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Intersubjective Sensibilities: Memory, Experience, and Meaning in Natural History Interpretation

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Abstract

This ethnographic account examines the perceptions of a group of outdoor educators or naturalists in a mid-western state park in regards to memory construction and how early memories impact their practice of interpretation. Findings show that early personal memories are not only fundamental to their eventual life as a naturalist but further; these memories motivate their work within the park. Of primary focus is highlighting the intersubjective continuity between the memories of naturalists and what they hope for others and the eventual goal of meaning making by way of affective memories. By describing and interpreting their perceptions of experience and memory we can examine how these processes are invested with significance and what role this plays in their subsequent practice. Since there is little ethnographic research concerning naturalists, this form of cultural analysis provides an important lens that permits an intimate account of naturalists' own awareness as a way to understand their unique contributions as educators.

Keywords

Memory, Experience, Meaning Making, Intersubjectivity, Naturalists, Ethnography

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Intersubjective Sensibilities: Memory, Experience, and Meaning in Natural History Interpretation

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This ethnographic account examines the perceptions of a group of outdoor educators or naturalists in a mid-western state park in regards to memory construction and how early memories impact their practice of interpretation. Findings show that early personal memories are not only fundamental to their eventual life as a naturalist but further; these memories motivate their work within the park. Of primary focus is highlighting the intersubjective continuity between the memories of naturalists and what they hope for others and the eventual goal of meaning making by way of affective memories. By describing and interpreting their perceptions of experience and memory we can examine how these processes are invested with significance and what role this plays in their subsequent practice. Since there is little ethnographic research concerning naturalists, this form of cultural analysis provides an important lens that permits an intimate account of naturalists' own awareness as a way to understand their unique contributions as educators. Keywords: Memory, Experience, Meaning Making, Intersubjectivity, Naturalists, Ethnography

“I think the interpretive service is in the business of building memories.”

Maggie (full-time interpretive naturalist)

In parks and preserves across the United States outdoor educators known as Interpretive Naturalists and visitors interact through directly experiencing natural and cultural phenomena. Social exchange of experiences and stories abound in this non-formal educative setting as these educators provide programs meant to foster engaged awareness in localized natural and cultural history. To this end their craft is an attempt to attend to both the direct experiences and affective memories of those whom they teach. Yet, in what ways are experiences and memories instrumental in the development of these naturalists? How do naturalists connect their own memories with the programs they create and the visitors they encounter? And what do naturalists hope result from the generation of affective memories? Within this ethnographic account, I explore the intersubjective dynamic between naturalists' own memories and their perceptions of building memories for visitors as part of their practice. My intention is to describe and interpret how early experiences and their associated memories are invested with significance for a group of naturalists at a mid-western state park in the United States. And further, how these interpretive naturalists connect these memories with their professional life. To understand this more acutely required a sustained interest, and sustained study in how naturalists reflected on their own experiences and memories and how they saw this informing their practice.

Variiously called Interpretive Naturalists, Interpreters, or Naturalists, these educators work within local, state, and national parks and preserves in the United States and across the globe. Their charge is to provide place-specific natural and cultural education programs to the public and interpret the complex language of environmental topics in applicable and approachable ways. In the United States there is a significant history of this form of nature study arising in the mid 1800s. In this work I use the term naturalist as it is the normative term used by those in the field and not only bridges interpretation work today to the early

days of nature study, but further invites inclusivity for multiple disciplines, education levels, and experience (Hunter, 2014).

What I found through the course of this study is that memory formation is not only important for their own development as naturalists, but subsequently, as a defining element of their practice. Experiences and memories rooted to a place become a facet of meaning making inherent in the experiences of these naturalists. These elements of experience, memory, and meaning become intertwined in the naturalists' world. In this way, memories of earlier times provide a motivation and connection for naturalists as they guide visitors to similar memories, in hopes this will ultimately lead to meaning making. While considerable focus has been paid to this process and subsequent outcomes for visitors little has been written about those whose charge is to engender place attachment and foster these positive memories (Hunter, 2012). By engaging in ethnographic field work and providing an exploration of cultural processes this account fills a needed gap in our understanding of perceptions and motivations of naturalists themselves as a unique group of educators.

I begin this work with a short exploration of the research literature and provide a description of my research process. Subsequently, I offer representative data and interrogate two central findings; that these naturalists trace their present occupations to early memories, and that their practice is guided by fostering similar affective memories for others.

Memories and Meaning: A Conceptual Lens

Interpretation literature is brimming with examples and explanations of creating meaning and connections between audiences and place (Beck & Cable, 2002; Brochu & Merriman, 2002; Chen, 2003; Dec, 2004; Goldman, Chen, & Larsen, 2001; Knapp & Benton, 2004; Larsen, 2003; Mills, 1920; Tilden, 1977; Sobel, 2004; Turek, 2006; Zarki, 2004). Turek (2006) states that "interpreters seek to connect their audiences directly with the resource--natural, cultural, historic. Each resource has its own story, its own voice; interpretation offers the venue for the visitor to hear that site-specific story and share in the work of making meaning" (p. 48). Meaning making is dependent upon interpreters who create the space whereby visitors can create their own meanings relative to their lived realities, memories and experiences (Beck & Cable, 2002; Chen, 2003; Dec, 2004; Tilden, 1977). There is a strong phenomenological orientation within these accounts, whereby place itself fulfills an intrinsic role in our construction of memories and meaning. The lived experience of each person, connected to a place through direct engagement and subsequently nested within affective memories exemplifies a set of conditions that positions phenomenology as keenly suited to grounding such work theoretically.

Beginning with the overwhelming a priori nature of phenomena, Merleau-Ponty (1962) stresses that "the world is always *already there* before reflection begins" (p. vii). Thus, our perceptions of things are dependent upon the things themselves in a relational engagement. Heidegger (1977) evokes a similar sense of the grounding orientation that phenomena provides our construction of meaning, while Casey (1993, 1996, 1997) describes this relational quality between object and subject by explaining that place (as phenomena) is always primary to perception. Therefore, we engage in a dialectical relationship whereby "we are not only *in* places *but* of them [his emphasis]" (Casey, 1996, p. 19). In attempting to connect both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, Michael Crotty (1998) suggests that the phenomenal world might be meaningless in itself, yet through our engagement it becomes our collaborator in meaning construction.

Meaning making manifests itself through the process of creating those connections that lead to emotional relationships between people and place (Ben-Ari, 2000; Brochu & Merriman, 2002; Kuo, 2002; Tilden, 1977; Turek, 2006; Webb, 2000). In regards to the role

of the interpretive naturalist, Turek (2006) stresses that creating connections should be a first priority and supersede any other goal. As we can see, there is considerable concern within interpretation research to explore this process of encouraging connections. Central to this interest in building connections is the exploration of affective memories. The role memories play in fostering significant connections has been a concern of research within the broader range of environmental education (Brandt, 2013; Measham, 2006; Palmberg & Kuru, 2000; Turnstall, Tapsell, & House, 2004). Knapp (2006), Knapp and Benton (2005), and Knapp and Yang (2002) have conducted interesting research dealing with semantic and long-term memories of visitors to interpretive programs. These studies offer insight into the ways that visitors to programs sustain their memories and what affect this might create. The great majority of studies however, follow this line of inquiry; examining affective memories for visitors, rather than investigate those who see memory construction as inherent in their work. Thus, we know quite a bit about outcomes, but little about the genesis of memory construction from the perspective of naturalists.

While there is ample research devoted to interpretation and memory little of this derives from qualitative inquiry broadly and ethnography specifically. For the most part, ethnography has not been a form of research within the world of interpretive naturalists (Hunter, 2012). Because of this, there is a lack of cultural analysis within interpretation research and our understanding of naturalists' own perceptions and meaning making from a cultural framework is limited. Central among this lack of knowledge is how naturalists perceive their own memories and how these relate to their practice, particularly when there is great consensus among naturalists that they are engaged in memory work. We are missing inquiry into the memories of naturalists, how these inform the craft of interpretation, how they were instrumental in their career choice, and how these memories are manifest through their work. We need to understand what motivates a naturalist, what, in effect, creates one. Exploring this facet of interpretive work is important for it helps us understand both the motivations of naturalists and how early experiences impact practice.

In light of past research trends it seems imperative to ascertain how naturalists themselves perceive memory and experience. "There is no perception which is not full of memories," (1998/1908, p. 40) Henry Bergson writes in *Matter and Memory*, and this in itself is reason enough to investigate this unique form of education in which memories are a key ingredient. Bergson continues that, "with the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience" (p. 40). The central facet of Bergson's point suggests that individual memories and external phenomena are corroborating elements nested within our perception of the world. This is correlative with the above discussion concerning Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Casey whereby phenomena and perception are intrinsically woven as we experience and remember. In the context of park interpretive programs this comes about through concerted educative programming. In this way, creating memories and meaning through park programs is a process of social interaction grasped by way of understanding the how and why naturalists undertake this.

Intersubjectivity

Fundamental to the practice of these naturalists and relative to the above discussion is an intersubjective awareness that connects naturalists and visitors in a broader community bound by shared experience of the natural world. Intersubjectivity provides a relational framework (Csordas, 2008; Duranti, 2010; Jackson, 1998) by which individuals become aware of one another and the phenomenal world through experiences of the body and through dialogic engagement (Jackson, 1998). Intersubjectivity goes beyond the sharing of ideas, or merely understanding one another to include "understanding made possible by the possibility

of exchanging places” (Duranti, 2010, p. 6). In this form, intersubjectivity can be seen as a set of conditions, a sensibility by which we are able to position take (trade positions) with another individual. Csordas (2008) explains a central facet of the philosophies of both Husserl and Ricoeur is that of analogy. Not that we can insert me for you, but rather, that all of these various egos are like one another. Csordas writes, “we are neither isolated cogitos that must bridge a gulf of solipsism nor participants in the same shared subjective substance. We are similar: all others are like me in the sense that all others [quoting Ricoeur here] ‘are egos just as I am. Like me they can impute their experience to themselves’ (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 239), and in this sense the words I, you, he, she are equal and analogous” (p. 113). This is suggestive that intersubjectivity is a process or mode of awareness and exchange that humans engage within.

“The idea is not that we *simultaneously* come to the *same* understanding of any given situation (although this can happen), but that we have, to start, the possibility of exchanging places, of seeing the world from the point of view of the Other. Intersubjectivity is thus an existential condition that can *lead* to a shared understanding” (Duranti, 2010, p. 6). This possibility of exchanging places is incumbent upon a space for social interactionism. This is a central facet that occurs within naturalist work whereby naturalist create this intersubjective space, engendering an intersubjective sensibility by which shared understandings germinate.

The ways in which naturalists interpret, organize, and attempt to reproduce a set of conditions they endow with significance generates intersubjective possibilities. These include direct experience, constructing affective memories, and sharing both tangible experiences and intangible imaginings with others. Intersubjectivity is the space wherein there lies the possibility to understand one another through the experiencing of the natural world. And indeed, the natural world plays a critical role in this process as something both shared and sharable (Duranti, 2010). This “sharable world of experience,” (Duranti, 2010, p. 2) these “extrahuman worlds” (Jackson, 1998, p. 6) provide the grounding of experiences and memories begat through intersubjective exchange.

Method

My central foci within this work is to explore how naturalists perceive their own memories and connections to place as a way of understanding their eventual practice and motivation in regards to visitors. My intentions are first to describe these early events and perceptions and second to interpret these perceptions relative to the various ways that naturalists view their practice of interpretation in a mid-western state park.

Ethnography, as a field oriented form of inquiry is centered on the interpretation of cultural processes through the collection of data arising out of various sources; including but not limited to in-depth interviews, archival research or artifacts, and of privileged position, participant observation. Ethnography is a systematic exploration of cultural phenomena, examining knowledge and meaning systems of a group of interrelated people, to interpret “webs of meaning” (Geertz, 1973) that form cultural constructions. A primary purpose of ethnography is to move beyond pure description of what people do to interpret the various meanings people ascribe to their actions and experiences (Wolcott, 1999). Within the ethnographic approach, we are interested in understanding the wide diversity of human life by examining particular people in particular places.

Giving privilege to in situ knowledge and experiences, ethnography offers a rigorous account that is holistic, contextualized, and makes connections between social events. “Ethnographers,” Harry Wolcott explains “examine things in their entirety rather than only in parts,” and are driven by “making *connections* [his emphasis] between things” (1999, p. 79). This is something that “one can expect (and insist on) from ethnography that is most apt to be

stripped away in any more narrowly focused approach” (p. 79). These elements of holism, context, and connections are keenly suited to research within interpretation as these find resonance within both fields (Hunter, 2012; 2014).

The data collection took place during a period of eight months, beginning in the early spring with winter still clinging to the cliffs and valleys of the park, through the greening summer, and ended in mid-Autumn with maples blazing orange. I interviewed all of the naturalists in the park (one full-timer, and four seasonal), in addition three full-time naturalists at three other parks. The data presented below arose out a larger ethnographic study and include both open-ended interviews with the each naturalist and informal interviews conducted during observations and before and after programs or engagements with the public. I made visits to the nature center throughout the weeks, varying days of the week and time of day, from early morning bird talks to late evening night hikes and star programs.

To collect data I used both audio recorders and detailed field notes. Interviews were both semi-structured and ad hoc, something Wolcott (1999) calls casual conversation interviews, stemming from observations in the nature center and out on the trails and post-program debriefing. Observations took place in the nature center, in the office, and outside in various environs of the park. The task of data collection was supplemented by my own experience as a seasonal naturalist in a mid-west state park several years previous. Having had this experience helped form a foundational grounding in the practice of interpretation and the ways in which goals and practice of interpretation intersect. Spending time in a similar forest as a naturalist provided a depth of understanding for the centrality of sharing stories throughout an experience. Even still, I was surprised by what these naturalists had to say about memory construction and realized the dynamic qualities inherent in the juxtaposition of memories, experience, and practice. Intersubjectivity is not something I thought about as a field naturalist nor is it a specific point of discussion for the naturalists I spent time with. However, the concerted work in which they engage memories, experience, and meaning creates the possibility for exchanging places and a unique form of awareness to set in. In this regard, the craft of these naturalists propagates intersubjective sensibilities.

Findings: Memory Work as Intersubjective Practice

Two interrelated findings are explored below. The first being that these naturalists share the perspective that their present occupation derives from early affective memories as children. Second, that these naturalists are motivated by fostering similar experiences for visitors rooted in the park. I found that for this group of naturalists their practice is enmeshed with the construction of memories, both theirs and visitors. This memory formation is not only important for their own development as naturalists, but subsequently, as a defining element of their practice. Their own memories serve as important grounding for an affective sensibility they embed in their work and which they hope to re-create for visitors. All of the naturalists in this study described affective memories as children, memories of sharing nature with others, with exploring and learning and connecting to a place. These prove to be pivotal moments in each individual’s life and they are a prime motivator for their subsequent practice of interpretation engaged in memory work.

Origins of a Naturalist: Early Affective Memories

These were memories that were often long in the re-telling, each person finding the threads of connection from one point to another. Here are some of the things they had to say concerning their early orienting memories that set them on the path to being a naturalist. I have oriented them into two groups to highlight specific salient points that they share,

although there were consistent and shared themes across all of their descriptions. The majority of these statements are mere snippets of longer explanations that these naturalists wove concerning their lives past and present.

When I was little, I would always go out with my dad and he would help me identify trees. And I guess I didn't really realize how much of an impact that had on me until I was unsure what I wanted to do in college. And by then, I was going out to this park a lot and hiking and I started seeing a lot of these trees again and just kinda spending a lot of time on my own and I was like this is really something I'd like to do. (Kate)

My family would take annual two-week vacations to northern Minnesota every summer to camp and canoe. Summers and weekends were spent down at the creek with a buddy of mine, fishing, frogging, trapping, hiking, building rafts along the creek and in the woods. (David)

For whatever reason, on my ninth birthday, my mother got me the golden guide, field guide to birds. And I remember looking at that book and thinking I was the only person that was gonna learn what the birds were in our backyard. It was like a whole world opened to me (smiling). And I remember the **feeling** (emphasis) that was the moment of connection. And I remember also borrowing, my parents had a pair of binoculars, and borrowing their binoculars and being outside in the backyard and discovering that there were **nighthawks** (emphasis) overhead at night. And it was the first bird I identified and I just felt (speaking slowly, directly, emphatically, yet not loud), **seriously**, (emphasis) I felt like I knew something nobody else had ever known (short laugh). (back into normal voice level) And that got me started and I started checking out books from the library on birds and the history of birds and then it went from there to reptiles and so I, **I loved it** (emphasis) and I went camping every opportunity I had, which always was with organized groups since my family wasn't into camping. (Julie)

The quotes above offer a glimpse into the birth of a naturalist; a fusing of memories, experience, and place in the young life of these naturalists. Each is infused with personal and emotive meaning and each is rooted to a particular time and place. In privileging these memories, they are each testifying to the importance of early and engaged exposure to localized natural history. In each memory above we have the explanation of some phenomenon or experience that arrests the attention of each naturalist. All attest to the centrality of direct engagement either through identifying plants or animals, fishing and hiking, or other more unstructured experiences. Each remembers an experience or series of experiences profound enough to solidify in their active memories; memories they still draw upon in their practice as we will see.

In this second set of quotes, attention is given not only to experience, but also to the sharing of experience. You will see commonality between the first set of quotes and the ones below in the types of engagement described.

Wanting to do something with the outdoors goes back to my childhood. I remember going out listening for the frogs with my dad. He used to take part in some frog survey so we'd go out for those. He used to take me out to the woods all the time. I remember following tracks through the snow with him.

My dad has always been a big nature kind of person and he was a big part of bringing me up with that. (Joan)

My grandpa, I think has been a big part of my life because he's a hunter, so he would walk me through the woods and we would learn how to track animals. So I think walking through the woods when I was really little with him probably had a lot to do with it. So, I think because he did that with me that was important. (Megan)

Some of my earliest memories were of taking nature walks and going on outings to state forests with my family. My grandfather taught me to fish, my parents taught me to identify birds, and we spent a lot of time on discovery hikes. I would also spend a week with my mother's parents and my grandfather always took us on 5-mile walks, just to see how the landscape was changing. He also maintained a garden and grape arbor, and allowed us to pick our lunch and also examine the insects that shared the garden. (Maggie)

Here, Joan, Megan, and Maggie are expressing the centrality of sharing their experiences with another person or people. In these descriptions there is the presence of a specific elder(s) who helps guide them through their experiences and all three statements have an implicit affective expression. Both the experience and the guide help to root their memories to a specific time and place and become fundamental in the way each naturalist integrates past and present. These early experiences are the first step towards what was often described by the naturalists as a "connection," as is the case with Julie's statement above.

Intersubjective Exchange: Experiences as Points of Connection

Taking account of these early experiences, what is the connection then between memories of childhood and the practice of naturalists? These expressions of the past are fundamentally what the naturalists hoped for the visitors that they spend time with. In this way, when relating these early memories, the naturalists are not solely exploring formative events in their own lives, but are drawing connections to their practice of interpretation. Experiences that begat memories are re-created in this space. Naturalists tap their own memories by way of their practice, manifesting active memory construction and maintenance. The early experiences that these naturalists shared with me were the same set of experiences that they hoped to share with visitors. Common refrains of naturalists such as, "I remember," "I used to," "this reminds me," "when I was young," or "when I was a very little," were often echoed by visitors when experiencing something during a program. There is an interesting sense of continuity implicit in this and this makes sense given the privileging of experience and memories to the practice of interpretation. Joan traced this trajectory in very explicit ways by explaining:

the whole point of nature deficit disorder is if **you're** (emphasis) exposed to it when you're younger **you don't** (emphasis) look for it when you're older and I think that if I hadn't had that experience and those influences growing up that I wouldn't have had any interest in what I do and you know, I do think back to those experiences that I had and which experiences stuck with me, you know, what influenced me when I'm thinking about what source of things that we might want to offer, that comes into play. Thinking about, you know, what kinds of experiences is this next generation going to remember?

Joan is expressing a connection between her earlier memories and what influenced her when she considers her practice. Early exposure factors in here prominently for Joan. But equally important is her attention to personal experiences and how these apply to her work and the experiences of others. In a similar vein, Maggie pondered upon the effects of her own experiences by posing “so why belabor the early years? I believe many experiences connected to these years began an interest in the out of doors that were later reinforced by my choices of summer work, academic coursework, and opportunities to work as a naturalist.” Both are remarking on a trajectory that binds early memories and their present work as naturalists.

How can lasting and transformative memories be created in a world that appears so fragmented, so dislocated by Joan’s assessment of nature deficit disorder? Jack asked this question himself when considering his earlier memories and connected them to his practice. Jack reckons, “I knew I had **some attachment** (emphasis) that obviously came back to influence me that these kids don’t have. So, what are they going to think back on as influential?” His statement is a kind of lamentation and his concern was not unique among these naturalists. This tension sits at the root of the practice, I feel, something that keeps naturalists in the field even when numbers may dwindle or budgets are slashed. Yet, at its heart, the lamentation reifies the concern with memory work as central to both interpretation and meaning making and that leads us to experience. What will people remember that is meaningful?

Naturalists often used the word “connection” to explain their own relationship and memories of the park and also what they hoped visitors would retain. Emily, a long-time field naturalist who became state Chief of Interpretation, and is now state Head of Stewardship stresses that a naturalist must “be able to make connections with visitors. That’s the most important thing. So, they need to be able to help people have those experiences.” A key element of this process, Emily suggests, is for naturalists to rely on their own experiences of being in the outdoors, “so [a naturalist] can share those experiences with the visitors. That’s another thing that really makes it relevant, is when you can talk based on your own experience.” Central to Emily’s notion of connection is the coupling of a naturalist’s experiences and those of a visitor. This sharing of experiences forms a central element of the craft of interpretation, one which hinges upon the intersubjective space in which sharing takes place.

In a similar vein, Kate described connection as a “kind of drawing back, you know, being able to draw on experiences that people may have had before or in their lives at some time and connecting that to something they’re seeing right now. So, it’s kind of...I would hope that most people as children have run around outside and being able to connect them to that again.” Here we have an attempt at connecting with memories of childhood, of recreating a feeling or experience that someone had in years past. Kate is describing the belief that adults need to make these connections to their childhoods through nurturing experiences relative to memories.

Jack offered this description of not only his upbringing and early memories but how this all relates to his practice of interpretation. This is, like the other memories shared, a shortened version. In its entirety it is a rambling and iterative exposition on the potential of deep experiences and memories.

So, I have a **sense** (emphasis) of this Pennsylvania farm where I grew up. You have a sense of what was influential to you, everybody does. And so, we bring that grounding, with what you first experienced, your first fish, your first rabbit you shot, your first baling of hay, the first lambs brought up, the first

horse you rode. All these things hit you at a very critical time in your life. Well, if it was pleasant or there were people there who **made** (emphasis) it pleasant; you'll look back on that as very concrete and stabilizing. That sense of place. I think **that's** (emphasis) that connection for me.

Here Jack is explaining how his own connections to a place are tied up in important memories and experiences that form a "grounding" in his life. This extant grounding, Jack contends, proves pivotal in how he views the land, relationships, and the stabilizing effects of place-bound experience. His own rootedness to the farm of his childhood becomes a form of motivation for him as interpreter, as he explains below.

Well, the people I work with, I don't know **anything** (emphasis) more about them than the man in the moon. I meet them briefly for a 30, 40, 60 minute program. **I can't connect** (emphasis) with them at that level, but I can maybe tie in something that maybe conjures up a thought that they had earlier in life. Or, remember when you were a kid and you saw this? Or for the first time, how many remember the first time they saw this? Or experienced a rain storm, or wind, or climbing up into a tree. We all, we all have these little things from when we were kids and that we've probably pushed to the back...so, you know, in a weak way I try to make that connection and it's vague and weak.

Jack's statement provides a view of the intersection and intersubjectivity of a naturalist's own background and those of participants in his programs. Taken together, Jack's statements provide a conceptualization of rootedness to that Pennsylvania farm and how he perceives his own practice of giving that sense of rootedness to visitors through direct experience of rain storm, wind, or climbing a tree. Similar to Kate, Jack directs his focus on people reflecting back on earlier memories. This tapping into earlier memories through direct and shared experience seems fundamental to how these naturalists conceive of their work.

Relating present experiences among people and across memories is akin to Emily's idea of connection, Kate's notion of "drawing back" to earlier moments in a person's life and Joan's concern of nature deficit disorder. Each of these naturalists is articulating a thread of applicability between their life and the lives of visitors to the park. This is a unique perspective shared by the naturalists and supports their deep concern for those who join them in programs scattered across the park. In no small way their exposition underscores the inherent intersubjective nature of interpretive work; work that connects lived realities of people as much as it connects people to place.

Central to Jack's reflection is the importance of early and transformative memories and the pitfalls intrinsic to the practice of interpretation. Developing a connection and situating memories in time and place through experience is a long, time-consuming, and at times exhaustive process. One of the many frustrations shared among naturalists is the seeming decline in interest in long-term nature study and exploration. Jack's concern above reverberates with this tension. Maggie sees the response to this predicament as a question of early exposure for children, guided hopefully, she adds, by "somebody who is significant to them." Maggie continued that "as long as the parents or grandparents are open to having the child bring them that piece of park, pick up that pretty leaf, find that insect, you know then I think those children are beginning to develop the foundation for being able to appreciate nature later." Two important assumptions underlie these thoughts. The first assumption is that early and fond memories will more likely lead to understanding and appreciation. The second is that it requires a larger community and/or a guide as surrogate of that community to shepherd these experiences and memories. Simply put, we all need engagement *and* someone

to share this part of our lives with. In many ways this is a projection of the naturalists own experiences upon the visitor, an abiding concern for shared and engaged interactions as intrinsic to memory work.

So, what occurs if these early experiences are fomented and if they are attended to by an engaged guide? What can we hope for as an outcome of this dynamic interaction between experience and memory? A full-time naturalist named David explained that

interpretation builds memories. People **experience** (emphasis) our properties and want to come back. The memories transcend generations. The stories become **rich** (emphasis) and the **need to share** (emphasis) and continue to experience stays strong. It makes visits enjoyable and more meaningful. David (Full-time Naturalist)

In David's estimation the coupling of experience and memory is the path towards the construction of meaning itself. In effect, the outcome of this dynamic equates to meaning being created between people and a place. David continued that

when people think back over their lives later in years, certain things stand out as being outstanding experiences. Some are life-changing some just feel good because of where you were, who you were with, what you were doing. People may long forget a certain park's features, or specific details of a property may fade, but **if** (emphasis) they remember having a blast at an evening campfire, a story told, singing with their families, seeing the amazing mating flight of an American Woodcock at dusk in a damp March meadow because they took in the interpreter's program one night...that's interpretation building memories. Those are a bunch of examples, but those are the things that mix the tangibles with intangibles, and that's (emphasis) what gives interpretation meaning. When someone has those kinds of experiences, build those kinds of memories, **yes** (emphasis), for that area, they can develop a sense of place. Is it important? **Of course.** (emphasis) It gives meaning to interpretation. People **love it** (emphasis) and hopefully they come back for more and support the program.

David's summation of interpretation underscores the complexity of the profession. His description is teeming with the goals and implications of interpreters, of the importance of experience, memory, and meaning. Of telling stories and connecting those stories of place to the memories and experiences of each visitor. Again, we have the importance of shared experiences, and the multiplicity of ways that memories and subsequently, meaning is created. In no small way, David is outlining the trajectory of interpretive work, which begins with an experience of a place, gestating into affective memories, culminating in richly meaningful connections for visitors.

Ideally, building memories through emplaced experiences generates the desire to come back to share and maintain experiences and stories, and for David this is when meaning becomes evident. Maggie agrees with David's sentiments. In explaining the underlying purpose of interpretation she stated that

we [naturalists] want to deepen that sense of understanding and appreciation, we **want 'em** (emphasis) to develop a down right devoted love of the place (she is smiling broadly at this) and we would want 'em, to have a rich life, and in our opinion, one of the ways to have a rich life is to, to have **really**

(emphasis) profound connections. We want them also to develop a soft spot in their heart for this **particular** (emphasis) place so that it remains meaningful to them and retains meaning throughout their lives and remains part of their active memory. And not only that if you don't have a love of something and a connection to something, you don't have a commitment to something, and we need that commitment as a goal.

David and Maggie are connecting memories, experiences, and meaning in a way that is rooted to a particular spot on the map. The meaning is an important result of this process because each identifies this as intrinsic to sustaining both people and parks. Both Maggie and David are articulating an explicit emotive component here and this is supported by the other naturalists. And this echoes the ways in which the naturalists describe their own connections to places further integrating individual subjective awareness.

Each naturalist in this study shared very specific memories, some which have lingered over the span of many decades, some newly hatched. Their thoughts are varied, yet these memories attest to the great potential that direct and affective experiences play in how we construct meaning. Further, they are a testament to the ways in which naturalists themselves understand and perceive the process of memory work and their role therein. What the naturalists have experienced and remember serve as a model of relating to a place that they hope to foster for visitors to the park, to bridge dislocation between people and place, to open those spaces within each person's life where meaning can attach.

Discussion: Memories, Meaning, and Intersubjectivity

As a group, these naturalists provide a particular set of cultural expressions concerning the inherent worth of meaning construction by way of memories and experiences. While each individual shared distinctive memories, taken together they evoke a unique worldview among educators today. While I have sought to synthesize some of their comments while exploring the findings, this discussion serves to interpret unique and important contributions these naturalists offer. I began with the question; what is the connection between naturalists own memories and their practice of interpretation? I was interested in their own perceptions of memory construction and how these memories are imbued with significance as part of their work. I was intent on teasing out the dynamics between early memories of naturalists and their subsequent educational efforts to better understand how experience, memory, and meaning intersect.

Each naturalist described an experience or experiences that arrested their awareness to the extent that they could point back to that moment/s over the course of years as a catalyst for their future as a naturalist. Each one elaborated on how the experience made them feel, who they were with, and what the memory meant to them. All of these memories evoke an emotive element and all see this as instrumental to their development as a naturalist and as a rationale for working with visitors. Instilling similar memories through direct experience for visitors, in essence, drawing people back to earlier moments, making park experiences applicable to past experiences becomes crucial to their practice. The individual naturalists make explicit that experiences and their associated memories are invested with significance. Taken together these individual perspectives coalesce into a particular shared worldview.

There is an interesting correlation between the early lives of these naturalists and the experiences they hope for the visitors to the park. Early, direct, and affective memories are perceived to be an important grounding not only in the lives of the naturalists and how it is that they became what they are, but in their practical life; their life as a child exploring nature wedded to their life as a naturalist providing those same memories to others. There is a

continuum then from their childhood experiences, sustained as memories, re-created in the day-to-day craft of interpretation these naturalists engage in.

Each naturalist in the study was able to connect their present occupation with early childhood memories. Each one described a memory rooted to a place, bound by direct experiences. These memories include hunting, fishing, camping, farming, cutting wood, looking for snakes, mushroom hunting, identifying birds or animal tracks, and hearing stories from elders. These memories form an important part of each personal history and one that each naturalist reflected upon when talking about interpretation as a profession. More than this, the naturalists provide an important perspective on the intersubjective nature of interpretive work, the importance of sharing experiences and memories. As explored above, various naturalists explained the connection between their own backgrounds and the present experiences of visitors to the park. This confluence of memories and experiences bound to a place operates as an important intersubjective sensibility within naturalist work that forges relational engagement and awareness.

Here we can return to Maggie's claim, "I think the interpretive service is in the business of building memories" as one rooted within this intersubjective discourse. Embedded in this is a concern with the subjective awareness of another person, what they experience, remember, and subsequently love. These naturalists concern themselves with the various subjective awareness of other people as they attempt to tap into early memories of participants and create space for meaning to attach. The craft of interpretation then provides the "understanding made possible by the possibility of exchanging places" (Duranti, 2010, p. 6), whenever a naturalist reflects on her own memories as a vehicle for providing experiences for others. Connecting their own memories with the experiences and memories of others generates the space in which naturalists may see the world from the point of view of someone else. In this regard naturalists are engaged in a form of position taking as they focus their attention on weaving memories, experience, and meaning applicable to each participant. This relational element of interpretation, this intersubjective sensibility and sharing of place, experience and memories between individuals is not well understood though the words of these naturalists attest to its significance. In this way, our own subjective awareness of place lies at the convergence of shared social interactions. Personal meaning in this context hinges upon relationships with others.

Re-Membering

In previous work I examine a re-conceptualization of remembering as a form of embodied experiential memory construction, retooling it as *re-membering*. What results from this activation of memory through direct experience is what naturalists perceive as a way of preserving both human and natural communities (Hunter, 2014). This present work expands on that work by examining the origins of those charged with memory building. Naturalists play a unique role in fostering preservation of human and natural communities through experiential memory construction.

Central to this present study is how their efforts of preservation are invariably linked to their own sense of *re-membering* as they consistently connect their experiences with others by providing the space for memories to be generated. *Re-membering* offers a lens for examining both the re-creation of memories and the generation of new ones through direct experience of phenomena. I conceive of this as a dynamic process and concerted effort developed as part of the naturalist role in the park. "*Re-membering* embedded in the education at the park is a process by which a conscientious rootedness takes form. This is rootedness culminating from embodied activation of memories through direct experience"

(Hunter, 2014, p. 13). From this *re-membering* there is the hope among naturalists that preservation will be seen as inherently valuable among participants.

On several occasions highlighted above a naturalist explored the continuity between her/his own experiences and memories and those of their visitors. The connection across these individual memories is shared direct experience. Illustrative of this is the commitment to fostering experiences that are perceived to be robust, transformative, and meaningful. Perspectives such as these offer important insights not only into practice, but also community and rootedness. Sustaining natural and cultural communities takes form as a kind of rootedness when memories are created and meaning is constructed and activated.

Keeping all this in mind, the naturalists in this study offer an intriguing model for building relationships between individuals and between people and place. This model is one of extended time and direct, emotive experience with a particular place, shared between people. Their craft, endowed with memories of their own, provides the space for experiences to be had, memories to be attached and shared, and meaning to be constructed. The examples above attest to this dynamic in how and why they go about their work in the forest while striving to root memories in experiencing a place, in a particular landscape.

Yet, naturalists were not so enthusiastic as to neglect exploring the pitfalls of constructing affective meanings. Providing engaged, rooted experiences that generate transformative memories is a long drawn out process and the naturalists were conscious of and reminded often of the obstacles to the efficacy of their programs. They were mindful of the inherent tensions of generating these types of memories in a changing world. How to make these connections within the present cultural shifts is not lost on them.

Despite these concerns, their perspectives reify a set of circumstances necessary for resource protection and meaning construction through memory work. Research has shown the importance of early, affective memories for meaning to be constructed, but we seldom here from those responsible for fostering those memories. Seldom are we accorded this intimate perspective of those in the field of interpretation and whose charge is to provide the space by which meaning is generated. Seldom do we hear educators speaking about their role in memory construction. While they may not claim what they do is cultural work, they are indeed engaged in a form of cultural activity whereby their ideas and practice enlarge the boundaries of experience and awareness.

There is a consensus among these naturalists that they are in the business of generating memories, in effect, fostering meaning for and with people. In their own words these naturalists are positing not only that their own rooted experiences are vital in their professional development, but further, offering similar experiences to visitors will result in something transformational. That through the sharing of experiences and memories tied to the natural world, there will be greater understanding and awareness of ourselves, each other, and “extrahuman worlds” (Jackson, 1998, p. 6). Central then to their role in the park is creating intersubjective conditions that beget awareness, that make understanding between people and between people and place possible.

There are important implications for education and schooling nested within these perspectives. Underlying these implications is the question, how do we invoke these early experiences to take root, to form a stable grounding for children as they grow into adults? These implications include the need for early and sustained experiences rooted in a particular place, augmented by engaged and caring guides. Further, that these experiences are most transformative when shared with others and that through the dynamic relationship of people and a place, meaning can be created. This process is evident in the evolution of these naturalists as they reflect on their craft and in the intersubjective concern they have with the generation of memories for others. We are dependent upon one another in this process, bound up in individual and collective experiences, memories, and meaning. These assertions beg the

question whether our various educational settings take note of these dynamics and if they are capable of making these kinds of connections.

What is the lesson in all this? One lesson is for education writ large and it is this. Early experiences help create future environmental leaders and educators. These experiences should include unstructured exploration but also need to be tended to and nurtured by a guide. We need to be able to share these experiences with others, thus there is an inherent social dimension to this, both in the experiencing and in the sharing of memories. Providing early and sustained experiences and fostering affective memories account for meaningful engagement for children and adults. Yet, we must allow time for this to transpire, allowing for relationships to kindle and for meaning to grow. This is not some flash in the pan curriculum, but lessons learned over many engagements, many years of patient care. These naturalists told stories of their lives spent outside over the course of years, sometimes decades and ultimately theirs is a model of relating to place that is unique among educators.

Not only that, but consistently there was a deep and abiding concern for weaving their own experiences with those of other people. Making their own affective memories applicable to those of their visitors highlights the intersubjective nature of their work. Naturalists consistently correlated their own memories and experiences with those of others and sought engagement through the natural world, providing the space of intersubjectivity within the park. Modeling deep connections between people and place and even between people seems contrary to much within educative and/or schooling environments. Locating their own affective memories as instrumental within this intersubjective framework exemplifies the nature of this counter position. Taken together, this group of naturalists offer an example of memories not locked away, but actualized through practice, embodied through engagement, and *re-membered* through intersubjective sensibility. And, from their unique perspective this awareness ultimately testifies to the intrinsic need for communities to foster, sustain, and share memories rooted in experience.

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