year, especially during the winter months, when most trapping and hunting was done. In this way, seasonal patterns of hunting and trapping on family territories were lost. Alex still laments how few families from his First Nation now live on the land. Alex’s family managed to resist this trend. They lived for almost the whole year on their family territory. Alex attended an official school for a month or so in September. Then his family went to prepare for the trapping season in October. Alex did his official school lessons by correspondence when he was on the land. The family trapped while the fur of animals was at its highest quality, from late fall through winter, until the spring. Then, in March, April or May, depending on the season and the suitability that year of ice for traveling, the family would move back to the First Nation. Alex would again return to official school, until it finished, in June. The family would then go to a fishing camp, where his father guided and his mother cooked. In this way, the family was together for the whole year, and patterns of interaction with the natural world on the family territory were maintained. Alex’s family were not wealthy, but because of their connection to the land, there was never concern over having enough food. (Alex Mathias, personal communication, 2018). In this way, Alex and his family avoided what Illich called the most violent form of poverty: the modernized kind that was disconnected from the land (Cayley 1992, p. 7).

Illich identified what he thought of as the cult of education that separated whole nations from their traditional patterns of living. The story of residential schools in Canada, brought to public consciousness decades later bears similarity to the detrimental effects of education that Illich saw in Puerto Rico. The form was different, but the result was the same. Those more marginal, considered within this formal structure of education, became even more so. This coincided with moving from subsistence poverty to «modernized poverty», which Illich considered to be a crueller form, because in it, the connection to the earth was lost (Cayley 2005, p. 5). Alex’s family managed to maintain that connection. With that connection came learning. And the learning that occurred was of the nourishing kind. How could it be other than this when it was *ju-jum dakim* that guided the learning? As in the case with Michael, this was learning in the context of the limitless abundance of the natural world. This

unofficial learning was the opposite of what Illich saw enacted in parts of the global South as part of colonization, and what occurred in most First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities in Canada. Alex's learning occurred through interaction with the natural world. This necessarily constantly reaffirmed and recalled in story that knowing and learning were necessarily linked with particular places and events. This was learning in the context of abundance, through kinship relations. There was no scarcity here of the kind Illich identifies in his consideration of formalized education. In less human-controlled places, the natural world was always present as nurturing other.

This section has linked the concept of agency of the natural world, with the etymology of «mother earth» – *ju-jum dakim* – to emphasize learning abundance that occurs in relationship with the more-than-human world. This view is compatible with Illich's critique of education occurring in the context of scarcity. But it goes beyond this: to the idea that the kind of *education* that they experienced was for Michael and Alex incapable of being other than abundant, while the relationship of reciprocal care between people and the natural world was maintained.

5. Conclusion

Illich's critique of education was made in the context of CIDOC's long-term project of critiquing established and unquestioned «tools» of living, like education. At Illich's time, this was based on a broad understanding of how capitalism works. Illich's strongest contribution was the formulation of an original critique of several public social institutions, like medicine, education and transportation. Illich had an idea that some other reality could replace the current one. But there is a broad gap between the optimistic recommendations that he and CIDOC made in the 1970's and today's reality, which seems little changed from Illich's earlier critique. This would suggest that while Illich's critique may have been well-founded, his proposed solutions were insufficient.

What the stories of the Elders suggest is that there may be an alternative to attempting to transform education within its usual context. Scarcity certainly defines education's relative unavailability for economically disadvantaged students. But the evidence above, of what learning in the context of a reciprocal relationship with the natural world could be, shows an alternative. These ideas broadly speak to Illich's conundrum. To address it, what we think of as education may have to expand. Learning in contexts in which a new kind of thinking and being occurs, such as those noted above, is an alternative that could make education abundant.

Illich does perhaps have an inkling of this in *Deschooling Society*. What might not have occurred to Illich was how abundant not just learning, but also education could be, if they extended to the relational epistemology and ontology deriving from a kind of knowing that is inseparable from the more-than-human. With world as co-learner (and co-teacher), the action of learning, itself, has the potential to rather become a being state that is the antithesis of the kind of scarcity that Illich investigated. It is a place of abundance. But a fuller exploration of this must remain the subject of another work.

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