

**LEARNING, LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, AND PLACE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON EDUCATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY BEFORE THE ADVENT OF COMPULSORY
SCHOOLING IN TIBET**

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Abstract

This study explores the precolonial cultural and historical context of children's ways of learning before the advent of compulsory schooling in Tibet by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the 1950s. The study focuses on local people's lived experience shared in their voices. In listening to their situated learning experiences of childhood, we collectively learn from the elders' wisdom. The research seeks to advance knowledge about unique aspects of Tibetan cultural heritage in order to raise educational awareness about children's ways of natural learning. Study findings show that these ways were place-based cultural practices that led local children to experience existential happiness during childhood and ontological freedom as their self-subsistence. Such learning experiences will help all educators concerned with sustainability to understand how children (ages 5–14) have learned without schooling in the rural Utsang and Kham in Tibet, and why these personal experiences of sustainable childhood are important for them. In a broader perspective, the study is fully aligned with the Dalai Lama's intention and the Tibet Oral History Project's mission to sustain and preserve the cultural heritage of Tibetan people.

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Dedication

Dedicated to the self-determination, independence, and freedom of Tibetan people and their Land of Tibet.

“The world is doing nothing but just watching. If it wants to, the world can help. The world can say, ‘[The Tibetans] should be given independence’” (Jampa Thinlay, 2012, p. 11).

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Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

“It is unacceptable that many formal education systems around the world contribute to the erosion of indigenous languages, knowledge, and ways of life” ~ Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2012, p. X).



Figure 1.1. Tingri, Utsang. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York, 1928. Archive #405266.

This dissertation is situated in the historical precolonial Tibet (1925–1959), mainly in rural Utsang and Kham. I have chosen this site because my previous research expedition took place in the Tibetan Himalayan communities in 2003 and 2008 (Shugurova, 2009). Since then, I have been inspired by the sincerity of the Tibetan people and the arts-based cultural heritage of Tibetan Buddhism (Shugurova, 2014). The ancient legends of Tibet describe the physical and

cultural land of the Himalayas as “the places of mind perfection” (Snellgrove, 1989, p. 201). The legends also say that people of all cultural backgrounds should learn from these places because the Buddha and deities live there (Roerich, 1929/2004). Many local people believe that the Himalayan mountains are the sacred abodes which also act as the teachers and guardians of the collective well-being (Devkota, 2013; Shugurova, 2015a). This research is an arts-based way of learning from the Tibetan people and their beautiful cultural and historical places of learning with the Himalayas. In so doing, I hope to contribute to the advancement of knowledge about the unique Tibetan cultural heritage that may raise an educational awareness about the local children’s ways of learning and their place-based sustainability.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe and explore the local children’s learning experiences in rural Tibet prior to the advent of the colonial, compulsory schooling by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the 1950s (Zhou, 2002). With the advent of schooling in the 1950s, the local educational practices have been marginalized by the dominant national policies of schooling that were focused on the mass assimilation of the Tibetan children into the communist ideology of modernization (Kolas, 2003; MacPherson & Beckett, 2008). The discourse of the Chinese Communist ideological development and modernization (Chapter 2) defined the local people as “primitive, dependent, and ignorant [minorities]” (Lin, 1997, p. 194). According to this discourse, “Minority peoples are less modern (*xiandaide*) than Han Chinese, that they are (or should be) grateful for Han help in becoming modern, and that modernisation is both desirable and unavoidable in order to become advanced (*fada*) [emphasis in original]” (Shepherd, 2006, p. 250). Compulsory schooling is one of the sites of the ideological modernization that “functions as a way to categorize people” (Dolma, 2014, p. 113). The

colonization has resulted in the deaths of more than 1.2 million Tibetan people between 1959–1970s (Choesang, 2014; Cooper, 2009; Dalai Lama XIV, 1996; Rutman, 2006), and more than 80,000 Tibetans became refugees by 1960 (Powers & Templeman, 2012). Klieger (2007) found that approximately 87,000 Tibetan people were killed by the CPC’s army in the period of 1959–1960. Lopez (1993) found that “between 1959–1979, one million Tibetans died as a result of execution, imprisonment, and starvation [by the CPC]” (p. 70). Consequently, the Tibetan communities have experienced the loss of environmental balance, local knowledge, and the appearance of socioecological disasters (e.g., desertification, famine, soil erosion, landslides, and earthquakes; Buckley, 2014). In fact, many Tibetan people believe that natural disasters are really unnatural because they have been caused by the systemic violence against the local people and the destruction of the sacred places in the mountains (Buckley, 2014; Devkota, 2013). The role of compulsory schooling in this process of ecological and cultural destruction remains understudied (Black, 2010; Buckley, 2014; Norberg-Hodge, 2000).

In this research, I describe and explore the historical (precolonial) context of children’s learning experiences before the advent of compulsory and colonial schools in the 1950s. In doing so, I focus on the exact words and voices of the local people who have learned without schools and lived through the colonial changes of the 1950s. I believe that these experiences will teach all educators concerned with sustainability about the cultural and historical significance of children’s ways of learning with a focus on children’s agency, independence of consciousness, and sense of childhood place. These concepts have been embodied in the local ways of learning as being associated with the mountains and their local knowledge of place (e.g., the Buddha dharma; Shugurova, 2009, 2014, 2015a).

Further, the precolonial context of children’s learning experiences and child-rearing

practices in the local voices is not widely studied and researched in the literature, including educational and sustainability studies (Brown, Farwell, & Nyerongsha, 1997; Mackerras, 1999; Postiglione, 1999; Sasson, 2013). The local people's views on and experiences with the imposed schooling regimes in the 1950s are not widely acknowledged in educational discourses worldwide (Shugurova, 2015a). I hope that my research will contribute to the overall preservation of the cultural-historical heritage of the Tibetan people.

According to the local knowledge systems, children usually follow and create their own pathways of natural learning without any specific instructions and schooling (David-Neel, 1929/1971; Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994; Norbu & Turnbull, 1968; Roerich, 1929/1990). It does not, however, mean that the people of Tibet haven't had any educational system. In fact, they have had various homeschools, urban administrative schools, and monastic schooling (Bass, 1998). Yet these schools were not designed in the social context of compulsion and enforcement. The local children had a choice to attend these schools or not to attend them (Yeshe Tinlay, 2013). Parents usually trusted their children and respected their choices and freedom (Kunsang & Deno, 2013).

The Buddhist term "natural learning" may be defined as "the most unrestricted way of learning, with tolerance and patience, without any sectarianism" (Roerich, 1967, p. 191). This pathway is considered as the continuity and the embodiment of *lam gui od gsal* or *the clear light of the path* (Reynolds, 1996; Tucci, 2012). According to Reynolds (1996), the clear light of the path is "the natural mode of being, the way in which thoughts exist naturally" (p. 96). Before the advent of compulsory national schooling, many rural children had been learning naturally (Chapter 4). As an artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/tographer), I am also a learner from the Tibetan elders about their childhood learning experiences that have sustained their

communities for thousands of years.

Specifically, I focus on the historical experiences of natural learning in the context of everyday life and local, predominantly Buddhist knowledge (Shugurova, 2014, 2015a). In so doing, I have engaged a *culture lens* (Mulà & Tilbury, 2009) that helped me to learn from the unique situated local experience. Within the situated intercultural approach, I never positioned myself as an objective and detached writer and researcher. The situated place cannot be understood and conceptualized outside of the lived contexts of local meanings and historical experience. Haraway (1988) explains that the situated connection creates responsibilities and emergent understandings that are “potent for constructing worlds less organized by the axis of domination” (p. 585). Ultimately, the situated approach has helped me to render the historical experiences as my (inter)cultural synthesis (Freire, 1968/1973a) that may be described in the following words:

The actors [I] who come from “another world” to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They [I] do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to give [emphasis in original], but rather to learn, with the people, about the people’s world. (p.181)

Even though I didn’t physically come to the precolonial world of the people, I conceptually position myself and situate the research within the people’s hope for their cultural self-determination. Hence, this research is not meant to be a transmission of lessons but a reflective learning journey through time and space. The journey is the a/r/tographic cultural synthesis that has allowed me to attend to the historical places of learning through my creative reflections, interpretations, and contemplations in art, poetry, and prose. These historical places are situated in the photo-archives of the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York and the pre-existing oral histories of the Tibet Oral History Project. My a/r/tography is, therefore, a

contribution to the collective struggle against colonization and oppression as well as to a cultural lens of educational sustainability worldwide. In this lens, I approach the archival voices and oral histories as the historical forces that help me to think *with* the people and, in so doing, to learn from them, despite our actual separation in time and place. My a/r/tography offers an unfolding perspective that resists the colonization and compulsion in education as well as searches for alternative ways of learning in the cultural context of educational sustainability with a focus on children's well-being (i.e., happiness). In this view, my vision is inspired by the people's lives and their stories that unfold in-between the archives and these pages, from heart to heart. Harjo (1989), in her book *Secrets from the Center of the World*, wrote,

In a misty dawn at the center of the world is the morning star, tending cattle at the other side of this fence. Several years away you can see smoke from a hogan where an old man is cooking breakfast. He has already been outside to pray, recognized the morning star and his relationship to it, as he stands at the center of miracles. (p. 14)

This vision of the morning star and the elder has led me through the a/r/tographic journey in visionary awe and wonder, as well as in the recognition of my relationship with the past, present, and future miracles. Hence, I approach this a/r/tography as a sacred process with respect to the people, whose stories I poetically and visually render in my interpretive learning arts-based journey to the rural world of Tibetan childhood experiences. Because of the sacredness of the process, I conclude each chapter with a poetic thought and the Tibetan mantra of unconditional love and compassion for all sentient beings, peoples, places, spirits, and the world. This mantra is also the mantra of the Dalai Lama and "the national mantra of Tibet" (Surya Das, 1997, p. 220). It is said as OM MANI PADME HUM.



Figure 1.2. Sacred mantras. May 1928. Kanchenjunga region of Tibet. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York Archive #405288.

Defining Key Terms

The term “culture lens” is a part of the international framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that analyzes the importance of cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge in all educational practices and discourses of sustainability (Mulà & Tilbury, 2009; UNESCO, 2005, 2008). Mulà and Tilbury (2009) define the culture lens as “the inclusion of alternative perspectives and new connections [that] gives access to traditional wisdom and forms of knowledge important to challenging unsustainability” (p. 1). In this view, my research has the potential to help all local and global educators concerned with sustainability to learn from the local communities of Tibet and their historical learning

experiences. I define these two groups of educators in the fluid terms that have multiple and interdependent meanings that are mainly geared towards the pre-service teachers in Canada (i.e., teacher candidates). I speak to them because I currently teach teacher candidates (i.e., pre-service teachers) at a provincial university in Canada (Shugurova, 2016).

The local educators may also include the general public of Tibet. The global teachers are the educators with an interest in and awareness of a global intercultural pedagogy for sustainability that is also known as Global Educational Citizenship (GEC) or/and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)/Sustainable Education (Carr, Pluim, & Howard, 2014; Ellis, 2015; Mulà & Tilbury, 2009; Mundi & Manion, 2008; Schugurensky, 2010; Sterling, 2010; UNESCO, 2017). Mundi and Manion (2008) found that many Canadian teachers and provincial ministries were interested in developing a global curriculum and diverse culturally responsive pedagogies in their classrooms, schools, and communities. The meaning of global in these discourses encompasses teachers' awareness of diverse ideas about sustainability (i.e., mainly centred on cultural subsistence), intercultural solidarity (i.e., understanding the struggle for self-determination of indigenous peoples), and social justice (i.e., understanding the rights of children and their families for cultural agency and voice in education) across the national boundaries (Ellis, 2015; Mundi & Manion, 2008; Smith, 2012). The awareness of global interdependency allows educators to conceptualize their teaching practices and educational ideas in the historical context of cultural synthesis with diverse indigenous communities (Freire, 1968/1973a). The cultural synthesis *gives voices* (Patton, 2002) to the local people who have not historically been heard and acknowledged in the formal academic discourses of educational sustainability (Shugurova, 2015a; Wals, 2012).

The concept of “voice” is contested because of my historical focus on the visual photographic archives and oral histories. Janesick (2010) defined oral history as “the collection of stories and reminiscences of a person or persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences” (p. 2). In this view, giving voice is about a creative, that is to say, an emotional way of listening to and for these storied experiences. To me, the concept of voice is about an embodied emotion and expression of people’s lived experience. The historical voices are the recorded and transcribed personal and collective conversational stories. I listen to them, I write with them, and I create art with them. In writing, the archival voices come alive in a hybrid dialogue between the texts/audio and myself through the generative themes, participant-voiced found poems (Leavy, 2015; Prendergast, 2009), interpretive/generated poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Richardson, 2000), and my artistic impressionist engagement with their situated contexts. These voices are digital and dialogic because they have been stored and storied in the oral histories and in the documentary photographs. The digital voices of the oral histories are “aural (it’s also visual and video interviews), it’s people speaking and their faces and their voices; it’s tremendously engaging” (Thomson, as cited in Trower, 2011, p. 9). To me, their voices are poetic because the people have descriptively and emotionally spoken about their childhood in the precolonial Tibet.

Sameshima (2006) also found that “poetry dwells in acoustic [aural] spaces because it performs even when unspoken. Words are mindfully selected to stand for and to perform for the unwritten. Poetry draws different pictures for each reader” (p. 53). Poetry emerges and dwells in the archives and oral histories as the silent witnesses to our engagement with the histories within the self and with others. The very notion of a historical memory is a poetic encounter with the subtle meanings and unknown experiences; this poetics includes “metaphorical, figurative,

poetical, connotative, even ludic—as well as diverse visual representations” through which research becomes a living process of meaning making engagements, rather than a purposeful search for objective answers to one’s research questions (Pardinas & Martinez, 2013, p. 18). In this context, I have approached the oral history voices as the *heteroglossia* that is the social “diversity of speech types [*raznorechie* = literally: “differing speech” = heteroglossia] [emphasis in original]” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 262-263). The heteroglossia is about the inclusion of cultural differences and diversities in people’s exact words and utterances that allows me to understand better the interviewees’ unique points of view with respect and care for their individual and collective expressional complexities. Bakhtin (1981) wrote,

Specific points of view of the world, forms of conceptualizing the world in words, specific worldviews, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another and be interrelated dialogically. (pp. 291-292)

With the help of the heteroglossia, I have attempted to critically learn from the historical views without silencing and appropriating their cultural meanings. Through this learning process, I have been transformed by the interviewees’ stories. The historical meanings poetically resonated within me, and I rendered their local knowledge through the participant-voiced poetics and thick descriptions (Janesick, 2010; Leavy, 2015). I have written poems on the basis of the generative themes that I found in the individual and collective contexts of the oral histories with a particular attention to the voices (e.g., words and utterances, emotional pauses, and expressions) of the narrators (Chapter 4). The thick descriptions are a/r/tographic because they are focused not on ethnography (i.e., “writing culture”), but on my subjective impressions of the oral histories (Leavy, 2013). These thick descriptions follow the dialogic voices and represent the

historical scenes through the *living inquiry* (Irwin, 2004; Irwin et al., 2006) of visual art, poetry, and expository prose (Chapter 4). According to Irwin et al. (2006), “A/r/tography is a living inquiry of unfolding artforms and text that intentionally unsettles perception and complicates understandings through its rhizomatic relationality” (p. 79). I have learned through my engaged unfolding artforms and poetic texts that have emerged from within the oral histories and archives.

In this way, the research process of giving voices to the people’s historical experiences is an ethical context of my research epistemology (a way of knowing), ontology (a way of being), axiology (my situated values), and methodology (a creative way of knowledge production) (Hart, 2010; Shugurova, 2015a). I define my culturally responsive epistemology as a critical dialectic (Freire, 1968/1973a, 2000/2004) process of “de-centering [myself] as an expert” (Briggs & Sharp, 2004, p. 5). The dialectic approach is rooted in understanding the historical realities of people’s experiences in their exact words, meanings, and conversational contexts (Freire, 1968/1973a). Hence, I problematize the concept of “experience” and challenge its premises of common sense and essentialism. All human experiences are characterized by diverse cultural processes and social relationships that can only be analyzed in the historical flux of subjective meanings (Gadotti, 1996). Further, the concept of experience has always a subjective meaning that should be defined by the people whose experience is at the centre of an educational inquiry (Freire, 1998). I, therefore, rely on the interviewees’ own definitions of their experiences and render them with respect to their subjective expressions.

For Freire (1968/1973a), a subjective consciousness is not a primary agent of the objective cultural reality. He wrote that “consciousness and the world cannot be understood separately, in a dichotomized fashion, but rather must be seen in their contradictory [dialectic]

relations” (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 19). I have, therefore, rendered my impressions of the participants’ worlds with attention to their lived places of meanings and historical experiences (Chapter 4). These renderings are the living inquiries of the dialectic relations between prose and poetry, whereby poetry is a heightened memorable (i.e., inspirational and transformational) experience with word/silence; and prose is an ordinary everyday speech (Mohaghegh, 2013). The dialectical epistemology (Freire, 1968/1973a) has informed my critical ontology/axiology (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) in allowing me to include different voices in their diverse historical contexts of expressions and situated meanings through both prose and poetry. The inclusion of the poetic text and artistic images has created an ethical space for my renderings. The ethical space is neither monocultural nor discursive; it is situated in my impressionist interpretations and personal reflections. This ethical space “encourages thirdness, an in-between space that exists between and among categories” (Irwin, 2004, p. 28). My findings have emerged within these third spaces of the historical representations.

My critical self-reflexive and relational positionality has allowed me to understand the local people’s voices in the cultural complexity of their dialogues in the dynamic context and interplay of their memorable personal and collective experience. Further, I situate my foundational key terms of “learning,” “place,” and “educational sustainability” within these dialogic contexts of the heteroglossia and my emergent critical paradigm. Lather (1986) refers to this process as a *systematized reflexivity* that is embedded in the generative interpretations and new intercultural understandings. Specifically, reflexivity means “a process of reflecting critically on the self as the researcher” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 124). For example, Walker Morris (2013) found that her reflexivity is directly connected with her participants’ stories. In fact, her reflexive research encounters were inspirational and transformational because

they had awakened her authentic voice of compassion, empathy, and respect; she could “unsilence [her] voice” (p. 57). My reflexivity is also a relational process that is embodied within my situated awareness of the self (Bickel et al., 2011; Irwin & Springgay, 2008). The systematized reflexivity has enabled me to conduct my research in a culturally responsive manner and recognize that my poetic and visual experiences affect and, in fact, define my researcher’s role, positionality, and research representations.

It is, therefore, important to define the concept of historical perspective and my idea of time within it because the notion of time may be seen as a generalized term that has multiple definitions (Bakhtin, 1981; Bergson, 1946/2007; Deleuze, 1968/1994; Freire, 1968/1973a; Heidegger, 1953/2010; Latta, 2014). The concept of time cannot be separated from the context of history (Freire, 1968/1973a). It is, however, difficult to define the meaning of history without generalizations. I agree with Latta (2014) that history is a sacred process. I have, therefore, conceptualized the elusive and sacred sense of history as a dialogic event that has allowed me to listen to the voices of the people and to render them within the textual, artistic, and intertextual (i.e., the passages in-between) spaces of this living inquiry.

Throughout the dissertation, I engage the cultural and historical lens on educational sustainability with an explicit aim to give voices to the situated livelihood and to illuminate some of the subjective examples of the lived experiences (e.g., memorable activities, processes, practices, and creative expressions) of learning. I define time not as a linear chronology of events (Heidegger, 1953/2010) and the duration of history (Bergson, 1946/2007) but as the embodied and affective experience of being in the present moment (Deleuze, 1968/1994). Hence, the historical perspective is shaped by the living time of one’s subjective awareness and relationship that folds and unfolds, flows and stands still throughout this living inquiry *in-between* the readers

and the poetics of image/word. Sameshima (2006) wrote, “In reading the poem, the reader becomes complicitly knitted into the unfolding segments, assembling them from the particular and separate to the general and whole. The reader is invited to become the interlocutor” (p. 52). I hope that the poetic context of time will help the readers to connect with the people’s experiences in their historical dialogues with us in the present.

According to Freire (1968/1973a), a historical dialogue may be seen as the critical pedagogy of solidarity that demystifies and unveils the historical marginalization and bears a possibility of transformation toward the intercultural synthesis. In this view, I don’t consider myself as the liberator or “the proprietor of history. . . but [I] commit [myself], within history, to fight at their [the silenced] side” (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 24). I hope that my readers will also be able to enter this shared historical moment of situated present and witness its lived realities in order to share the people’s hope for a better future and a better world for all us in the present. As Tadeu de Silva and McLaren (1993) eloquently express,

It is a hope of passionate remembrances, of finding a common ground of struggle rather than a common culture, of new spaces of possibility rather than the arenas of despair and manufactured doubt. It is a hope that is fundamentally Freirean. (p. 79)

The historical perspective is fundamentally Freirean because it is rooted in the embodied experiences of the past and the people’s hopes for a different history. Hence, my a/r/tography manifests the radical hope in the context of educational sustainability.

Therefore, the purpose of the research is three-fold: to give voices to the local people and to learn about learning without schooling and the local educational sustainability of childhood place. I perceive my research as a contribution to the advancement of knowledge about the Tibetan cultural heritage that will raise teachers’ (i.e., Tibetan, Canadian, and all other interested

pre-service teachers) awareness of children's ways of natural learning and sustainability. I believe that non-Western learning practices will help educators, concerned with sustainability, and the general public to understand how children (ages 5–14) used to learn naturally without schooling and why these cultural experiences of sustainable (i.e., place-based) childhood are important for them and for their communities (Shugurova, 2009, 2014, 2015a, 2015b).

Research Questions

1. How had the local Tibetan children been learning before the colonial and compulsory schooling was introduced in the 1950s?
2. What were the Tibetan children's ways of learning?
3. How has learning changed with the introduction of compulsory schools in Tibet? What might we as educators learn from these unique historical contexts about learning, local knowledge, and place? (Shugurova, 2015a, p. 4)

The questions have emerged from the generative themes that I have found in the oral histories and visual archives. Freire (1968/1973a) found that the generative themes were “the thought–language with which women and men refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive the reality, and their view of the world” (p. 97). With the help of the emergent generative themes, I have been able to connect better with the multilingual local meanings and unknown cultural experiences. When I listened to the local people's experiences in their own words and expressions, I could reflect better on my previous historical knowledge and assumptions (about learning) as well as to render their stories without generalizations and simplifications of their situated meanings. According to Nevin (2013), “When all of us meet in that cultural and relational third space, we are learning and engaging in a discourse that reflects a more culturally responsive inclusion” (p. 57). The generative themes have, therefore, helped me to create an

inclusive ethical space of engagement where diverse experiences and unique cultural differences can be heard and acknowledged with respect and care for their historical significance (Shugurova, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). The historical significance is a subtle process that emerges within a complex interplay of social relations and individual experiences. Hence, the historical significance cannot be known with certainty (McLaren, 2000, p. 154).

Grounding, centering,
 questions emerge through
 being in a prism of times
 living with, lived, growing
 in wonder of self–world “poesis”
 making a stance, place, time
 in a different lens,
 in dance, meanings, rhythm
 in rivers, in feelings
 paths, on palms
 in places, in schools, beyond real.
 (Shugurova, 2014, p. 19)

*

What do my questions seek
 Uncover, reveal, transform, heal
 read, mean solve
 if anything but a world
 in need in heart in All.

(Shugurova, 2014, pp. 12-13)

Research Thesis

The study shows that children's ways of learning were place-based cultural practices, including gender equal games, physical activities, intergenerational dialogic learning, and learning through the popular local knowledge that have led young children to experience their existential happiness in childhood, and ontological freedom as their self-subsistence. Children's ways of natural learning had formed, and had been formed by, their household self-subsistence (i.e., self-sufficiency) that was the context and process of their place-conscious educational sustainability. In this lens, I invite the reader to learn from the poetic and artistic archival renderings of the oral histories about the importance of children's agency in creating, embodying, and performing their highly complex self-learning cultural practices and, in so doing, creating their childhood places of educational sustainability as their existential happiness and ontological freedom.

Research Paradigm

I situate my research in a critical paradigm (Freire, 1968/1973a, 1973b, 2000/2004) because I aim to learn from the local people and follow their situated stories and dialogues. Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) define the concept of paradigm as "a constellation of theories, questions, methods, and procedures that share central values and themes" (p. 12). A critical paradigm allows me to question my naturalized assumptions about learning and to give voices to the people (Freire, 1968/1973a; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). For Kincheloe and McLaren (2008), a critical theory paradigm doesn't have specific definitions because there is always room for multiple interpretations and, even, disagreements. In fact, this paradigm is purposefully designed "to avoid the production of blueprints" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 303).

Freire (1968/1973a) notes the importance of a critical paradigm in educational research because the researcher and her/his participants begin to “participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation” (p. 120). The subjectivist epistemology of the critical paradigm involves my (as researcher) reflexive awareness of my situated values during all research stages (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The subjectivist epistemology shapes my culturally responsive context (Shugurova, 2015a). Berryman, SooHoo, and Nevin (2013) found that in a culturally responsive research

not only is epistemological clarity important in understanding how others view the world and social phenomenon, but it is also essential that researchers be clear about their own epistemology and ability to see beyond their own limited understanding of knowledge production. (p. 3)

The critical reflexive awareness has helped me to learn from the people and to acknowledge their historical struggles. This situated awareness of the past and the present historical experiences has emerged from within my attentive listening to the voices of the self and of others. Thus, the critical paradigm has helped me to describe and explore how a particular knowledge about learning “grows and changes through a dialectical process of historical revision that continuously erodes ignorance and misapprehensions and enlarges more informed insights” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). My dialectic is a knowledge-sharing process about the historical lived experience, in which the “historical past and the moment of the present . . . both work upon and produce each other” (Carney, 2005, p. 850). Freire (1985) thought that a dialectic historical context emerges when researchers, educators, and cultural workers let “the real world of the *asentamiento* [emphasis in original] function as mediator” (p. 33). Within my dialectical paradigm, I have tried to learn from the historical past, reflect on my epistemology, and create

respectful understandings with the people's histories (Berryman et al., 2013). In so doing, I have also tried to create a space for the real world as the mediator through art and poetry.

My critical epistemology is subjectivist because I focus on the significance of “the lived [subjective] experiences of people in the contexts in which they live” (Egbert & Sanden, 2014, p. 34). Freire (1968/1973a) emphasizes the axiological importance of the lived context as a respectful place of engaged understanding of the self and the other. The lived experience is always situated in a culturally specific context that “is the primary and inescapable face of the world itself” (Freire, 1992/1994, p. 76). Hence, my epistemology (knowing), ontology (being), and axiology (beliefs/values) are interconnected. My ontology is being shaped by the subjective cultural and historical experiences and contexts that have “crystallized over time” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 98). I also perceive all forms of knowledge as mediated by the individual and collective values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My axiology is a reflective awareness of my own values and cultural lens in the context of learning (Shugurova, 2015a).

Brief Overview of Theoretical Approaches

With the help of my paradigm, I draw on two theoretical perspectives of unschooling and critical pedagogy of place. Unschooling reflects the local concept of natural learning that should neither be controlled nor regulated by adults (Holt, 1972, 1983; Holt & Farenga, 1981; Ricci, 2012; Ricci & Pritscher, 2015; Roerich, 1929/2004; Shugurova, 2015a; Trungpa, 2004). I also agree with the scholars who define the Tibetan historical learning practices as shaped by the local knowledge of place (Bishop, 1989; Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994; Roerich, 1929/2004; Shugurova, 2009). For example, Bishop (1989) found that the trans-Himalayan Tibetan places have historically been perceived as the cultural realms of the Great Buddha Nature. The sense of sacred inhabitation and cultural belonging permeates diverse lived

contexts of children's learning experiences (Roerich, 1929/2004). Hence, I engage critical pedagogy of place because its theoretical lenses help me to situate myself in the midst of the cultural learning places of the Himalayas and to connect with the local historical experiences and meanings (Bishop, 1989; Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; MacKenzie, 2008; Ruitenberg, 2005; Smith, 2012).



Figure 1.3. Tsang-Po, the Brahmaputra River. Tibet. April 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York, Archive #405256.

Methodology: An Overview

I engage a/r/tography because it helps me to learn from the oral history narrators about their learning experiences and to ethically render their voices within this textual space. Many scholars describe Tibetan culture as being embodied in diverse artistic practices, such as the Buddhist spiritual performances, drawings, paintings, textile, and poetry (Klein, 2001; Roerich,

1924/2004; Singh, 1985). Hence, I have chosen a/r/tography as my culturally responsive methodology (Bickel et al., 2011; Irwin, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sameshima et al., 2009).

A/r/tography is a complex arts-based methodology of embodied and situated knowledge that cannot be separated from one's personal experiences, histories, memories, and ways of being with and in the world (Chalmers, 2004; Irwin, 2004, 2010; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Perhaps, there is no one definition of a/r/tography as the term has a complex and multidimensional terrain of subjective meanings and experiences (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). To me, a/r/tography signifies "an arts-based research methodology [that] emphasizes the process (praxis) through which practitioners draw upon their Artist, Researcher, and Teacher identities to artistically engage (poesis) in research and (re)questioning their understanding (theoria)" (Lea, Belliveau, Wager, & Becker, 2011, p. 2). The arts and graphy are not positioned as the separate entities but as the dialectical processes of knowing with(in) the art/graphy, self/other, and time/space. According to Irwin (2004), "A dialectical perspective views categories of thought as being in equal relationship to one another, thereby allowing the inherent concepts to vibrate constantly with active energy" (p. 28). These interwoven vibrations invite the reader to become an engaged participant in these unfolding spaces of poetics and visual art. The a/r/tographic space of this dissertation is alive and living with the vibrations and energy of the archival imagery, found poems, and impressionist art.

Furthermore, I had been drawing on my identity as an artist to expand my reflexive and reflective understanding beyond the rational, multilingual, and conceptual understanding. In so doing, I have rendered my poetic reflections and painted the local historical scenes of learning with the help of the visual archive. Prosser (2013) also found that visuals are "not about an image or object in of itself but more concerned with the perception and the meanings attributed to them" (p. 223). The visuals have allowed me to represent the historical learning places and to

connect with the past. With my paintings, I hope to demonstrate my respect for the arts-based Tibetan cultural heritage and sustain the artful authenticity within the research process (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bresler, 2006; Leavy, 2015).

As a researcher, I wrote thick descriptions, analyzed interviews, rendered visual imagery, delved into the archives, consulted the literature, and expressed my reflective impressions with poetry and paintings throughout my research praxis. This poesis has become a meeting space of art (painting, photography) and graphy (poetry, conversation, text), time and place that embodies the ethic of my a/r/tography. Throughout the dissertation, I have engaged my theorica in a constant act of reflexive questioning of the taken for granted assumptions about learning. To me, reflexivity is about transparency of my self-awareness and reflection throughout the research process that has helped me to understand how my poetic sense of self is critically and creatively embodied in this process. This reflexive approach helps me to make my theoretical/methodological assumptions explicit, as well as to record my decisions of what/why I chose to include or exclude from the research. With the help of generative poetics (including the poetics of the visual art), I have systematically reflected on my subjective epistemology and remained conscious of new understandings and unknown situated meanings (Peshkin, 1988; Richardson, 1992; Shugurova, 2014, 2015a). In so doing, I have developed an ethical space of my respect and care for the individual and collective oral histories and archives.

My Role as the Researcher

My role as a researcher is dynamic and multi-faceted. I have maintained constant reflexivity with the help of my poetic journal and detailed reflections (Walsh & Bai, 2015). To me, reflexivity has been an embodied writing process through which I was able to interrogate my sense of self and my subjective understanding, interpretation, and representation of the unknown to me experiences and cultural contexts. Reflexivity is expressed through my *presence* in the

research process as an artist, researcher, and teacher (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014).

Knowles and Cole (2008) defined arts-based reflexivity as a transformational process through which the researcher/artist may transform herself through the medium of research and art. To me, these transformations have been impressionistic and affectional. Specifically, I have realized that poetry lives in the oral histories and archives. The oral history utterances appear as the poetic moments of personal connections that weave multiple languages and sound, speech and silence together in the act of understanding. Tedlock (1975) also found

relatively casual

conversational narratives

which are the more ORDINARY business of the oral historian

are THEMSELVES highly poetical

and cannot be properly understood from prose transcripts.

the MEANING of SPOKEN narrative

is not only carried by the sheer words as transcribed by alphabetic writing

but by the placement of SILENCES

by TONES of VOICE

by whispers and SHOUT. (p. 712)

When I listen *for* this poetics, I feel *for* the people and their testimonies. I feel like my connection with them grows through and in these impressions and expressions. My impressionist approach is affectional because I have fully immersed myself in the poetics of oral histories with an aim to render them through the found and interpretive poetic of the visual art (Chapter 4). The affectional engagement has also been my ethical standpoint that allowed me to pause, observe, and attend to the beauty of the moment. This is the profound Buddhist practice that is called

mindfulness (Bai & Scutt, 2009; Nhat Hanh, 2009). Nhat Hanh (2009) explained that “we generate the energy of mindfulness to illuminate everything that is happening in the present moment” (p. 2). I have written all of the poems from within these affective and impressionist moments of mindfulness.

I have discovered myself through these reflexive moments of presence. Lincoln et al. (2011) found that one’s reflexive writing is “a process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes of the problem itself) and discovery of the self” (p. 124). I have discovered the historical lessons of the people that are about education, sustainability, and the global Buddhist compassion. In so doing, I have learned about myself as an individual in the historical relationships with others who are known and unknown to me. I felt myself composed by the ordinary poetics of my everyday life and its prosaic memories. Likewise, Bickel (2007) wrote that “my body does hold the memory of the places/spaces I have been in” (p. 211). These reflexive places are the mirrors of times that have given me a new awareness of the self as the embodiment of histories and situated knowledge. The mirrors of times are the process of writing in learning from the poetics of found meanings as the vital and novel understandings unfold in space, and fold in colour on canvas.

Marcus and Fischer (1986) found that reflexive representations often develop into the messy texts. The messy reflections and expressions are like the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) through which I have given voice (or rather attempted to give voice) not only to the participants and to myself, but also to the Tibetan land. I have tried to find this voice in the land by “quieting of the discursive mind” (Bai, as cited in Barrett, 2011, p. 127). I have done so through my paintings and poetics with an intent to create an ethical space where these liminal experiences can be acknowledged and celebrated in and through the research act. Irwin (2007) emphasized

that a/r/tography dwells within and emerges out of the liminal borderlands between one's sense of self as an artist, researcher, and teacher. She wrote, "The arts offer practices that are inherently liminal because they highlight taken for granted experiences or conversely, make strange experiences seem familiar" (pp. 1402-1403). The feeling of estrangement has accompanied my research journey because I remained an outsider to that historical time and space. Yet I am a learner and a teacher. Greene (1973) wrote that a teacher is a stranger because she is always in search of herself; and the very process of knowing begins with a feeling of strangeness. Paradoxically, estrangement leads to the construction of knowledge as the pursuit of freedom (Greene, 1988). As a teacher, I construct my courses within the context of freedom, or rather, in the search of freedom in and through education. The Tibetan historical experiences have given me a possibility of learning (and, therefore, teaching) about freedom as the ontological context of knowing (Chapter 4).

Through these passages of estrangement, I have felt troubled by the problem of *giving voice* to others and voicing different histories. Huss and Cwikel (2005) found that giving voice in an arts-based research is a challenge because of its dynamic context of multiple interpretations that involve the researcher's emotional and cognitive involvement with the historical voices. Some of these voices speak through the silence of archives and sound of oral history audio recordings (i.e., digital voices). The silence of the past is transformative, inspirational, and critical; it has moved me to tears and poems. I have meditated on the digital voices and portrayed them in paintings. In so doing, I have sought to render the complex experiences and unique expressions with hope to invoke further reflections and to promote dialogue among educators, interested in the issues of sustainability across time and space.

During my meditations, I have become self-conscious of my *white identity* not only as an artist, researcher, and teacher, but also as a Canadian, Jewish, Eastern European lady. My identity has been shaped by the feeling of estrangement, that is to say my explorations of and with the world. Block (1998) wrote that a Jewish sense of estrangement is neither about the loss nor nostalgia, but about “a condition to be creatively used” (p. 22). I have used my identity as the creative instrument in the research in order to grasp the liminal moments of presence and strangeness for the purposes of developing the poetic and visual representations. The concept of the self as the instrument is prevalent in a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay, 2008). This approach is about my emotional engagement with the data that “opens self to vulnerability of the other” (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 70). The openings are the generative snapshots of interpretations, reflections, and participant-voiced poetics (Chapter 4). The idea of a *textual–visual snapshot* was coined by Leavy and Scotti (2017). These snapshots “are concomitantly raw, sad, visceral, challenging, inspirational, and hopeful” (Leavy & Scotti, 2017, p. 2). The snapshots gather the individual stories with impressionist art, just like the photographs gather various scenes and perspectives into one lens. This lens can be viewed from a multiplicity of perspectives. My lenses have been shaped by my estranged a/r/tographic identity and reshaped by the ongoing engagement with the data snapshots. These shape-shifting processes are creative and, purposefully, raw (similar to my artistic identity).



Figure 1.4. My self-portrait. White chalk on black schoolboard. March 2016.

Can I really give voices to others without “othering” them? I can only learn from the archives and oral histories, as well as remain self-conscious through the quiet poesis of learning. Cary (2004) wrote a poem that also helps me to critically situate my role as the researcher in a broader context of voices and estrangement, self and others. In this context, learning from the oral histories is a reflexive process of remembering and witnessing the historical silenced experience in the present moment.

Remember

It is more than

Local made global or

Global made local

It is more than

‘knowing’ colonialism

And

‘giving voice’ to silenced

subalterns

It is seeing yourself as colonizer colonized.

It is more. (p. 81)

I often wondered what has become of me through these messy field notes and poetic memos that seemed to lead me away from my research questions toward the unknown dimensions of deep meanings and heart-felt experience. Leggo (2016) wrote about himself, “I live my art, and my art lives me. I wear my art, and my art wears me. I am my art. I engage with my art always everywhere. Perhaps I only live as art, as a poem” (pp. 53-54). I often felt that I was fully a part of the poem and its different history. In fact, I felt myself as non-existent outside of the poems and paintings. I have lost my sense of prosaic self and dwelled in these liminal and raw becomings. I saw myself as the *colonizer colonized* in a mirror that hangs in my studio.

Trinh Minh-Ha (1989) wrote, “Yet—I—the—writer do not *express* (a) reality more than (a) reality *impresses* [emphasis in original] itself on me. Expressed me” (p. 18). The reader will find these expressions as my a/r/tographic paradox of transgressions through which I have attempted to uncolonize the reality and its *im/expressions* of/on me. I have tried to regain my attention to the present moment and to focus solely on *how* the archival visual places speak to/through me about the past historical learning experiences.

It is also important to note that my researcher’s role places a sense of limitations onto the research outcomes. In particular, I don’t know the Tibetan language. Hence, I couldn’t fully immerse myself in the local literature that I found in the archives. There is a vast body of the

Tibetan literature, dating back to the 8th century and through the 20th century that is located in the National Archives of Nepal (*Catalogue of Tibetan Manuscripts*, 2011). I was given a local access to study these great sources (e.g., a classical Tibetan poetry book entitled *Rje Bod Mkhas Pa'I Gab Tshig Gi Dpe Brjod Logs Su Bkol Te Bshad Pa Mkhas Dbang Dgongs Rgyan PaN Chen Bla Ma'I Zhal Lung Zhes By aba Bshugs*), yet I could neither translate nor interpret these important masterpieces of the local arts-based literacies and ancient literature. In addition, these sources had to be studied right there in the chemically treated room. I could not physically stay in the archival room due to my health conditions. The chemical treatments made me nauseous. Hence, the outcomes of the research lack a theoretical connection with this local ancient literature and its beautiful masterpieces of poetry. However, I have made a theoretical connection with the translated ancient literature (Chapter 5).

cultures swirl in forgetfulness

grounds, lakes, winds

trees caress the space

of being, reading self

as a landscape of time

as an archive of stillness

where time folds

near the heart

I hear voices, pauses, world

living land answers in touch

in pulse in the body of earth

writing through fingers, veins, winds

these breathing lens of theoria, poesis
learning from other times how it has been
before the colonial rules, schools, minds
before these spaces between
Silence, Others, and I.
(Shugurova, 2014, pp. 3-4)



Figure 1.5. A Tibetan lady on the threshold of her house. 1928. Tibet. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405170.

OM MANI PADME HUM

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

Is hope sufficient for us to feel included, even for happiness?

We seek congeries of childhood images as buttress for un-fulfilled potential,
our sadness filtered through reason
where dream and hope reinstate a future.

~ Wangmo Dampa, Untitled.



Figure 2.1. Near Tsang-Po, Tibet. A mother and her daughter. Inspired by a photo (#405260) in the Nicholas Roerich Museum archive in New York. Mixed media on canvas on board. May 2016.

Situated Cultural Context: Learning Places

Bolin (2006) explored a similar topic (i.e., children's learning experiences in the context of community and without school) in her study of the child-rearing practices in Chilihuani

villages in the Peruvian Andes over the 1988–2004 period. Bolin (2006) wrote “I came to realize that material poverty does not prevent these people from gaining a deeper understanding of the most essential of human existence, such as compassion for other forms of life, including animate and inanimate spirits of nature” (p. 1). The local learning practices are rooted in the culture of respect where all people and beings are treated equally with dignity and care. Bolin (2006) observed that the “children's culture is not separate from that of adults” (p. xi). Children are perceived as equals with adults. Equal participation allows children to become the active agents and co-creators of the collective livelihood because their individual talents and skills are valued and recognized as a unique part of the communal well-being. Specifically, these learning agencies include herding animals while playing, weaving various household objects, and helping their communities alongside adults’ daily work. There is no formal schooling in the villages, yet all children demonstrate their highly advanced comprehension of many school subjects when they choose to participate in the regional school competitions.

Critics (Ennew, 2010; Oliart, 2008) said that Bolin (2006) didn’t engage a broader theoretical analysis of modernity and childhood experience in indigenous societies because she was focused on a thorough development of theoretical support for her romanticized description of the villager’s livelihood. However, Arredondo (2006) noted that Bolin purposefully wanted to avoid the victimization of the local people in the context of modernization and, in so doing, was “careful not to romanticize their existence” (p. 432). Mayer (2008) admired Bolin’s research because of its resonance with and support of Mead’s (1928/2001) research with Samoan adolescence and the portrayal of their smooth cultural transition from childhood to adulthood through the local rituals of respect and without any stress. Yet Arredondo (2006) found that Bolin didn’t position and situate herself as a Western researcher in order to question and

destabilize the dominant oppression of the local people that seems to be disguised under her objectivity. I would like to add that Bolin (2006) presented rather a homogenous account of the local cultural practices with a sense of nostalgia and longing for their way of life. In this way, she has constructed a divide between us (“western” communities) and them (“non-western communities”). I also found that the homogenous narrative depicts the people as being similar to one another in their daily life without a particular acknowledgment of their individual differences and subjectivities. Based on the critical readings of Bolin (2006), I have taken into my account the importance of reflexive positionality and acknowledgement of unique individual differences of the local people.

Likewise, my research focus is on the historical context of children’s learning experiences before the colonization of Tibet in the 1950s and the development of national schooling in the 1950s. I then discuss my theoretical perspectives that have helped me to conduct the study in the culturally responsive framework with respect to the people and their unique experience. In order to understand the significance of the local learning experiences before schooling, it is important to envision their culturally-situated context of local place (Bowers, 2008; Devkota, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003; Roerich, 1929/2004; Shugurova, 2014). Gruenewald (2003) highlights that places are the “centers of experience” (p. 621). Place-based analysis helps me to recognize a “long and culturally varied history” (Bowers, 2008, p. 333) and to analyze the local communities with a sense of connectedness with them (Smith, 2012). Glynn (2013) highlights that culturally responsive researchers should “be engaging with them [the local communities] in their world, in terms of their language, cultural values, aspirations, and preferred ways of thinking and acting” (p. 51). Hence, I analyze the historical background with respect to the local people’s sense of place (i.e., how they speak about their place-based experiences of

childhood) because *it* gives voices to the lived experiences as well as allows me to listen *for* their situated conversations and stories (Cruikshank, 2005) about children's pathways of natural learning.

Many Tibetan places have been shaped by the people's beliefs and experiences that have evolved from the collective intergenerational reverence, spiritual worship, and respect/love of the Divine Himalayan wisdom (Devkota, 2013; Roerich, 1929/1990; Shugurova, 2009). For example, Devkota (2013) found that the local villagers in the Tibetan trans-Himalayas believe that people

should not cut old trees because “ying” stays there which will curse us, “naga” lives in our rivers and water holes, and if we disturb it—there won't be rainfall and will also give us health related problems. We shouldn't disturb big mountains because “chen” lives there and it will also curse us. (p. 33)

Historically, all local learning practices have been connected within the cultural sense of living place (Shugurova, 2009). Casey (1996) defines a concept of the cultural living place as the material/spiritual embodiment of the local knowledge because “to live is to live locally, and to know is, first of all, to know the place one is in” (p. 18). Tibetan cultural places as the local knowledge have formed the ontology of communal learning practices with respect to the sacred mountains of the Buddhas, deities, and spiritual beings (Ramble, 2002). These practices have emerged from the Buddhist teachings of Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal, Atisa, Milarepa in the 8th and 11th centuries and even the pre-Buddhist shamanic knowledge of Bon (Jackson, 1976; Tsogyal, 2004; Tucci, 1967; Wangyal, 2000). Bon's local knowledge sustains a worldview of Great Nature as a living, active, and caring consciousness, in which human beings enact its mysteries in ceremonies, agricultural activities, and rituals (Wangyal, 2000). One of the ancient

local poetic stanzas, entitled *The Lamp That Clarifies the View*, helps to understand this premise.

The first section was translated in the English:

Dzogs pa chen po kun gnaste

rang bzhin ihun rdzogs

chen po nyid

rdzogs pa chen por

ye nas gnas

The Great Perfection abides

(in)everything;

(it is) the great, spontaneously

perfected Nature

(which) exists as Great Perfection

from the origin.

(As cited in Rossi, 1999, p. 45)

Learning has historically been associated with a longer pathway of one's life-long self-realization with the help of the Bon and Buddhist local knowledge and its spiritual visions, arts, meditations, rituals, magic, and creative communication with the Great Nature of the Himalayan cultural places (Roerich, 1929/1990).

Hence, the local knowledge is diverse, and its learning practices embody the traditional Tibetan Bon and Buddhist folklore about the pathways of natural learning (Roerich, 1929/1990; Wangyal, 2000). The concept of natural learning is difficult to define in one word or meaning. Perhaps, these pathways may be creatively expressed through the historical cultural literacies that have been recorded in the Tibetan poetic sutras and folk beliefs (Roerich, 1929/1990; Schaeffer,

2009; Thubten, 2009). For example, Thubten (2009) eloquently wrote, “Sky is free. Ocean is blissful. Trees are divine. Rocks are enlightened. So are we. Who is still searching, for what” (p. 1). This poem teaches about the intrinsic nature of being. This way of being is free from time because an individual may experience an all pervading wisdom of nature; it often manifests through the awareness of daily life and one’s engagement with its ongoing interactions (Surya Das, 2011). The Tibetan folk worldview of blissful being with the Great Nature reflects the cultural understanding of this natural realization of all pervading wisdom (i.e., natural learning) (Roerich, 1929/1990). Many folk stories and oral legends are being told and sung to praise one of the folk saints and teachers, Milarepa (12th century), and his wisdom of learning from nature. For example, his song about listening to the cuckoo reveals his care for the local birds’ livelihood and their environment. In this poetic meditation, learning is a listening process to the sentient beings and their multitude of voices and expressions,

The voice of the cuckoo is so moving,

And so tuneful is the lark's sweet singing,

That when I hear them I cannot help but listen—

When I listen to them, I cannot help but shed tears. (Milarepa, 1999, p. 85)

Ultimately, compassion is the wisdom of the intrinsic being and reality. Tibetan child-rearing practices have been guided by the belief in the intrinsic Buddha nature of all peoples and sentient beings (Roerich, 1949/1976; Sasson, 2013). Natural learning allows children to understand and create their life-long experiences of self-realization through the feelings of loving-kindness and compassion that liberate the mind from the karmic bondage of suffering and oppression (Rokotova, 1926/1971). Natural learning is portrayed in the Buddhist scrolls through poetry and art as “the most unrestricted way of learning, with tolerance and patience, without any

sectarianism” (Roerich, 1967, p. 191). Mothers, fathers, and community members have historically educated their children through diverse pathways of natural learning in a living context of their daily life and cultural places of the sacred Himalayas (Roerich, 1929/2004).



Figure 2.2. Women are grinding grains. Nagchu, Tibet. January–March 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405172.

Local Knowledge and Children’s Ways of Natural Learning

Roerich (1929/1990) observed that many villagers of the trans-Himalayan Ladakh (India) and Tibet, who also practice Tibetan Buddhism and some traditions of Bon, let their children freely explore all daily labour activities, artistic practices, and other communal ways of life. Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994) also found that children (ages 5–14) in the Tibetan Ladakh were educated with “constant attention and love, and yet the parents at the same time remain so relaxed and easy-going that the child is allowed a great deal of independence and freedom to experiment” (p. 530). Starting at age 6, boys and girls usually help in raising their younger

siblings. At age 9, children's duties become more complex as they take place outside in the community (e.g., collecting dung, firewood). All social roles lack rigid boundaries and definitions; they are fluid and subjective (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994). Children learn through an active exploration of and open participation in their communities (Roerich, 1929/1990).

Further, Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994) found that a child "learns from an early age to be cooperative, so there is no need for strict definitions of his/her, or anyone else's responsibilities" (p. 530). This way of learning is fully immersed in the adult world whereby children can interrupt their parents and other community members without any fear of punishment. For adults, these instances of attention aren't interruptions; they are productive learning opportunities (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994). It is interesting to note that Silva, Correa-Chávez, and Rogoff (2010) found that many indigenous Mexican heritage children, whose learning experience doesn't involve conventional schooling, tend to learn through observation and *keen attention* of ongoing adults' activities and "surrounding events" (p. 909). Rogoff (2011) found that children's keen attention involves observation, close listening, and sustained posture (p. 258). Such ongoing learning opportunities create a supportive context whereby children have multiple possibilities of learning and of developing independent responsibility/initiative (Silva et al., 2010). This finding resonates with Bolin's (2006) understanding of the cultural context of respect that shapes children's social competence in their local community. In this broader perspective, natural learning is always situated in a particular cultural context and its complex local knowledge systems (Bolin, 2006; Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994; Rogoff, 2011). Rogoff (2011) wrote,

The cultural tradition in which children are included in the range of community events

and learn by observing, overhearing, and pitching in has been dubbed *learning through intent community participation* [emphasis in original]. This way of supporting children's development and learning appears to be common in many indigenous communities of North and Central America. (p. 257)

In their later work, Correa-Chávez, Mejia-Arauz, and Rogoff (2015) renamed the concept of learning through community participation as a seven-fold paradigm of learning by observing and pitching in (LOPI) that is a part of a broader indigenous knowledge system. This paradigm consists of the following seven facets,

1) community organization of learning (i.e., a child contributes to the community); 2) motivation (i.e., a child is eager to contribute); 3) fluid social organization; 4) goal of learning to transform participation (i.e., belonging); 5) learning by attention (i.e., with guidance from the community); 6) shared communication (i.e., embedded within a particular activity); and 7) assessment (i.e., a child is acknowledged for her contribution). (p. 4)

This paradigm helps to illustrate? how learning is structured in the situated context of many indigenous communities in Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States (Correa-Chávez et al., 2015; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Rogoff, 2011). Yet these studies didn't specifically define the role of children's agency and will in the learning context of LOPI; the children's agency is embedded and centred in the paradigm. For example, many Mayan mothers tend to guide their toddlers without any sense of control over their intrinsic motivation and natural behaviour (Correa-Chavez et al., 2015). Rogoff (2011) observed that children's learning agencies are the *osmosis* that emerge

simply [by] being around and involved. They have the chance to be part of the rhythms

and routines of everyday community life, so that they can attune themselves to ideas, values, information, and the ways of doing things by being part of life as it is lived. (p. 264)

In this context, learning takes place without any external control and imposed outcomes. Paradise and Rogoff (2009) define this way of learning as natural or informal “because it is not explicitly formulated, its characteristics and patterning tend to be invisible. ... [It is] learning that everyone engages in ‘naturally,’ by virtue of being human” (p. 102). Natural learning is a highly complex process because it is embedded in an intricate and implicit cultural context of everyday life. Further, Paradise and Rogoff (2009) said that natural learning is a pan-human “cultural tradition of [all] humanity” (p. 104). In all of these processes, learning is about a child’s agency and initiative in participation and communal contribution where expert (i.e., adult) and non-expert (i.e., child) are mutually involved in a fluid process; their roles are interchangeable (Haan, 1999; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009).

In this view, the local knowledge *is* an informal structure that has a collective organizational system of shared place-based meanings, spirituality, and intergenerational histories (Cajete, 1994; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Reagan, 2005). Critics of natural learning found that it “rests upon a system of person-oriented values” (Scribner & Cole, 1973, p. 557). Some critics found that natural learning is backward and, even, non-educational (Reed & Reed, 1968). Yet all learning processes may be defined as formal *and* informal because their boundaries are subjective and vague; as well as all learning experience may be empowering and oppressive at the same time (Church, Bascia, & Shragge 2008). It is, nevertheless, important to note that there are different cultural practices of natural learning that should be studied to further understand the value of natural learning as a life-long process of children’s well-being. Correa-

Chavez et al. (2015) suggested educational researchers and teachers giving children a possibility of agency in sharing their interests, stories, ideas, and experiences in an open research framework that is not defined by the dominant “western” paradigm of compulsory, assembly-line schooling.

In the Tibetan Himalayan communities, the concept of learning also seems to be inseparable from the concept of living where children are supported by and included in diverse community events and, therefore, have multiple opportunities for intentional participation (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994; Roerich, 1929/1990; Trungpa, 2004). Often children’s learning experiences are considered as spiritual because children’s consciousness is a part of the Buddha’s nature (Sasson, 2013). Levinson and Holland (1996) also found that these ways of learning (both formal and informal) are the experiential and affective sites of cultural production that is the development of children’s cultural skills, values, and knowledge. Yet children’s participation in the community seems to be mainly about playing alongside adults and their daily work (Kondro, 2012; Kunsang & Denno, 2013; Norbu & Turnbull, 1968). For example, Norbu and Turnbull (1968) wrote about Norbu’s childhood experience in the precolonial Tibet:

I was too young to be able to help my father in the fields—a boy must be ten years old anyway before he can be of real use, and in any case parents like to see their children playing. I had many friends in the village, but most of all I liked playing with my sister. My very earliest memories are like my dreams, and I can see myself being bundled up in woolen blankets by my mother and put in a corner where I could not get into trouble while she worked. The first real memory I have is of a day in autumn when all the colours in the fields and on the other sides of the mountains were changing. My sister and I went into the fields to play almost every day because the straw that had been cut was piled up and we had made a little house by burrowing into the pile and making little rooms. Into

one room we had brought some flat stones, making a table. Other small stones we used as dishes. (p. 53)

Children's intentional participation was about playing in the midst of various communal activities and cultural contexts such as this situated play in the fields of barley and wheat. I discuss the importance of creative playfulness in the context of natural learning as living in details in Chapter 5. In this situated perspective, the very nature of the children's mind is considered as her or his embodied activity (King, 1991; Roerich, 1929/1990). The natural mind is a self-emergent playful or/and creative act of being that "intrinsically moves toward its own self-realization" (King, 1991, p. 84). Learning is a natural state of the active mind. The concept of the mind has been created through the local knowledge and its beautiful legends, folklore, rituals, and other daily cultural practices of the Himalayas (Rinbochay, 1980; Roerich, 1929/2004). The mind does not have one essential meaning. The very meaning of the mind is understood through the concepts of "consciousness (jñāna, shes pa), awareness (buddhi, blo), and knower (samvedana, rig pa)" (Rinbochay, 1980, p. 15). Roerich (1929/2004) observed that the local people do not transcend their material conditions of life but immerse and create them as a spiritual context of the collective well-being.

Learning is a natural embodied path of the creative mind that makes children aware and conscious of all living wonders and paradoxes of the world and its diverse cultural realities and places. Rinbochay (1980) found that the mind is not a container of information "or just the brain mechanism, but to be individual moments of knowing, the continuum of which makes up our sense of knowing" (p. 15). From the early ages (even prior to the physical birth), children develop their ways of natural/spiritual learning and knowing that lead them towards their life-long realization of their Buddha Nature (Roerich, 1929/2004).

It is also important to note that the local understanding of the pathways of natural learning cannot be separated from the cultural definitions of childhood (Sasson, 2013). In the historical context of local childhood, learning has mainly been associated with free explorations of the “domestic crafts and cultural arts” (Bangsbo, 2008, p. 70). Trungpa (2004) found that the culture of childhood and children’s ways of learning is not about obtaining objective information because information doesn’t exist outside of their conscious experiences of knowing. In addition, knowledge should help people and beings to overcome and transform their suffering as well as to achieve liberation in their everyday contexts of life. This understanding reflects the teachings of the Buddha (Nhat Hanh, 1997; Rokotova, 1926/1971; Trungpa, 1981, 2004). According to Rokotova (1926/1971), “The Buddha is the Liberator. He liberates, because he himself has been liberated. Ancient writings always emphasize the vital applicability of his teaching. Gotama did not avoid life, but took part in the daily life of the workers” (p. 13). Natural learning experiences cultivate an expanded consciousness of liberation from suffering and oppression. Ultimately, the learner should decide how she wants to learn.

Trungpa (2004) teaches that the Tibetan term “sbyong ba” means “to learn” in a “sense of exploration of our state of being that is independent of education and information collecting” (p. 115). There are no studies found about the local experiential literacies and the exploratory ways of learning in the local Tibetan communities prior to the colonization. Yet I found numerous studies about the greatness of the local knowledge and its profound literary and oral cultures of the Buddhist scrolls, poetry, magic, agricultural chronologies (e.g., astronomic numeracies), medicine, folklore, and sacred art (e.g., paintings, drawings, sculpture, architecture, and performance) (Bista & Von der Heide, 1997; Jackson, 1976; Norbu & Turnbull, 1968; Roerich, 1949/1976; Schaeffer, 2009; Shackley, 1995). These studies demonstrate that the local

communities have not only been able to sustain their unique literary traditions through time, cultures, and generations, but also to teach their children about the cultural practices in the historical wisdom of their ancestors and the Buddhas.



Figure 2.3. December 1927–January 1928, Sharugon village, Tibet. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405107.

Childhood

The local cultural concept of childhood is not an ontologically separate domain from adulthood (Brown et al., 2008; Kunsang & Denno, 2013; Sasson, 2013). In Tibetan, the concept of “childhood” refers to the personal growth and transformation that is not necessarily age specific; childhood may be a life-long experience of being in the world (Sasson, 2013). Hence, children are not usually perceived as innocent and naïve because their karmic accumulation of deeds, thoughts, intentions, and motivations have led them into this life for a reason and with a

cause (Gross, 1996, 2006). The karma, however, is not a negative term because it allows parents and community members to recognize the intrinsic talents of their children with respect to their experiential wisdom from previous lives (Gross, 1996). Further, Brown et al. (2008) found that Tibetans share a belief in children's abilities to recall their karmic knowledge and memories through play, dreams, and unrestricted activities. Adults and spiritual leaders (e.g., lamas) usually pay attention to these expressions because they can recognize the ancestors and incarnations among the new generations (David-Neel, 1929/1971). For example, in the time of his early childhood (3–5 years old), the Dalai Lama XIV often expressed his will to travel to Lhasa, a capital city of Tibet, and to lead his family around the city. He has also demonstrated his memory of the significant sacred sites in Tibet (Brown et al., 2008). Tibetan people always try to respect their children for who they are and who they want to be/become in order to respect the Buddhist laws of karma (Norbu & Turnbull, 1968). This way of learning has been marginalized but it remains as an option.

Further, Gross (1998) found that Buddhism respects children not only for their previous spiritual accomplishments, but also as “future Buddha[s]” (p. 131). Karma is a law of cause and effect through which children develop. Basically, karmic deeds (i.e., actions) accumulate over time and present their fruits in one's karmic journey through lives (Gyatso, 2011). Karma, however, is not a deterministic concept because karma is, ultimately, “created by thoughts” (Rokotova, 1926/1971, p. 45). Garrett (2009) explained that karma plays a significant role in child development because it is one of the motivational forces (e.g., causation); and the “primary force of growth is the wisdom of a Buddha” (p. 108). Yet the concept of karma remains a highly contested terrain since the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet in the 7th century because this concept has multiple subjective interpretations (Calkowski, 2002). Therefore, the

epistemological concept of childhood doesn't have a special religious meaning in the lives of Tibetan people as a sacred institution (Gross, 1998). Childhood is a natural karmic process of life that allows parents, family members, and communities to observe, recognize, and nurture the inborn spiritual gifts and natural talents of children (Gross, 1996). Yet children's ways of thinking are highly respected for their intuitive memories of their previous lives and the potential of becoming the Buddha (Brown et al., 2008).

In this cultural context, Sasson (2013) found that the Tibetan concept of childhood and the concept of children are two different social categories. The concept of children is often associated with the first twenty years of life; yet it may also refer to biological adults "with little socially recognized authority" (Sasson, 2013, p. 6). However in her memoir, Kunsang (Kunsang & Denno, 2013) described her childhood as a free experience because her parents and community members never "thought it was dangerous to give children this much freedom" (p. 3). Childhood was perceived as a creative time of children's freedom when all kids could play together in groups without any adult supervision. She wrote,

Kids usually spent the day outside together in groups. When the kids in one of the groups got hungry, they could go into any of their homes to get food and go right back outside when they finished eating. If kids got tired, they might go home to sleep, or they might lie down and take a nap in the grass any place they were comfortable. It was a pretty wild childhood, and I loved it. (Kunsang & Denno, 2013, p. 3)

In allowing their children to play together and to create their childhood experience, adults show the profound respect for them and their development as the responsible members of a great community. According to Norbu and Turnbull (1968), respect is the basis of all relations for Tibetan people at all ages. Hence, parents usually respect children's choices in the context of

everyday life, as these choices are considered as a part of their educational experiences. For villagers (farmers and nomads), childhood is a natural context of their secular education (Norbu & Turnbull, 1968). Basically, childhood is a way of living that is embedded in the cultural (i.e., collective) practices of a community and children's individual (i.e., subjective) choices, such as play. Children are usually not instructed by adults but are allowed to explore various cultural sites (e.g., pastures, household, and gardens) and practices (e.g., weaving, spinning, and other craft tools). These subjective explorations are situated in the context of community relations whereby children can communicate with all other adults and children without any obstacles (Kunsang & Denno, 2013). Norbu and Turnbull (1968) wrote about his (their?) own observations that children usually learned directly from their parents and the teachings of the household; "children learn by living close to their parents from the day of their birth, accompanying them in their work and in daily rounds" (p. 329). Hence, the cultural concept of childhood has to be understood within these lived experiential contexts of children's ways of learning.

Overall, it is important to conceptualize learning in the context of childhood as an intentional participatory process of children's explorations of and keen attention to diverse cultural practices of their families (Rogoff, 2011; Rogoff, Paradise, Mejia Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003) through which children create their daily meanings and social ideas, identities, and lifestyle. Silva et al. (2010) suggested researching "the generality of keen attention to surrounding events and its prevalence among Indigenous people on other continents" (p. 909). This conceptualization of the local children's ways of learning is inseparable from a broader cultural worldview of Tibetan Buddhism that has shaped and sustained both secular and religious educational systems before the advent of compulsory schooling. The Buddhist beliefs have guided parents in their child-rearing practices since the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet in the

7th century (Norbu & Turnbull, 1968). In this view, many local people believe that compassion is the primordial wisdom (Rokotova, 1926/1971). Compassion “is an art, the masterpiece, of which is a state of spontaneous, equanimous love, and understanding toward all beings” (Novick, 2012, p. 55). Compassion embodies all manifestations of consciousness including keen attention, awareness, and spontaneous explorations (Gyatso, 2011; Roerich, 1929/1990). It is interesting to note that Tibetan Buddhism considers intention as an accomplishment because it is an act of consciousness (Calkowski, 2002, p. 65).

Based on my literature review, I consider the historical learning practices of the Tibetan communities to be sustainable because they have preserved the local Buddhist knowledge by nourishing children’s intrinsic agency (karma), independence of consciousness, and sense of place (with its local knowledge). It is also important to note that the existing academic literature doesn’t delve into the particular cultural and individual contexts of children’s natural pathways of learning. There are some episodes of personal memories and autobiographies, as well as the brief overviews of these experiences within a framework of one–three pages (Childs, 2004; Dalai Lama XIV, 1962; Kunsang & Denno, 2013; Norbu & Turnbull, 1968).

The Social Changes: Compulsory Schooling in the 1950s

The Communist Party of China (CPC) invaded Tibet in 1948 (Dalai Lama XIV, 1962). The Dalai Lama asked the United Nations for help and support. The support was not given; only El Salvador demonstrated its solidarity and willingness to stand with the Tibetan people (Laird, 2006). As a result of the military mass destruction of the Tibetan communities, the Dalai Lama was advised to escape; he found refuge in India on 30 March of 1959 (Kauffman, 2015). Thousands of Tibetans followed their spiritual leader and escaped through the mountains to become refugees in Nepal and India (Kauffman, 2015; Laird, 2006). It is important, however, to

note that it is beyond the scope of my literature review to analyze whether or not the Chinese government has led “the peaceful liberation” of Tibet (Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN, 2009, para. 1). As my focus is on the people’s voices, I follow their accounts and the official statements that were recorded and documented by the United Nations (1959, 1353 XIV), the Dalai Lama (1962, 1997a), and academic peer-reviewed studies in order to briefly reflect on the historical context of social changes that were associated with the advent of colonial and compulsory schooling (Bhoil, 2013; Le Houérou, 2014; Zhou, 2002; Zhu, 2007).

As a part of the colonization, the centralized national schooling system was established. During the 1950s, the centralized CPC developed two policy documents regarding compulsory education such as “Compulsory Education Procedure in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Compulsory Education Planning in the Tibet Autonomous Region” (Zhu, 2007). These documents were inaccessible to me to analyze and study because they seem to be archived on password protected websites such as the CPC archives and important documents (OriProbe Information Services, n.d.). Ma Rong (2014) also found that “there are few historical records and research reports that relate to education in Tibet” (p. 85). Generally, the policies aimed to nationalize and modernize Tibet through the centralized curriculum that taught children about their patriotic sense of belonging to the united mainland of China, the Motherland (Hansen, 1999).

Specifically, schooling is described as a site of an ongoing “control of the border areas [in order to] ‘civilize’ the people who inhabited the frontiers of China” (Kolas & Thowsen, 2012, p. 95). The first compulsory modern school was built in February 1951 in Qamdo (Bass, 1998; Zhou, 2002). During the period of 1952–1957, the government of China implemented a bilingual schooling model with ninety primary schools (Kolas, 2003; Kolas & Thowsen, 2012). Furthermore in 1957, the official industrialization of Tibetan villages began. As a result of the

industrial development and ongoing socialist modernization, there were more than fifteen hundred schools built in rural Tibet (Zhu, 2007). Right after the Dalai Lama's exile, the control over Tibet was tightened with the imposed land reform through which many monasteries (more than 6,000) were violently destroyed, people tortured/imprisoned, and private lands were confiscated (Kolas & Thowsen, 2012). Tibetan Autonomous Region of China (TARC) was officially declared in 1965; the area covered the cultural-historical geography of Bo within Utsang and Kham (Bass, 1998; Brunn, Toops, & Gilbreath, 2012). Yet Ginsburg and Mathos (1964) found that it was established in 1956 (p. 204). In this view, compulsory schooling served the interests of the Chinese state as a colonial site of governance, economic modernization, industrialization, and cultural destruction of the Tibetan communities.

As a colonial site of governance (Sangay, 2003), schools have specifically been modelled to sustain the nationalized dominance over Tibetan people with a goal to construct their socially cohesive collective identity as obedient and patriotic minorities of China (Bass, 1998; Hawkins, 1983). Since 1935, the concept of minorities has been developed by the CPC that defined all local communities (including Tibetans) as autonomous within the unified multination of China (Hawkins, 1983). This social transformation of people's identity has been accompanied with the material destruction of various cultural educational sites, such as the Tibetan monasteries. These cultural sites have historically sustained a different idea of people's identity as the spiritual followers of the Buddha's dharma (i.e., the religious law) and not the political followers of the CPC (Shakya, 1999). Compulsory schools have become the central educational institutions. During these colonial changes, the status of the local people was named as the subjects of China, and Tibet was defined as "a too thinly populated" place (Maitra, 1963, p. 30). It is also important to note that the term "indigenous people" is not recognized by China regarding the Tibetan

people (Erni, 2008). For example, one of the Chinese delegates in the United Nations said that “in China, there are no indigenous people and therefore no indigenous issues” (as cited in Erni, 2008, p. 358). The Tibetan people are officially considered among the national minorities of the People’s Republic of China whereby the dominant ethnic Han group of people consists of 91.96 % and all other minority groups consist of 8.04 % (Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN, 1999, para. 1). In this perspective, compulsory schooling was a site through which children have been instructed about their new social identities as patriotic Chinese citizens (Bass, 1998), and not the indigenous children of Tibet.

In this view, schooling has created an intergenerational cultural gap between the parents and the children in the production of schooled ideologies (i.e., socialism, patriotism, nationalism). For example, Norbu and Turnbull (1968) wrote,

In the schools that we were establishing ourselves [home schools, monasteries, urban government schools], prior to the Chinese invasion, we taught subjects, such as art, literature, and of course religions. These subjects are now all banned, and according to the Chinese, Tibetan children are now being given class education, socialist education, and education in patriotism, with class struggle as the central theme. (p. 336)

These themes have constructed the mainstream culture of schooling “where a Tibetan child learns to become Chinese” (Kolas, 2003, para. 3). Further, many children were forcefully taken away from their parents and transported to China (Chapters 4 and 5). These accounts are not widely studied and analyzed in the academic and popular cultural literature. At present, it is difficult for local scholars to investigate these historical and contemporary contexts because the scholars (including Chinese) “who have attempted to do so have been censored, sacked, and in some cases, imprisoned” (Hillman, 2016, p. 6). Since 1959, the Chinese colonization has been

about the violent separation of the local children from their parents into the schooled regimes of enforced nationalization, as well as the mass destruction of the sociocultural organization of Tibet including the monasteries, agricultural lands, and middle/upper class households (Maitra, 1963; Shakya, 1999; Woesser & Wang, 2014).

The compulsory schooling mechanisms have served the political interests of the CPC and further marginalized the Tibetan peoples' interests and local knowledge systems (Shakya, 1999). Even though Tibetan language was included in schools, the Chinese language and ideologies have dominated the curriculum (Bass, 1998; Nima, 2001). In addition, the national educational policy of the time (1950s–1960s) was influenced by the Chinese leaders' belief in compulsory schooling for the benefit of the mainland economic development and the gradual transformation of the local people's consciousness toward the unified loyalty for China (Hawkins, 1983). For example, the Chinese Ministry of Education outlined different political goals for the Tibetan minorities including the collective enculturation (i.e., institutionalized development) of “a spirit of equality, unity, fraternity, and cooperation” and preservation of the “indigenous languages in primary and secondary schools” (Ma Xulun, as cited in Bass, 1998, p. 28). Shakya (1999) found that many Tibetan people at first had developed many affinities between the communist ideologies of equality and the Buddhist ideas of dharma. Yet many Tibetan women elders felt immediately that the Chinese slogans about equality and other ideas meant extreme and sustained violence against all Tibetan people and their cultural heritage (i.e., local Buddhist knowledge, customs, traditions, beliefs, ways of knowing/learning) (Maitra, 1963). For example, a Tibetan woman elder witnessed the following:

Very old ladies with white hair flapped their aprons and wept saying, “Why have you come to our country?” And still they [the Chinese] did not glance at us. ... That was the

first time the Chinese came; marching from across the Mondoe Zampa of Lhasa. ...

Beating the apron is considered extremely bad. (Yangzom, 2010, p. 2)

As a result of the enforced colonial rules and regimes, thousands (80,000) of Tibetans had to escape to Nepal, Bhutan, and India in order to survive (Shakya, 1999). With the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the bilingual schools ceased to exist and communal monolingual Chinese schools were introduced (Bass, 1998). According to Kwong (1988), the Cultural Revolution was initiated by the Chinese students who were not satisfied with their schooling systems. She wrote,

The main goal was to replace, in the jargon of the hegemonic ideology in China, the feudal capitalist values and norms of the pre-communist period with proletarian ones.

Feudal-capitalist-values and norms took different forms and were articulated in different ways in different social contexts; the school, as the transmitter of knowledge, values, and definitions of reality to the next generation, was a principal battleground in determining whether the new ideology could be successfully sown in the society. (p. xii)

The main leader of the revolution was Mao Zedong who had also initiated its structured development in Tibet (Bass, 1998). The structured revolutionary development was organized by the main military leaders such as Wang Qimei, Zhang Guohua, and Zhang Zaiwang. These leaders have maintained control over the masses, as well as manipulated and regulated the mass protests. The students' protests were restrained. As a result of this revolution, the Soviet model of socialist compulsory schooling was introduced in China. The schooling ideology was defined by the communist politics whereby all teachers and students had to follow its principles and morals without any critical thinking and reflection. This ideology may be defined as the political socialization through which children were deliberately taught about the dominant socialist values

of citizenship including self-criticism, group criticism, and cooperation (Rosen, 1983). The goal of all schooling institutions was to mold an obedient citizen who would not only become a patriot but also an active socialist agent of China (Yin, 1984). Some of the new measures to achieve this ideal socialist citizenship included the mandatory political curriculum (e.g., specific examples of communist ideals and social behaviours; explanations of Marxism and Leninism) as well as the collectivization of school experiences (e.g., praise of participation, attendance, group work). All students (ages 7–14) were expected to become members of the political parties, such as Young Pioneer. The significance of this political participation was about the development of individual values in the context of collective belonging to and loyalty of the socialist progress and national unified prosperity (Hawkins, 1983; Rosen, 1983).

Because of the political revolutionary emphasis on the socialist ideologies of atheism, the Cultural Revolution in Tibet has led to mass destructions of the Buddhist relics, monasteries (including the monastic schools), and sacred sites. Kolas and Thowsen (2012) and other colleagues (Lopes, 2015; Smith, 2009) found that this revolution was devastating for all people and cultural sites across China, specifically in Tibet. For example, Lopes (2015) provides an eyewitness account of one of these tragic destructions:

One cloudy autumn day, while we were harvesting green peas in the field, we heard a voice come over the loudspeaker demanding that we attend a meeting. We sensed that something terrible was about to happen. When we arrived at the courtyard, we saw that a crowd had gathered, including hundreds? of college students; where they had come from, we did not know. They began a political study session, but the meeting was chaotic, and they began to argue among themselves. ...

The Red Guards swarmed into the Maitreya Hall next door and began to toss

bundles of ancient sutras into the courtyard from the second floor of the Buddha Hall.

They lit a fire, and soon the monastery was filled with the thick smoke of burning books [this took place in Kumbum monastery in Tibet]. (Arjia Rinpoche, as cited in Lopes, 2015, p. 40)

This is one of multiple cases of intentional destruction of the ancient Buddhist relics across Tibet that have taken place since the violent invasion of the CPC in the 1950s. Overall, compulsory schooling was one of the central instruments of the revolution because its processes “could be used to transform traditional values and instill a successor generation with values deemed appropriate for a revolutionary society” (Rosen, 1983, p. 99). It is also important to note that many local destructions were done by the Tibetans themselves alongside the Han (Lixiong, 2009). These attacks lasted till Mao’s death and the imprisonment of its main military leaders in Tibet (Jiang & Ashley, 2000).

The schooling models were then re-designed in the context of national modernization and its cultural revolution to serve the industrial progress of communist China. The concept of modernization has emerged from Mao’s interpretation of the Marxist ideology as “the natural tendency among nations” (Hawkins, 1983, p. 8). The local community-based schools were established throughout the Tibetan Autonomous Region that were known as *minban* in Chinese language or *mangtsuk lobchan* in Tibetan language. The concept of minban may be summarized in one of the following slogans, such as “run by the local people but subsidized by the state” (Zhu, 2007, p. 65). The local communities have become transformed into micro-units of the national state-led governance with a goal to construct the centralized political control over diverse local forms of production (i.e., cultural production of knowledge, agriculture, social ideas).

Some Han communes were able to exercise their own control over their educational processes and experiences. Further, these communes have also constructed their own school organizations without any help from the government and constructed their curriculum in an accord with the dominant socialist ideals and values. For example, one school reported that “the poor and the middle class peasants are enthusiastic in running schools, considering them their own. Many old poor peasants have lectured to their pupils” (as cited in United States Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 1968, p. 68). The inclusion of peasants was a representation of the developing socialist model of cultural equality that was supposed to instruct the new generations of Chinese citizens about the values of labour and other means of agricultural production for the collective benefit of all. This idea resonates with Mao’s vision of the mass enculturation that may be defined as an achievement “of a conflict-free social order designed for rapid modernization” with a focus on “unity, harmony, and stability” (Hawkins, 1983, p. 8). In this view, children had to be instructed about their social roles and appropriate actions without any sense of personal agency or individuality. The self-knowledge and self-actualization mattered only in the context of one’s social actions and behaviour (Shakya, 1999). Deng Xiaoping is known to describe this schooled personality with the following example: “The color of the cat doesn’t matter—what matters is whether or not they catch mice” (as cited in Hawkins, 1983, p. 8). The localized system of national socialist schooling has fully embodied these ideals and political structures through the community-based cooperative schools (Zhu, 2007).

Through this socialist, mono-cultural (i.e., the national cultural) policy, many Tibetans have been forcefully assimilated into the communist ideologies. Further, Kolas (2003) found that “as a consequence [of the Cultural Revolution and monolingual instruction], an entire generation of Tibetans failed to learn to read and write their Native language” (para. 7). In addition, the

revolutionary ideas have not only contradicted many traditional Tibetan Buddhist values, but also completely negated them as backward and illiterate (Norbu & Turnbull, 1968). The communist leaders (known as the Red Guards) in Tibet often violently tried to convert the local cultural ways of knowing into the socialist ideologies (Shakya, 1999). For example, Gruber (2010) wrote that “the Red Guards demanded that all schools take part in the destruction of Jokhang in Lhasa and marched everyone to the temple” (p. 119). This shows that the compulsory schooling under the CPC has perpetuated the state-led systemic violence against the traditional cultural knowledge systems of Tibetan people.

Moreover, the compulsory model of colonial schooling has contributed to the ongoing ecological destruction of Tibet (Buckley, 2014; Gastil, 1992; Zhu, 2007). The direct link between schooling and ecological degradation has not been researched in depth and in detail (Hawkins, 1983). Yet there are numerous cases that demonstrate how the compulsory institution of schooling has constructed a socio-political system of exploitation and objectification of the natural environment (Epstein, 1983; Woese & Wang, 2014). For example, Epstein (1983) found that schooling has instilled the sense of extrinsic instrumentality into children whereby they viewed all subjects (e.g., sciences, language arts, social studies) through a lens of the material progress and social utility. Children have been taught the values of technological advancement, scientific positivism, and industrialization of the land (e.g., construction of dams, mass production of good, factory work).

The intrinsic Buddhist values of dharma have been marginalized and silenced by the modern schooling systems (Lixiong, 2009; Rosen, 1983). Modernization has become a process of cultural change of “the traditional Tibetan culture [that] is essentially backward” (Kolas & Thowsen, 2012, p. 11). Because of the schooled modernization, the ecological, spiritual, and

cultural values of the Tibetan land have not been represented in the textbooks and taught through pedagogies. This disconnect of children from their local knowledge has resulted in the lack of respectful understanding of the unique, fragile Tibetan ecosystems (Lixiong, 2009). In the precolonial Tibet, the Buddhist law of dharma had historically maintained the bioregional environmental protection of all wild species and ecosystems (Dalai Lama XIV, 1962). Nobody was allowed to harm the wild animals and to overuse the wild pastures. The compassionate laws of dharma had been extended toward all sentient beings and places (Chapters 4 and 5). For example, one of the interviewees of the Tibet Oral History recalled his own experience in the precolonial Tibet that helps one to understand the importance of the natural environment for the well-being of all people and non-human others. He said:

I wish to explain because when Tibet first came into being and the Buddhist religion flourished there, the Buddhist dharma had many “don’ts,” things that were not allowed. When I reflect on it these days, since the time Tibet came into being and the dharma flourished, no one in the world, but the Tibetan people conserved their environment. There is something called yartsa gunbu “grass in summer and worm in winter” or scientifically called cordyceps sinensis, which grew in our region and is said to be very nutritious. I heard that now-a-days a gyama [similar to a kilogram] of it costs 30,000 yuan. If you go by that calculation, each [piece of yartsa gunbu] costs about 300 to 400 Indian rupees. In the olden days it was forbidden to pick them in Tibet. The reason given was that if one harvested it, the earth’s fertility would diminish. People knew that it was nutritious and helpful in treating diseases, but picking it would mean loss of the earth's fertility. The Tibetan government forbid it and the people too did not harvest it. Even at that time Tibet's Buddhist dharma taught that the spirits of nature would get jealous or that the earth’s

fertility would diminish. There was another plant called zayum, which is a very expensive medicine. One was forbidden to pluck that also. It was said that if one plucked it, the spirits that lived in the forests and hills would not like it and might send thunderbolts, landslides or floods. However, when the Chinese arrived, all these were harvested.

It is called yartsa gunbu. Now-a-days people call it bu “worm.” The Tibetan government forbade people from picking it. The reason was that the fertility of the soil would diminish, so environmental protection was being practiced even then. The zayum is used in medicines and it is forbidden to pluck it. Plucking it would make the spirits jealous and cause thunderbolts, hailstorms and others. The Chinese use it in their medicines. When the Chinese came, they harvested these. They are not found in any other country in the world except Tibet. (Gadak, 2007, pp. 7-8)

The colonization with its systems of modernized schooling, however, has drastically altered the intricate human–nature balance. In a broader historical perspective, compulsory colonial schooling models have gradually eroded many facets of the local cultures and people’s traditional knowledge systems because the main purpose of schooling was the forced indoctrination into Communism and the systemic destruction of the Tibetan civilization.

The Advent of Compulsory Schooling in the Region

With the introduction of the national schooling policies in Nepal in the 1950s (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1956), the local Tibetan Buddhist ways of natural learning have also become marginalized by the state of Nepal and international development agencies such as the United States Overseas Mission (Caddell, 2007; Reed & Reed, 1968; Shrestha, 1997). Wood (1987), an educational advisor to the Nepalese government, describes himself as “the first white man” (p. 227) in the local villages. His Normal Schools project has initiated the nationwide

construction of schools, publication of textbooks, production of uniforms, and implementation of teacher training programs (Wood, 1987). As a result of this project, the traditional knowledge systems and local learning practices were defined as primitive, unsecular, and illiterate (Black, 2010; Caddell, 2007; Reed & Reed, 1968). Compulsory schooling has created this pattern of destruction worldwide; and this pattern is not unique to this region (Black, 2010).

The global modernity has been defined by the Western developmental discourses that have imposed their visions, ideas, desires, and practices over many indigenous communities of Nepal (Ferguson, 2005; Kapoor, 2002; Masaki, 2006; Robinson-Pant, 2010). Ferguson (2005) found that the developmental discourse has emerged from the North American and Eurocentred ideologies of colonialism and their popular cultural representations of the dominant identity of the self (i.e., an educated/literate modern person) and other (i.e., the traditional or primitive illiterate person). In this view, colonialism is not only about the economic exploitation of the local people's labour and natural resources but also a construction of the uneducated minorities in need of salvation from their traditional illiteracy (Mohanty, 1988). Masaki (2006) found that a developmental discourse is a socio-cultural medium that defines many indigenous communities as underdeveloped and poor. In so doing, the discourse of schooling assimilates the oppressed into the dominant social order by colonizing their everyday activities and cultural practices with a foreign authoritarian worldview (Mohanty, 1988).

The notion of development (*bikās*) in Nepal has never been associated with the educational sustainability of the local people because the *bikās* represents the governmental power of social order and modern progress (Reed & Reed, 1968; Shakya, 2013). Shakya (2013) found that the *bikās* was “an external factor, something imported into the country and distributed by the government” (p. 119). The developmental agents have presented the necessity of modern progress and its ideological superiority over the rural local knowledge (Pigg, 1992). In this view,

ideology is “the repository of something ‘supra–natural,’ an objective [that] enables to deceive their conscience and conceal their true position” (Havel, as cited in Freire, 1998, p. xxxii). The ideological roots of developmental discourses are rooted in the Darwinian concept of evolution that depicts a natural transformation of an organism towards an ultimate state of one’s genetic or inherent perfection (Esteva, 2010).

The imposed evolutionary view of the *bikās* has created a state of underdevelopment that is characterized by the metaphors of individual deficiency and cultural illiteracy (Carney & Rappleye, 2011). Furthermore Robinson-Pant (2010) found that the developmental agencies have produced separate national literacy programs for the different cultural places, such as the Terai, hills, and high mountains. For many local Tibetan people, the schooled ideas had not acquired any meanings because they could not connect the foreign ideas with their embodied contexts of daily life and the communal cultural–historical values (Pigg, 1992; Robinson-Pant, 2010). The developmental discourses of schooled literacy have never represented a neutral process of modernization through which the collective and individual human conditions were improved (Black, 2010; Shrestha, 1997). Shrestha (1997) described the *bikās* as the intoxicant of modernity:

the more we drank from the spring of this intoxicant, the less control we had over our own senses, eventually becoming oblivious to the relation that the so-called ladder of modernity, imported and imposed from the West, was actually a trap. (p. 50)

Schooling has become a representational site of the *bikās* and discursive mechanism for the naturalization and nationalization of the developmental ideologies and their imposed values and principles of modernity and progress (Carney & Rappleye, 2011; Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 2005; Pigg, 1992). In this panoramic view of sociohistorical change towards modern literacy and progress, the development of national schooling was defined and perceived as a necessary transition from “the backward traditional culture” to the modern sophisticated one:

The new educational system must be designed to promote a kind of knowledge quite different from that utilized in Nepal's traditional culture. The modern secular knowledge system of the West emphasizes logical analysis and scientific methods as ways of knowing, precise use of symbols in communication, the utility of knowledge in solving problems of the material world, and the validity of the search for secular truth. (Reed & Reed, 1968, p. 156)

Since the 1950s, all Tibetan children have had to leave their communities to become schooled in the urban centres of Jomsom, Kathmandu, Pokhara, Delhi, and even New York (Childs, Craig, Beall, & Basnyat, 2014; World Bank Education Policy and Data Center, 2014). Skinner and Holland (1996) suggested that Nepalese schools have created multiple sites of liberation and oppression. As a site of liberation, schools have constructed new social possibilities of children from all castes and cultural backgrounds to obtain literacy and to question some of the taken for granted traditional assumptions about the social caste (i.e., class) and gender (Panta & Resurrección, 2014; Skinner & Holland, 1996).

The dominant Nepalese caste system has historically been organized in an accord with the hereditary socioeconomic locations that sustain a power hierarchy through which people are granted or not granted access to the public sphere and its cultural production of knowledge (Panta & Resurrección, 2014). For example, the highest caste is the Brahmins (or Brahmins, priests/teachers) who act as the privileged gatekeepers of the dominant political ideologies and religious education and literacy (Shrestha, 2002). The lower castes constitute Ksyatriyas or soldiers, Vaysias or traders, Shudras or artisans, and Dalits or the untouchable. There is a religious belief that the Brahmins have an immanent place in the social system because their cultural roles have been postulated in the ancient religious texts of the Puranas during the period of 3102 BC through 45 AD (Chaurasia, 2008). The sacred scripts, however, do not postulate a

prescribed form of behaviour and social organization but rather tell diverse stories about the life of the local communities, Goddesses, Gods, and universe (Wangu, 2003). The social hierarchy of caste is still maintained in Nepal in order to preserve the traditional religious values (Panta & Resurrección, 2014).

National schools have, therefore, created a possibility for equity and equal access to the social privileges, such as jobs and labour (Acharya, 2007). Yet Skinner and Holland (1996) found that a compulsory schooling system has also produced a new social hierarchy of *an educated person* (pahne mănche) who was perceived as a superior human being compared to all other uneducated social groups. All illiterate people, specifically the “uneducated women . . . were constructed in political and development discourse as holding back the country” (Skinner & Holland, 1996, p. 274). Since the 1950s, Tibetan local knowledge has been further marginalized and subordinated as illiterate and uneducated others (Reed & Reed, 1968).

In this broader regional view, the Tibetan cultural and historical context is one of the first documented cases of a sociocultural crisis of unsustainability that was caused by compulsory schooling (Childs et al., 2014). Some of the local villages in the trans-Himalayas have been abandoned as a result of the social changes (Craig, 2004; Devkota, 2013). Devkota (2013) found that the social changes have caused devastating ecological changes, such as desertification, extinction of species, landslides, and glacial retreats in the Tibetan communities of the Lo Mustang in the trans-Himalayas. Hence, it is important to give voices to the local people and to listen to their historical experiences that were misrepresented, marginalized, and colonized during the sociopolitical and cultural changes of the 1950s. During my research expedition in 2008, many local people (including Buddhist teachers and women elders) expressed their concerns about the systemic destruction of their communities by the national systems of

governance and hope to preserve their situated educational sustainability of local knowledge, learning practices, and place (Shugurova, 2009).

I write, seeing through rocks in the valley
walled cities, palaces, caves
schools standing bare—witnessing change
changing the lens
I see deserts.
where are the people?
where is the Land?
Walls, gates, gongs.
(Shugurova, 2014, p. 48)

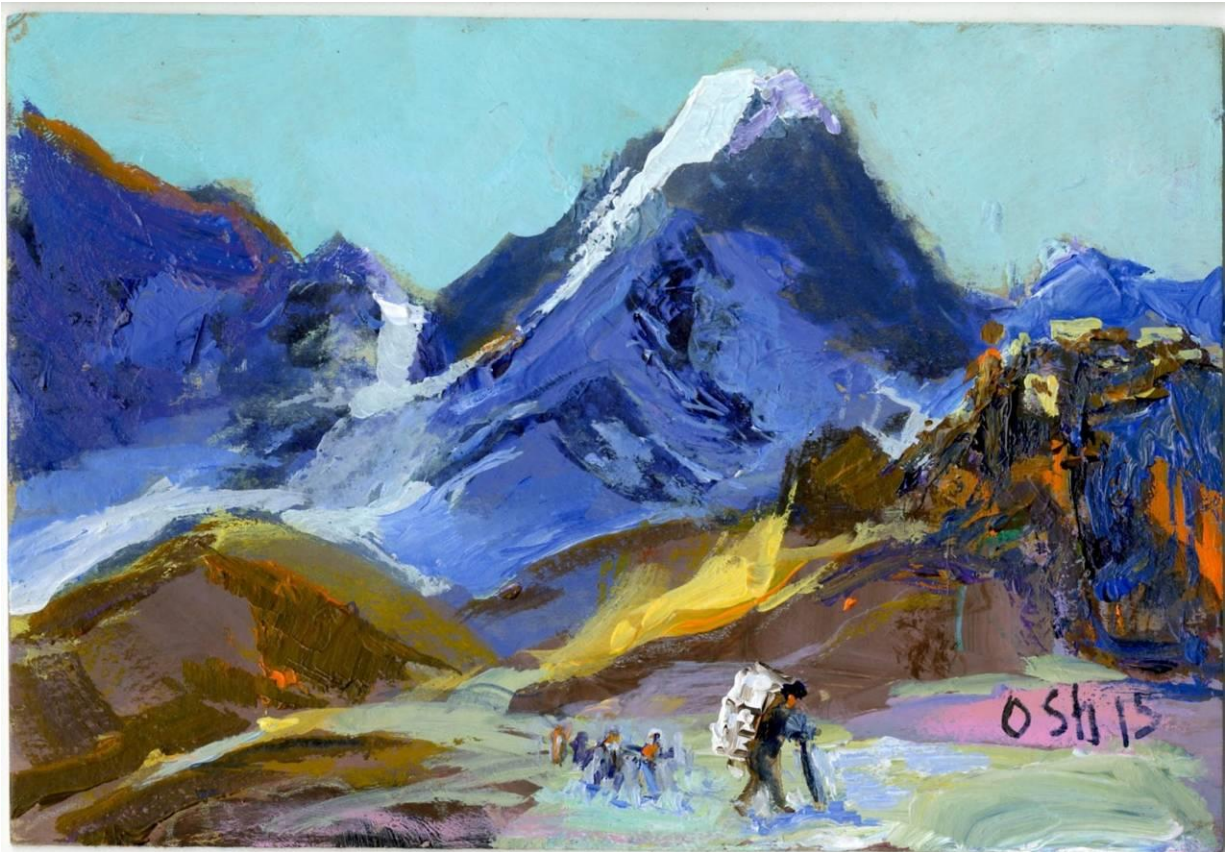


Figure 2.4. Children are leaving for schooling. Oil on paper (Shugurova, 2015a).

Reading terrains

borders merge

cut, peel, urge

read in —between

pause, heal, learn

anew earth being—

borderless

grounds, lakes, oceans

meet, evolve, toll

in bells of my memories

schools, desks, boards,

borders between self

others, worlds.

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 24)

Theoretical Perspectives: Learning as Living

“In Tibet we say, ‘Theories are like patches on a coat, one day they just wear off’”

~ Sogyal Rinpoche

According to the collective wisdom of Tibet, learning cannot be separated from all living and life-long relations including the human relations with more than the human beings, such as animals, plants, mountains, rivers, spirits, and the Buddhas. The natural path of learning is both an inner and outer journey that also involves children’s awareness and mindful realization of their compassion and lovingkindness (known as friendship, *kalyana mitrata*) with/in the living world of the Great Nature (Rokotova, 1926/1971). Many people think about the Great Nature

with awe and reverence because *It* is the actual “reality of all existing things and conditions for the current moment” (Roerich, 1926/1971, p. 14). According to Trungpa (1981), learning emerges from within one’s awareness of being within the Great Nature as a spontaneous realization of a spiritual mindful “openness [that is] created by the environment itself” (p. 140). I attempt to connect to the people’s historical learning practices and experiences in their cultural context of daily life. In this cultural and historical perspective, unschooling helps me to explore and recognize the importance of children’s natural agency, will, intrinsic motivation, and imagination that have shaped the local knowledge and its educational sustainability (Shugurova, 2015a). What follows is a brief description of unschooling with a focus on the key themes and their role in my research process and its theoretical framework. Unschooling allows me not only to analyze the local learning practices without schools but also to establish the intercultural connection/synthesis with the unique situated experiences of the communities (Freire, 1968/1973a; Ricci, 2015).

According to Bai, Epper, Scott, Tait, and Nyuyen (2015), the intercultural approach is about “an in-between relationship open to cultural identity transformation, including cultural innovation or hybridity, based on mutuality and reciprocity” (p. 1). The intercultural lens of unschooling shapes an ethic of my theorization because this lens is based on the profound respect of differences that allow me to understand the unfamiliar and unknown to me local experience and wisdom (Bai et al., 2015; Ricci, 2015). From the intercultural perspective of unschooling, learning is about children’s being in the world as the “embodied way of life” (Ricci, 2015, p. 375). Embodied understandings are the personal, affective, and experiential ways of knowing, unknowing, learning, and unlearning that take place in/through the historical continuum of time (Bowman, 2004; Leggo & Irwin, 2013). The concept of embodiment connects my intercultural

theorization with the local ways of learning that are also about the harmonious and unrestricted realization of one's enlightened and nondual mind (Dalai Lama VII, 1999).

Bai and Scutt (2009) write that “the educational objective [of Buddhism] is to go from the dualistic consciousness of subject–object dichotomy that precedes and precipitates instrumentalism, to the nondualistic consciousness that experiences intersubjectivity or ‘interbeing’” (p. 99). Unschooling also emphasizes the importance of noninstrumental approaches to all forms of learning because these authentic experiences can neither be pre-determined nor pre-planned by external authorities and schooled curricula (Pillalamarri, 2015; Ricci, 2012). Pillalamarri (2015) suggests that unschooling inspires children to learn in a fluid and organic process that does not separate the world into subjects and objects; because “this path, wondering, pondering, meandering as it may be, comes from within” (p. 66). The intercultural path of unschooling is dynamic and relational (Ricci, 2012). It is like “a river [that] charts a course by flowing” (Pillalamarri, 2015, p. 67). In my theorizing, I conceptually (i.e, poetically, impressionistically, imaginatively) follow the material, metonymic, and metaphoric path of the river Tsang-Po (Brahmaputra) that flows through the research site. This river is my imaginary compass and guide in the unknown (beyond the immediate reach) historical territories; it leads me towards their local knowledge and learning experience. On my way, I am learning from the photos and stories about the river, mountains, hills, and villages through the impressionist meditations in my visual art and poetics of their cultural places.

Learning is life. Holt (1970) says that learning is living; “it is impossible, and misleading, and harmful to think of them as being separate” (p. 25). In 1977, Holt conceptualized the term “unschooling” as a way to encourage parents to educate their children at home because he was critical of the dominant schooling paradigms that had widely applied Skinner's behavioural

theories and other instrumental psychological strategies of social control (Shugurova, 2015a). For example, Skinner (1974) used a method of social reinforcement to predict, organize, and structure children's behaviour. Behaviourism defines children as the mere "members of the human species" (Skinner, 1974, p. 184). The notion of a human being is perceived as a biological organism, determined by one's genetic information as well as environmental reactions that govern her or his behaviour (Skinner, 1974; Watson, 2009). Skinner (1974) thought that emotions, contemplation, psychic feelings, and intuition should not be studied at all because these psychological states are irrelevant and unreal. Furthermore, behaviourism does not recognize the subjective significance of children's will, imagination, intrinsic motivations, consciousness, and other intrinsic mental aspirations/talents (Faryadi, 2007; Hern, 1996; Holt, 1972, 1977). Behaviourists understand learning as an external/environmental event that does not involve children's mind and intrinsic motivation (Faryadi, 2007).

I strongly disagree with Skinner (1974) and other behaviourists because I view children not as the mere biological organisms/species but as the cultural agents of all life endeavours, including diverse educational experiences. McGrath (2010) found that unschoolers perceive children as "whole people here and now (not incomplete adults or adults-in-training)" (p. 74). Unschooling argues against all instrumentalities, including the pre-determined definitions of human subjectivity and limited understanding of children's mental activities (Holt, 1970).

Morrison (2007) explains that children learn best when they are "free to decide what they study, and how, and when they study it" (p. 43). Agency is about the personal and collective conscious choice to act as a creator of cultural meanings and experiences (Holt, 1983). Agency is the human intrinsic right "to be a maker of the world of culture, by discovering that he [or she] ... has a creative and re-creative impulse" (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 47). The United Nations (1989)

Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the importance of children's agency in all decisions that affect their well-being, including all educational processes. Agency embodies children's ontological well-being with a focus on their intrinsic motivation and creative imagination that should not be limited by the dominant instrumental teaching methods and behavioural structures of schooling (Grey & Riley, 2013; Morrison, 2007; Ricci, 2012).

This ontological nature of agency may be defined as “an open-ended process, always incomplete and constantly negotiated” (Caiman & Lundegard, 2012, para. 2). As an unfinished historical process, children's agency is connected with children's conscious free will to learn with the consciousness of respect, trust, compassion, care, and love (Ricci, 2012). Ricci and Pritscher (2015) explain that “willed learning is based in fascination, trust, respect, and care. Fascination and trust are what allow for an internal motivation to flourish” (p. 2). The intrinsic motivation is about children's inner talents and embodied knowledge that they choose to cultivate or experience through their conscious will and not through the imposed demand. Pillalamarri (2015) eloquently writes that unschooled children learn from their “own curriculum [that] may lead him [or her] to people, places, books, even textbooks, but it is his [or her] inner curriculum that is leading him [her]” (p. 68). The ontological nature of learning is organic, fluid, and creative because it emerges from within children's wonderful talents, intrinsic motivation, and free will (Ricci, 2012).

According to Wolsing (2005), free will is about one's responsibility for her or his choices, decisions, and actions. Children's will is a creative force that inspires them to imagine, think, reflect, and construct interesting situations and playful activities that evoke meaningful and engaged learning experiences. Giesinger (2010) explains that will is connected with a broader concept of human freedom when individuals can realize themselves “as free agents [and]

the ultimate (causal) source of [their] actions” (p. 516). Willful learning initiates profound soulful experiences that emerge from within children’s intrinsic sense of wonder, fascination, compassion, respect, care, and love (Ricci, 2012; Ricci & Pritscher, 2015).

As the free cultural agents of their learning experiences and knowledge production, children embody and dwell in their unique soulful places of learning that can never be pre-planned by adults (Kopliku, 2014; Ricci, 2012). In this view, freedom is at the heart of learning experience. Petrovic and Rolstad (2016) suggested that “freedom and autonomy are required for development of the child as a person who is intellectually independent, capable of living and conducting him or herself in harmony with others” (p. 5). Therefore, these authentic places and learning spaces may be perceived as their engaged ways of *being with the world* (Freire, 2000/2004). Children create their imaginative experiences in these soulful places that give voices to and sustain their free agency of kindness, compassion, respect, care, and love (Ricci, 2012). Imagination is an ontological freedom of the mind and mindful awareness of the living contexts of daily life (Abram, 1996). Imagination is never an escape from the world but the actual way of “getting into the real world” (Holt, 1983, p. 283). As a social event, imagination is rooted in the intrinsic awareness of others, such as other people, animals, sentient beings, and the world at large (Dore & Lillard, 2015). Free imagination leads children to create an expanded consciousness of the self and others as the unfinished beings with/of the world (Freire, 2014). As cultural agents, children are more intuitive to the powers of the Great Nature and, therefore, are more creative in all their free activities of knowledge construction (Roerich, 1929/1990).

Freire (2014) explains that imagination is an embodied communication with the world that has emerged “from a characteristic of the vital experience that we call curiosity” (p. 9). Children’s curiosity leads them to discover and uncover, imagine and create the soulful worlds of

wonder in/through their learning places that are usually situated and embodied in a daily context of the household, community relations, and natural world (Kopliku, 2014). In this context, learning becomes a heart-felt process of self-actualization and realization,

centered on evoking human emotions and engaging learners in experiences that illicit a sense of wonder and appreciation for the sacred, as well as involving [children] in learning more about the self and how one is connected to a larger whole. (Burgis & Rendón, 2006, p. 1)

Imaginative learning emerges from children's soulful desire to experience the wonders of the living world (Miller, 2000; Ricci, 2012). Miller (2000) highlights that "soul education requires imagination, not force" (p. viii). The soulful learning experiences cannot be pre-determined because they are embodied in children's intrinsic curiosity, motivation, active imagination, and consciousness (Kopliku, 2014; Rolstad & Kesson, 2013). Ricci (2012) emphasizes that "we must allow for spaces where children's greatness and genius will thrive whatever their talents and interests may be" (p. 119). Soulful experiences are meaningful; they are more likely to "live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1925/1958, p. 9). Holt (1989) found that children can use an idea or/and experience only when they can own it in their minds and embody its various meanings in life; all other forms of learning are "surface, parrot learning" (p. 25). The experiential wisdom of free agency, intrinsic motivation, imagination, and will becomes the natural wisdom of compassionate mindfulness and understanding (Ricci, 2012; Roerich, 1929/1990).

Unschooling allows me to connect historical experiences with the ethical consciousness of respect, compassion, care, love, and trust (Ricci, 2012, 2015). With the help of unschooling, I will describe how the local people have imagined their learning/knowing experiences, created

their cultural meanings, and sustained their soulful compassionate places of being/becoming with the world. Unschooling gives me a culture lens to explore a historical context of children's learning experiences (Shugurova, 2015a). The key themes of unschooling resonate with some of the local Buddhist concepts, such as independence of consciousness, imagination, embodied mindful awareness, and soulful places that are rooted in the worldview of compassion and loving kindness (Roerich, 1929/1990).

Compassion forms a cultural basis of all learning experiences because of its heart-felt nature of understanding the self, others, and the world (Gyatso, 2011). All Buddhist themes of learning are about one's growth of compassionate mindfulness and deeds of loving kindness (Bai & Scutt, 2009; Nhat Hanh, 1997; Roerich, 1929/2004). Nhat Hanh (1997) says that "understanding is the essence of love. If you cannot understand, you cannot love. That is the message of the Buddha" (p. 2). When children experience compassionate understanding, they naturally embody their intrinsic Buddha nature (Rokotova, 1926/1971).

Unschooling helps me to understand, translate, interpret, and connect with the local generative themes as well as to contribute to a larger intercultural scholarship of unschooling (Augustine & Brahme, 2014; Pillalamarri, 2015; Ricci, 2015). In so doing, I hope to advance the intercultural understanding of how learning practices and experiences without schools outside of North America and Europe have historically created the local educational sustainability. By focusing on the concept of learning as living, I describe and explore the local learning practices as well as contribute to the critical intercultural scholarship of unschooling.

Bells, gongs, winds

deserts move years,

stepping on paths

covered in paved roads
 I feel land—being touched
 by the granite of walls
 built, imagined, real calls
 to dwell in, dwell in-between,
 stepping through
 valleys of time.

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 46)

Learning: Living Place and Local Knowledge

I engage a critical pedagogy of place because it helps me to situate my research in a place-based culturally responsive analysis of the local learning practices (Bowers, 2001; Gruenewald, 2003; Johnson, 2012; Ruitenberg, 2005). Johnson (2012) uses two definitions of place: “first, place as a way of understanding, learning, and knowing about the world; and second, as the embodied location of everyday struggle for meaning: political, cultural, and economic” (p. 830). I approach the local places as the particular cultural locations of people’s historical experiences and meanings (Bowers, 2008).

Places are the tangible and intangible multidimensional locations of the individual and collective experiences of being with the world (Gruenewald, 2003). Critical pedagogy of place does not have one pre-determined or fixed set of meanings because its analytical approaches draw on many social, geographic, cultural, and educational theories, including critical pedagogy, indigenous pedagogy, critical geography, contemplative aesthetic pedagogy, holistic education, and place-based pedagogy (Freire, 1968/1973a; Gruenewald, 2003; Johnson, 2012; marino, (Marino not capitalized?) 1997; Orr, 1994; Smith, 2012). I choose a perspective that is rooted in

the critical recognition of the local indigenous knowledge (Bowers, 2008; Cajete, 1994; Cruikshank, 2005; Freire, 1968/1973a; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2012). The culturally responsive concept of living place as embodied in the local knowledge helps me to form respectful interpretations and analysis of the findings (Walker Morris, 2013). According to Smith (2012), all researchers who work with indigenous peoples “need to have a critical conscience about ensuring that their activities connect in humanizing ways with indigenous communities” (p. 150). With the help of critical pedagogy of place, I situate my findings within my culturally sensitive context of personal reflections and impressions.

According to Bowers (2001), the critical pedagogy of place “encompasses an explicit understanding of relationships and processes, an embodied knowledge of community relations and the ecology of place” (p. 152). The local knowledge has historically been preserved and constructed by the popular folklore, such as diverse legends, sacred paintings, poetic narratives, and stories that have formed a communal identity of the people and their living places (Devkota, 2013; Ramble, 2002; Shugurova, 2009). The local knowledge may further be conceptualized as a *conjuncture* of a cultural synthesis that is about “relations and their [collective] history, and of space-time frames” (marino, 1997, p. 11). For example, Devkota (2013) observed that the villagers refer to the Himalayas as the conjunctural living knowledge about/with the Buddhas and the sacred teachings of more than the human beings. Hence, all local ways of natural learning have historically been connected with a conjunctural *place-consciousness* (Greenwood, 2008; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008).

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) note that a “place-consciousness must also include consciousness of the historical memory of a place, and the traditions that emerged there, have been disrupted, or conserved” (p. xxi). During the research, I have rendered the historical

significance of diverse local places within the lived context of people's learning experiences (Cruikshank, 2005; marino, 1997). Places communicate with people in multiple ways, including intuition, emotions, creative imagination, joy, meditation, and arts (Abram, 1996; Gruenewald, 2003). Furthermore, places are alive with the agency, will, and powers of the Great Natures or *Dzogs pa* (Rossi, 1999) that animate and sustain the historical significance of people's experiences and conjunctural cultural wisdom (Bowers, 2008; Cruikshank, 2005; Gruenewald, 2003; Roerich, 1929/2004). Place-consciousness shapes my epistemology, ontology, and axiology with the heart-felt respect and care for the people's lived contexts of daily life (Shugurova, 2015a). My attention to the daily context is inspired by the Buddha's approach not to avoid life but to participate and experience its daily activities (Rokotova, 1926/1971).

Drawing on Freire's (1968/1973a) concept of conscientization as "the *development* [emphasis in original] of the awakening of critical awareness" (p. 19), Gruenewald (2003) says that a place-conscious research creates a situational context of *conscientization*. Conscientization allows me to connect with the historical realities and, even, take action against oppression (Smith, 2012). My action is in learning from the local experiences of learning and understanding their historical significance for educational sustainability. For Ball and Lai (2006) place-conscious conscientization informs their data collection and representation because it includes a multiplicity of the "artifacts and performances of local cultural production" (p. 261). Hence, I connect with the stories of the interviewees as the conjunctural places of learning through cultural production. Cultural production is a creative and critical context of the interviewees' experiences and their stories about their childhood and learning (Kincheloe, 2006). During the data collection and analysis, the cultural production was mainly performed through my

impressionist art and poems that helped me to deepen my situated reflections on the historical significance of place-consciousness in people's lives.

The place-conscious cultural production is my conscientization that “creates new knowledge, discovered through dialogue, and experienced in and with the world” (Freire, 1998, pp. 1-2). For example, Cruikshank (2005) invites her readers to “listen for stories” instead of a conventional habit of “listening to them” (p. 76). In doing so, she represents the recorded stories of her participants with a focus on their place-based (i.e., conjunctural) meanings (Cruikshank, 2005). The emphasis on the conjunctural context has helped me to highlight the critical agency of “both objective and subjective (constructionist, intuitive) ways of knowing [and learning]” (marino, 1997, p. 13). I invite my readers to dwell within these re-created conjunctures of historical experiences and to become learners from their situated local contexts. I have been listening *for* the stories (Cruikshank, 2005) and learning about natural learning from the cultural–historical place-based conjunctures of people's lived experience (Shugurova, 2015a).

Living voices on paper
are dancing together
Are they dancing in time
no, *on* moments, woven
through deep sounds of heart
living in truthful echoes
of glacial paths.

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 53)



Figure 2.5. A Tibetan village in Utsang. Inspired by a photo (#405088) in the Nicholas Roerich Archival Collection in New York. Oil on canvas. Summer 2016.

OM MANI PADME HUM

Chapter 3 Methodology

...getting messy, engaging, being involved... ~ Patti Lather

Getting my pen ready,

Writing the scenes:

Mountains, moons, rivers

Seeing the unseen

Drawing the stories on pages

Reading the seabuckthorn hills

Listening self, silences, voices, spaces

memories in-between

histories, photos, and places



Figure 3.1. I am analyzing data. Inspired by an archival photo (#403101), Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Oil on canvas. October 2016.

My Naturalistic Inquiry

My methodology reflects my research paradigm and its theoretical approaches. Leavy (2009) states that a research methodology needs to be linked with the research purpose in order to “facilitate research objectives and communicate research findings” (p. 16). My research purpose is to give voices to the people and to learn from their historical learning experiences. In so doing, I have primarily been oriented toward oral histories as a space of learning from the multiple (and a multiplicity of) voices about the subjective historical experiences (Janesick, 2010; Leavy, 2011). Oral history, as a naturalistic methodology, emerged in 1948 with Allan Nevins’s research on American memoirs of all historically significant people in the USA (Leavy, 2011). Currently, the oral history method is prominent in various qualitative studies, such as educational research, feminist research, cultural studies, and social sciences (Crothers, 2002; Huerta & Flemmer, 2000; Leavy, 2011). Generally, the oral history method is part of a naturalistic inquiry that is, mainly, focused on interviews and conversations with a purpose to give voices to participants’ views and perspectives (Leavy, 2011, p. 3). Often oral history involves a primary data collection; yet it may also rely on a pre-existing archival (i.e., digital or physical) database (High, 2010; Leavy, 2011). Based on my research purpose, I decided to engage the pre-existing oral histories of Tibet Oral History Project (278 transcripts and audio oral histories) as my naturalistic inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Specifically, I engage the oral histories as the individual and collective voices that I further render through the naturalistic inquiry of a/r/tography.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), naturalistic inquiry is always situated in a particular context that I need to understand, represent, and/or re-create in my methodological practices. I define this context as a historical monologue that takes time and place in between the

oral histories and my impressions. Oral history is one of the naturalistic inquiries that is also often engaged for the purposes of understanding a historical *process* and not a particular event (Leavy, 2011). As a process, my research methodology is a *living inquiry* (Irwin, 2004) that doesn't follow a linear approach to data collection/analysis/synthesis and representation; the living inquiry is "an artistic encounter, where the process of meaning making and being are inextricably connected to an awareness and understanding of art" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). I have experienced these encounters with the oral histories through my art and poetry, prose and meditation.

It is important to note that the digital environment of pre-existing oral histories has many advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages are primarily in the context of access to diverse voices as evidence, and voices as communities (High, 2010). Voice as evidence is about the participants' lived experience that they choose to narrate in their own words and expressions. Voice as a community reflects the collective multiplicity of the participants' points of view about their shared experience at a particular historical context (Trower, 2011). Specifically, oral histories focus on voice and giving voice (i.e., validating and acknowledging) experiences and subjectivities (i.e., worldviews, ideas, self-determined identities) of the participants (Leavy, 2011). Janesick (2014) explains that with the help of oral histories "we acknowledge subjectivity and celebrate it in order to reach new understanding of someone's lived experience. This in turn helps us to make more sense of the human condition" (p. 305). In this view, the disadvantages of engaging the pre-existing oral histories are mainly in the lack of direct contact with the participants for the purposes of member check and collaborative interpretation (High, 2010). Pre-existing oral histories are, usually, rendered through an analytical method and/or an impressionist method (Leavy, 2011). I discuss these approaches in my data analysis section of this chapter. In

order to respect the historical and cultural arts-based context of the local communities, I have decided to immerse myself in the oral histories with the help of the visual and textual art in order to fully engage my researcher's responsibility as an a/r/tographer.

Why Have I Chosen A/r/tography?

Many scholars describe the Tibetan culture as embodied in diverse artistic practices, such as the Buddhist spiritual performances, drawings, paintings, textile, and poetry (Klein, 2001; Singh, 1985; Ramble, 2002; Roerich, 1929/1990; Trouveroy, 2003). My naturalistic inquiry emerges from within my sense of respectful connectedness with the artistic local contexts of people's lives. As I indicated in my introduction, a/r/tography is my culturally responsive naturalistic methodology that is rooted in the pre-existing oral histories (Bickel et al., 2011; Irwin, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Patton, 2002; Sameshima et al., 2009). As an a/r/tographer, I immerse myself in all naturalistic dialogic situations, conjuncture, and contexts that emerge throughout the research process (Shugurova, 2015a). In so doing, I have also become a witness of the historical experiences (McLeod, 2008; Passerini, 1991; Prendergast, 2015; Walsh & Bai, 2015; Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015). The concept of witness has been engaged in arts-based methodologies in multiple ways, including compassionate being with others (Walsh et al., 2015) and witness consciousness (Dunlop, 2004; Walsh & Bai, 2015). For example, Dunlop (2004) wrote, "The artist-researcher bears witness, as someone who sees and knows by personal and aesthetic experience, through artistic production, as well as through the act of giving evidence" (p. 150). I witness people's stories that unfold in their voices and silences of these archives. These moments of witnessing presence evoke emotional connections, intuitive knowledge, and create mutual understanding within the self and with others (Walsh & Bai, 2015).

As a witness a/r/tographer, I embody my research process and its unfolding (re)creations

of the shared knowledge and historical wisdom. The intercultural poesis allows me to contemplate and “to hold with great gentleness the sacredness of the world of creating” (Snowber & Bickel, 2015, p. 67). The emergent *theoria* becomes a dynamic context of impressions and reflections that invite the readers to dwell in new meanings and understandings. Hence, I have connected with the oral histories “as the creative material *in* [emphasis in original] arts practice” (Sandino, 2013, p. 1). My *theoria* has emerged from my creative engagement with the literature, theoretical framework, visual archives, and oral histories. Hence, my *a/r/tography* helps me to interweave the research purpose, questions, and paradigm because it draws on diverse theories such as critical pedagogy of place and unschooling (Burns, 2004; Codack, 2010; Hannigan, 2012; Irwin et al., 2006; Shugurova, 2015a).

What Is A/r/tography?

A/r/tography was developed on the basis of a post-structural philosophy of rhizomes (Delueze & Guattari, 1987; Irwin, 2004; Irwin et al., 2006). Delueze and Guattari (1987) suggested that “a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing” (p. 25). Rhizome, as a metaphor of connection, helps me to imagine, create, and experience relational and non-hierarchical research situations of understanding with the participants and their living places (Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Irwin et al. (2006) found that “rhizomes are interstitial spaces between thinking and materiality” (p. 71). Rhizomatic understandings are embodied in my encounters with the oral histories, thick descriptions, poetic renderings of archives, impressionist paintings, and reflective journal that shape my *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis* (Springgay et al., 2005). Rhizomatic relations are rooted in my compassionate understanding of the people’s histories.

The concept of rhizomes may be compared with the local Buddhist worldview of

compassionate interbeing and dharma (Bai & Scutt, 2009; Rokotova, 1926/1971). Rokotova (1926/1971) wrote that “all that exists is but part of an eternally unfolding development—dharmas appear one moment, in order to change in the next” (p. 43). The recognition and awareness of the dharmas helps me to cultivate compassionate connectedness with unknown people and their communities during the research and beyond its processes. Trungpa (2005) suggested that one’s compassionate dharma is a realization that “we *are* this space, we are *one* with it, with *vidya* [emphasis in original], intelligence and openness” (p. 85). I have attuned with the consciousness of the dharma during all research stages because this connected awareness helped me to recognize and acknowledge different cultural historical realities “in a way that transcends [my] time and space” (Walsh & Bai, 2015, p. 28). Interbeing is the compassionate ontology (a way of being) that respects all peoples, animals, plants, places, gods, and Buddhas as a manifestation of the universal dharmas (Nhat Hanh, 2009; Novick, 2012; Shugurova, 2015a). Throughout my research, I have meditated on the embodiment of compassion, dharma, and interbeing.

My a/r/tographic interbeing with the people may be defined as “the capacity and ability to sense and feel everything in terms of the bond” (Bai, Scott, & Donald, 2009, p. 324). In this context, my epistemology, ontology, and axiology are interconnected in the mutual sense of connectedness that is “porous, relational, moving beyond what is solid and individualistic; it includes listening and viewing and calls us to attend to both self and other with respect, compassion, and care” (Walsh et al., 2015, p. 5). These bonds of meanings have been embodied in the different poetic places of my encounters with the histories. In fact, I reflect on this place-based axiology/ontology/epistemology through art (Shugurova, 2009, 2014, 2015a). Walsh and Bai (2015) describe the place-conscious process as a spiritual *being with* the self through which

“we create generous spaces for the other to be-with-what-is” (p. 26). Specifically, my methodological place of interbeing “invites us to actively, subjectively, and wholly engage with our work and the work of others from within” (Leavy, 2012, p. 6). That is why my naturalistic design shapes and is shaped by my a/r/tographic interbeing that is mainly about my awareness and understanding of people’s stories.

Oral History Interviewees

My sampling is purposeful because I search for the “information rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). There are 278 (67 women, 211 men) oral history interviewees in the Tibet Oral History Project archive. I have read all of them and have decided to focus on those oral histories that, specifically, represent the individual and collective historical context of children’s learning experiences without schools. I have chosen 30 interviews that are gender equal: 15 women and 15 men. A/r/tography doesn’t have a pre-determined requirement for research participants; participants may include one (i.e., author) individual to 68 people (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). I have decided to give voices to the women and men on an equal basis in order to sustain and preserve the Tibetan cultural tradition that values gender equality (e.g., equal opportunity of men and women in social life) that was emphasized by some of the interviewees. These interviews help me to focus on the rich details of the collective experience during the precolonial time. I render these collective multiple-voiced experiences through my interpretive lyric and found poems with a particular attention to their own (exact) words and expressions (Leavy, 2015; Richardson, 1992). This lyric poetic process is focused on my “moments of emotion and less concerned with relaying a story per se” (Leavy, 2015, p. 80). This process has allowed me to develop the personal connection with the collective experiences in a broader context.

Furthermore, I decided to focus on the individual experience as the unique subjective contexts that had allowed me to answer my questions and to learn from both the collective and individual experiences. In particular, the situated context gives voice to four individual participants: two women and two men (Kunchok Tashi (alias), Tsering Chonphel, Dawa Dolma, and Cho Lhamo). These people spoke about their childhood experience in the precolonial time in detail. My decision to situate the individual stories within the collective oral histories was inspired by Prendergast (2015) and her approach to the found poems that she had created from literature: she refers to this process as organic because it was based on her feelings and impressions, rather than on a rational analysis of meaning:

My process unfolded organically in that I began highlighting lines, phrases, or stanzas that had some kind of resonance or made an impression on me as I read. ... Finally, after finishing this highlighting process that attended to my catch, I knew exactly how to proceed. I would craft found poems from the excerpts that attempt to illustrate the new voice forms I had caught in this inquiry. (p. 683)

Likewise, I have approached the collective oral histories for the purposes of developing connections with them and immersing myself in their historical processes (e.g., impressions, meanings, subjectivities) with the help of the found poetic voices. In my situated individual approach, I have tried to contextualize the lived experiences of the individual women and men with honour to their memories and as their witness. Leavy and Scotti (2017) define contextualized research experiences as the *expression of emotions* that “invite you [the readers] to reflect on their [participants’] experiences, your own, and perhaps will foster empathy across similarities and differences” (p. 1). Hence, the situated voices are at the centre of my findings that allow the readers to enter their lives and to experience their historical realities through the

living inquiry of poetics and visual art. In so doing, we as the readers of these histories become active witnesses “as witnesses standing beside participants in their search for justice, recognition, healing, a better life” (Prendergast, 2015, p. 683). Overall, I hope to render the importance of people’s experiences with compassion, kindness, and love.

Data Collection

My data collection consists of a/r/tographic renderings such as poetic journal reflections, thick descriptions, and impressionist paintings (Bickel, 2010; Bowers, 2008; Irwin et al., 2006; Leavy, 2015; Richardson, 1992; Savi-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014; Shugurova, 2015a; Springgay et al., 2008). It is important to highlight that renderings are not instrumental methods but conceptual processes (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). The renderings help me to understand a particular situated context of people’s experiences through a creative and anti-oppressive process of coming to know the self, others, and living places (Springgay et al., 2005). Irwin and Springgay (2008) outline six a/r/tographic renderings that give me a lens to collect, analyze, interpret, and represent data: contiguity (art and graphy), living inquiry, openings, metaphor and metonymy (new connections), reverberations (new awareness), and excess (beyond normal) (pp. xxvii–xxxi). These renderings relate to my central research problem because they help me to describe and explore the local learning experiences in the historical complexity of people’s daily life (Shugurova, 2015a).

Specifically, the data collection process included the following stages: (a) reading comprehension of all transcripts of the Tibet Oral History Project; (b) reflective and lyric poetic journal writing; (c) citing (in my poetic journal) the relevant excerpts that specifically talk about childhood experiences; (d) creating thick descriptions (visual and textual) on the basis of archives and oral histories; and (e) poetic lyric interpretations and representations of the chosen

excerpts from the Tibet Oral History Project (Glesne, 1997; Leavy, 2015; Richardson, 1992). All meanings and understandings have emanated from within the poetic reflective and artful place of respect and care for the historical experiences and their situated individual renderings.

Poetic Reflections

At the beginning of my data collection, I rendered the local *place-consciousness* through my living inquiry, contiguity, and reverberations in order to become cognizant of “the rooted [the lived] experience of people in their total environments including the ecological” (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. xxi). I began with my subjective awareness of the historical learning sites and situated learning experiences with the help of my poetic reflective journal, where I recorded my found poems, lyric poetic impressions, and prosaic interpretations of the selected excerpts/citations from the Tibet Oral History Project. The poetic reflections have helped me to connect with the oral histories (audio/video/transcripts) that could not necessarily be interpreted only through prose (Leavy, 2011; Richardson, 1992).

Leggo et al. (2011) found that a/r/tographic poetic reflections have a potential to “address intricate and integral experiences that can be too readily ignored or silenced or misrepresented” (p. 253). I began with my found poems that I have rendered with the help of the transcripts. In this process, I have focused mainly on the people’s exact voices and remained “chronologically and linguistically faithful to the transcript” (Glesne, 1997, p. 207). I have highlighted the key expressions about their childhood and placed the found poems in the oral history as a whole to see and feel how my found poems embody the original voices. Then I have tried to meditate on these poems and the generative reading *experience* (Prendergast, 2006) as I read them individually and collectively. The process of experiencing the poetics of transcripts has allowed me to “enter a space of intuitive imagination and disappear in another’s words” (Glesne, 2010,

p. 36). From within this space, I have juxtaposed the embodied textual representation of the found poems and my experiential impressions of them.

In my poetic reflections, I became a learner of and from the people's stories. With the help of my poetics (including the poetics of the visual art), I have systematically reflected on my subjective epistemology and remained conscious of new understandings and unknown situated meanings (Peshkin, 1988). Poetic reflective notes have created an excess that allowed me to embrace different cultural meanings and dwell within these creative emotional ways of knowing, unknowing, learning, and unlearning (Leggo, 2006).

Thick Descriptions

In addition to poetic reflections, I have used thick descriptions (Bowers, 2008; Geertz, 1973) as my contiguity in order to explore some of the historical learning places/spaces and their meanings in children's learning experiences. Through the contiguity, I was able to see, understand, and present the complex ideas that were interconnected with one another. According to Irwin and Springgay (2008), one of the ways to understand contiguity is to think about it as "found in the act of double imaging between art and graphy that is between the art form and writing with, in, or about the phenomenon" (p. 179). Therefore, the contiguity has been expressed primarily through my thick descriptions that are the embodiments of art and my writing about the local pathways of natural learning. Specifically, I engage contiguity as a reflexive way of learning from the individual and collective oral histories.

Let me pause for a moment and contextualize the term "thick descriptions" and its meanings. Even though thick descriptions are mainly used in ethnography (Clifford, 1990; Fetterman, 2010; Geertz, 1973), Carter (2014) applies them in a/r/tography. For Geertz (1973), thick descriptions "bring us into touch with the lives of strangers" (p. 317). The purpose of thick

descriptions is in interpretation and not in the discovery of meanings (Geertz, 1973). Poetic ethnographers often write novel-like thick descriptions and keep ongoing field journals that provide a detailed textual interpretation of diverse situational meanings and experiences (Clifford, 1990; Fetterman, 2010; Geertz, 1973). According to Fetterman (2010), thick descriptions “aim to convey the feel and the facts of an observed event” (p. 125). The purpose of thick descriptions is to provide a detailed situated account that is rooted in the data (Leavy, 2015).

My a/r/tographic thick descriptions may be conceptualized as rhizomatic because they direct readers “attention to the in-between where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of languages, images, materials, and situations” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xix). These in-between spaces of contiguity have helped me to recognize and acknowledge the diverse macro- and micro-relations in the multiple sites (e.g., learning spaces and learning activities) within a particular place-based context (Leavy, 2013; Wolcott, 2008). Leavy (2013) asserts that thick descriptions connect a micro analysis such as one’s subjective experiences with a macro level such as “the sociohistorical contexts that shape their experiences and in which their lives play out” (p. 13). A/r/tographic thick descriptions have helped me to become cognizant of the micro- and macro-interplay that the participants had spoken about in their oral histories. Specifically, thick descriptions of the local historical places of learning help me to reconstruct the temporal and spatial scenes that shape and are being shaped by the oral histories.

In particular, I have focused my descriptions on the particular details that are a part of the learning spaces/places, such as household sites, community gardens, agricultural fields, and sacred grounds (Carter, 2014). Leavy (2013) found that thick descriptions may *carve* new ways of seeing “the complex realities of others that promote understanding and connection” (p. 19). I have situated my findings in the thick descriptions of the historical learning sites and their lived

experiences. Specifically, the local metaphors have helped me to connect with these cultural places and spaces of learning because metaphors usually “constitute basic schemes by which people conceptualize their experience and the external world” (Gibbs, 1994, p. 1). With my thick descriptions, I became mindful of my “direct encounters with [the visual photographic] artifacts” (Biggs & Büchler, 2012, p. 35). These artifacts include tangible/intangible daily contexts that are a part of the local knowledge and its living places of learning (Roerich, 1929/1990). Thick descriptions have helped me to explore the research problem through the visual and textual novel-like renderings that were partially situated in my creative readings of the archives (Chalmers, 2004) and my exploratory poetic journal (Shugurova, 2014).

Impressionist Paintings

This method is inspired by other a/r/tographers as a creative process that allows me to render diverse lived experiences from multiple perspectives and different conceptual lenses (Chalmers, 2004; Irwin, 2004; Leavy, 2015). The method consists of my subjective interpretations of various historical learning experiences through the visual medium of acrylic, oil, pastel and canvas/paper. Through my impressionistic and expressionistic paintings, I have represented the historical scenes of learning. I hope the readers will be able to observe the details of children's everyday life as well as to connect with the children's learning experiences with the help of the creative interplay of colour, light, texture, and overall imagery. With my paintings, I aim to demonstrate my respect for the arts-based Tibetan cultural heritage and sustain the artful authenticity (i.e., trustworthiness) within the research process (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bickel et al., 2011; Bresler, 2006; Leavy, 2015).

Furthermore, I have also analyzed the publicly available photographs found in the Digital Collection of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. I have created some of the paintings on

the basis of this analysis. In addition, I have found my inspirations for the impressionist paintings in the selected excerpts of the transcripts and videos from the Tibet Oral History Project, such as this one:

When one comes out [of the house] there are mountains all around. The mountains are covered in forests; there are thangshing “pine,” dhabshing “silver fir,” bhushing and different kind of trees. Then there are pastures and large rivers flowing close to the village. (Dawa Tsering, 2014, p. 3)

I have meditated on these descriptions and created my impressions of the historical learning places and spaces as well as tried to establish the emotional connection with the cultural contexts of people’s lived experience.

Data Analysis

In a/r/tography, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation are not discrete and separated research acts but rhizomatic relations and resonances between the self, others, and living places (Irwin et al., 2006; Walsh & Bai, 2015). Resonances are the subtle experiences that arise within one’s emotional depths and subjective sensations through attunement within the self (Loizzo, 2012; Siegel, 2010). Siegel (2010) explains that attunement is “how we focus our attention on others and take their essence into our inner world. We can be attuned to nature, focusing in on the ways the breeze brushes the upper limbs of the trees” (p. 34). Basically, attunement is the intrinsic awareness and heart-felt experience of diverse meanings with openness, curiosity, acceptance and love (Loizzo, 2012, p. xv). Resonances are contiguous because they allow my “deeper understandings to emerge with time” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 903). The resonances help me to deepen my theoretical approaches with the help of my emergent and generative themes. I attend to resonances with the help of my meditative

memos (Walsh & Bai, 2015) from the preliminary reading of all the oral histories. Memos are my reflections and reactions that provide an account of diverse learning situations that have emerged from the data. Leavy (2014) suggested developing “a separate memo for each research question” (p. 620). In this view, my data analysis and interpretation are mutually interconnected processes that evoke enhanced understanding and promote reflection (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Throughout my analysis, I focused on the contiguity in the combination of visual and written doubling processes as “the movement between art and graphy [through which] research becomes a lived endeavor” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900). My contiguity involves a juxtaposition of archival photographs and poetic interpretations of the interviews (Irwin et al., 2006). These juxtapositions create an excess as “an ongoing practice concerned not with inserting facts and figures and images and representations into language but with creating an opening where [my] control and regulation disappears” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 907). The excess makes new possibilities for reciprocity by opening the unexpected spaces of creative meanings with the help of the generative metaphors and metonymy (Biggs & Büchler, 2012; Irwin & Springgay, 2008).

During my explorations of the generative themes (inductively conceptualized in the situated context of the four oral histories and with recognition of a broader collective multiple-voiced poetic background), I have focused mainly on the *processes* (Charmaz, 2014; Leavy, 2011) of creative meanings and understandings. The focus of my process-based analysis was on action that I conceptualized through gerunds (Charmaz, 2014). A/r/tographers use this particular method in order to conceptualize the data in a culturally responsive framework (Irwin et al., 2006). These gerunds reside in between reflections and meditations in “an interstitial space, open and vulnerable where meaning and understanding dwell” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xx). The

process of analysis has been rhizomatic. In this view, I began to understand not only what learning meant and how learning had been (or hadn't been) practiced, but to analyze why it was so (Charmaz, 2014). Looking for the processes of the situated (i.e., both the individual and collective) meanings in the transcripts and video interviews, I could better connect with the historical context (e.g., reasons and understandings) of the people's lived experience. I started my analysis *for* these generative processes by immersing myself in these historical encounters and rhizomatic connections through art and poetics. As I indicate above, I studied all individual interviews that specifically identified and shared how the participants had learnt naturally in their home villages, where schools were never built. My intention was to choose the rich content that is explicitly about their childhood experience (ages 5–14). Charmaz (2006) found that the rich data provide “a solid material for building a significant analysis. Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and action, as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (p. 14). In this context, I have gathered all the relevant excerpts in one file and written reflections in my journal.

Further, I have applied a HyperRESEARCH 2.8 software as an instrument for my juxtapositions of the audio, video, visual, and textual documents. The software has enhanced my data analysis with a focus on multiple meanings and multilingual interpretations of the interviews, reflections, and thick descriptions (Hesse-Biber & Crofts, 2008). The multi-media juxtapositions have allowed me to understand “what is seen and known and what is not seen and known” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx). I could, specifically, delve into the interplay between the seen and known through paintings. Within this process of understanding multiple realities and *situated* meanings, a *collective reflexivity* has emerged that “entails simultaneously being receptive to new cultural domains of understanding” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 124). Sinner et al. (2006)

found that a/r/tographic situated meanings did not provide an enclosure but allowed the readers to dwell within their emergent and generative understandings. During the analysis, I aimed to recreate the rich context where I could reflect on the participants' feelings and emotions. I listened to the videos and re-read the excerpts. I wrote the found poems from the excerpts. I have placed all of the poems and images, thick descriptions and memo, paintings and sketches in a montage-like (Leavy, 2010) rhizome in my studio (e.g., an art installation with excerpts and poetic reflections) in order to physically situate myself amidst these unique heart-felt experiences that resonated in my mind, body, soul, and spirit. I felt as though I was blessed by the Buddha because I was invited to become a guest in the people's lives and histories. I felt blissful to render this experience with attention to the moments of personal connection and meaning.

Data Interpretation

As I indicate above, I perceive my data collection, analysis, and interpretation as contiguous processes and practices. Specifically, I have analyzed the oral histories with the help of reflective poetic writing from/as memos. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) discuss the importance of memo as a process that lets the data speak through the multiple conversational meanings. In doing so, I have identified some of the emergent codes and their generative themes (Freire, 1973b). I have used a *tri-voiced poetic method* (Leavy, 2010) to synthesize the excerpts. Leavy (2010) says that "during my final immersion in the data I created poems that merge the transcript data, my own voice, and the literature review" (p. 181). First, I transformed "all audible and visual data into written [i.e., poetic and prosaic] form" (Bailey, 2008, p. 128). Second, I identified the codes through my memos and reflections in order to categorize them. Leavy (2010) suggested using the *thematic codes* that express an essence of meanings in one word. Glesne (1997) found that these thematic codes are "about the essence conveyed, the hues,

the textures” that can be connected with each other in an “abstract representation” (p. 206). I have rendered my generative themes through the expanded poetic transcriptions (Glesne, 1997; Leavy, 2010; Prendergast, 2009; Richardson, 1992).

In my poetic reflections, I privilege and centre the voices of my participants (Glesne, 2010; Prendergast, 2009; Richardson, 1992). Leggo et al. (2011) found that their poetic transcriptions “enlarge the portrayals of learning and move away from our increasingly dulled precepts of traditional research, so often predictable in form, content, and style of information” (p. 249). The poetic data analysis and interpretation processes also respond and relate to/with the local ways of knowing through poetry and cultural place as a means to achieve the personal and collective interbeing, the Buddha Nature (Klein, 2001; Roerich, 1929/1990).

Data Representation

In a/r/tography, data representation cannot be separated from the research process as a whole (Bickel et al., 2011; MacPherson, 2000; Springgay, 2008). Springgay (2008) found that “in a/r/tography representation cannot be seen as the translation of experience. Instead a/r/tographical research as living inquiry constructs the very materiality it attempts to represent” (p. 37). My representations include a synthesis of text and image, story and dialogue, poem and painting within a traditional dissertation format.

Artful Authenticity and Trustworthiness

My ethical considerations are embodied within my research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008). I follow an institutional framework of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2014) that emphasizes “respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice” (p. 6). Bresler (2006) adds the importance

of “caring for individual participants and for the setting, portraying them with complexity and dignity” (p. 65). I also adhere to all codes of the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board (NUREB). I obtained a certificate of the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans as a part of my Doctorate Seminar (Shugurova, 2014).

The research embodies the methodological merits of trustworthiness and artful authenticity (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bickel et al., 2011; Leavy, 2015). Springgay (2008) says “instead of requiring logical certainty and the guarantee of universal validity a/r/tography is embedded in imagination and conjecture—openings that seek to provoke and generate meaning” (p. 41). I choose a term “trustworthiness” instead of “validity” because validity is mainly associated with quantitative and mixed methodologies (Denzin, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Some critical researchers completely reject the term “validity” in qualitative inquiry, because it does not acknowledge the significance of emotional experiences and other intersubjective renderings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998).

Trustworthiness occurs when “the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 209). I use a non-foundational approach to achieving the transformational trustworthiness rather than a quasi-foundational transactional trustworthiness (Denzin, 2011; Leavy, 2015).

The transactional process is based on an iterative communication between a researcher and participants in order to ensure a methodological consistency, analytical coherency and theoretical accuracy (Brinkmann, Jackobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014; Denzin, 2011). The transformational trustworthiness is also a collaborative process that is characterized not only by an analytical coherency but also “a moral frame, implementing an ethic, rooted in the concept of care, love, and kindness” (Denzin, 2011 p. 646). The transformational context deepens my

a/r/tistic renderings (Rolling, 2010). My strategy to achieve transformational trustworthiness has been grounded in my reflective journal of poetic meditations and contemplations.

I have also tried to establish transformational trustworthiness with the help of an artful authenticity that was a respectful portrayal of my participants in all their cultural complexities (Bresler, 2006; Leavy, 2015). Leavy (2015) explains that this may be achieved through “intertwining of authenticity and artfulness [that] comes out in the audience experience” (p. 279). The artful authenticity embodies the research process as the poetic interbeing with the local people (Leggo et al., 2011). A/r/tistic rigor is achieved through my reflexive analysis of new meanings (Irwin, 2008). Moreover, I have tried to avoid generalizations and to care for the individual and collective complexities of the participants.

Like Benjamin’s “free-floating montage,”
pieces, fragments are gathering in thoughts
becoming through meanings, revealing, changing,
evolving

Feeling tension, I step into transcripts,
dimensions, perspectives, places,
opening up myself to diversity, voices,
evolving

Listening to stances, passages, readings,
finding a shared ground for contemplation
being embodied in senses, intuitive Self,
evolving

through, with, in, within, the unfolding Silence

Between, “free-floating” histories,

living with being, *here, there,*

evolving

Not like Benjamin in “montage”

a mosaic of Moments

weaving, knitting, spinning, visiting

near by living memories, yarns of meanings

Yearning

evolving

other, others, various meanings are

Potentials

in tensions,

possibilities, momentums

of new lenses, deeper senses

evolving from heart

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 7)

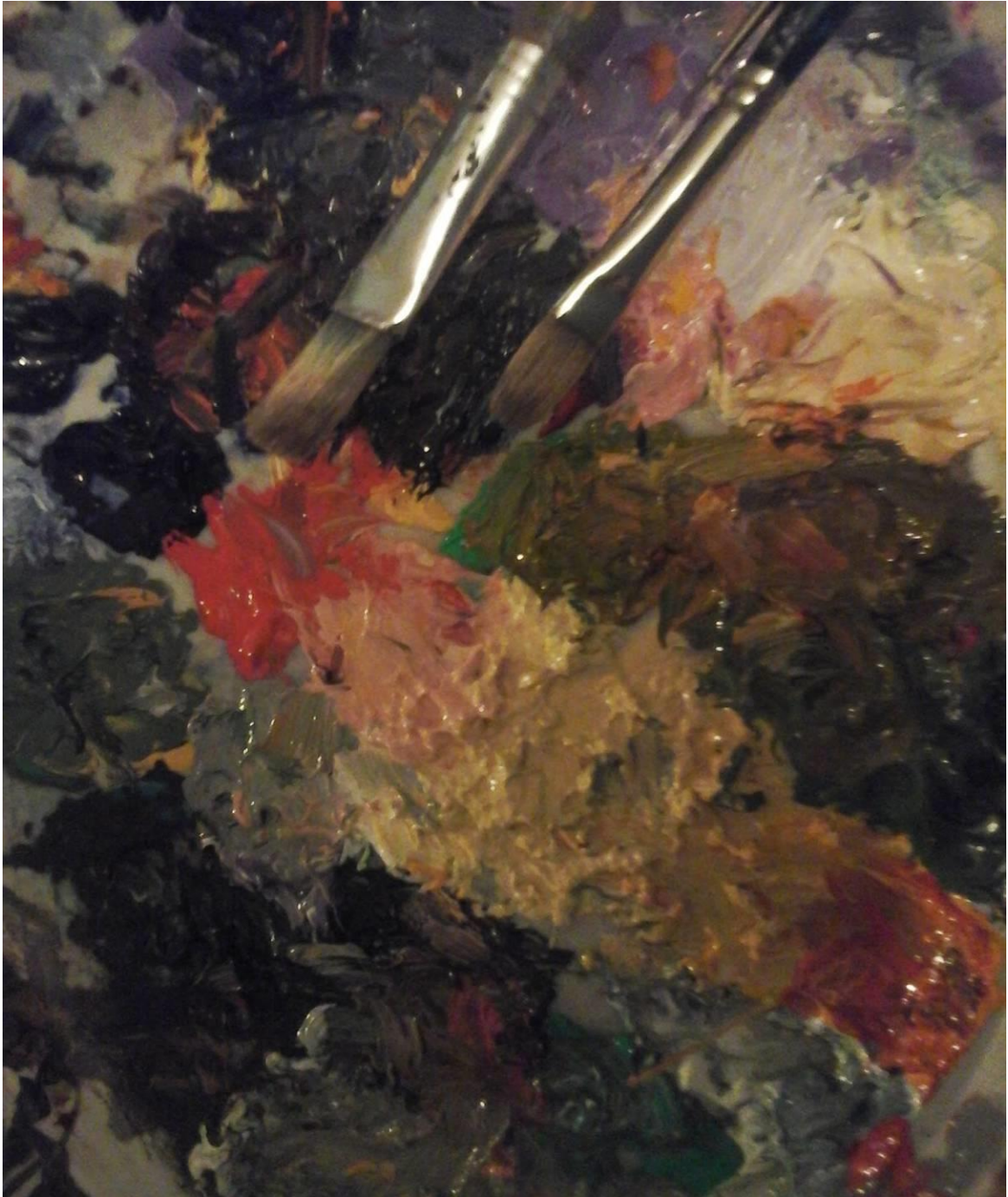


Figure 3.6. My oil paints and brushes.

OM MANI PADME HUM

Chapter 4 Understandings/Findings

So our stories will be told, remembered...

Our histories will be honored. ~ Tibet Oral History interviewees.

A memory of a memory, a memory that is possible because it evokes another memory. ...

We can remember only thanks to the fact that somebody has remembered before us, that other people in the past have challenged death and terror on the basis of remembering. ~ Luisa Passerini, 2009.

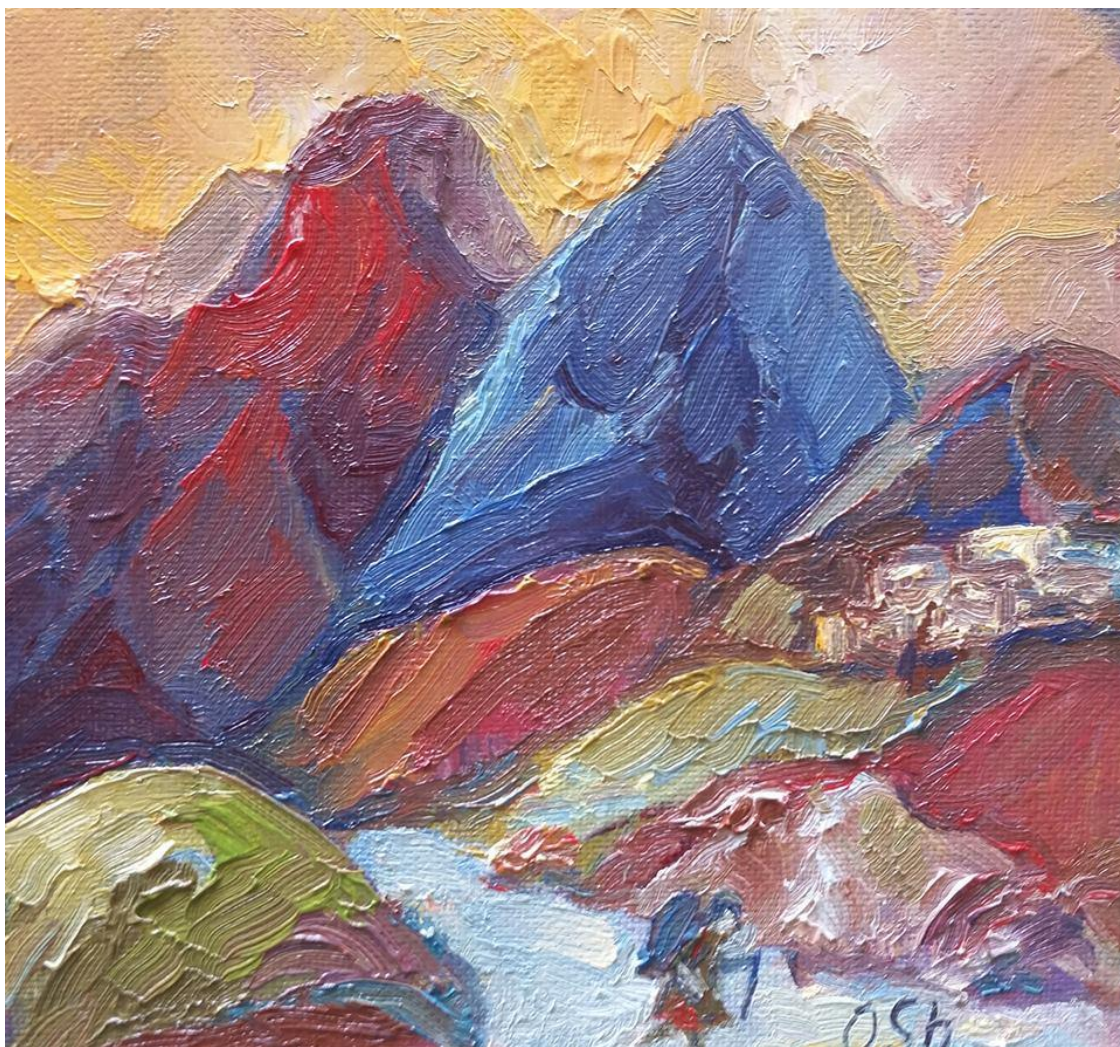


Figure 4.1. Arts-based journey through the trans-Himalayan Tibetan villages (Shugurova, 2015c).

In this chapter, I discuss my findings and interpretations that have emerged from the a/r/tographic inquiry. I have gathered, analyzed, and represented the findings through a creative process such as poetic writing, oil impressionist paintings, thick descriptions, and photography. Irwin and Springgay (2008) found that a/r/tographic findings are not the mere representations of objective information but the multi-layered contexts of new meanings and reflective understandings. The findings are rhizomatic as they embody and reflect my a/r/tographic stance as a learner (Deleuze, 1968/1994; Springgay, 2008). Springgay (2008) wrote that “a rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum” (p. 7). This dynamic momentum has emerged from my artistic interpretation of the collective and individual oral histories and visual archives. What follows is a brief description of my organizational rationale and a/r/tographic representation of the findings.

The organization fully reflects my research paradigm through which I purposefully seek to listen to the collective and individual voices of the elders and to learn from their situated living histories about learning before the advent of compulsory colonial schooling. I have organized my findings/understandings (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) around the main research questions. I approach the renderings as the heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) through which I represent the individual and collective voices. According to Bakhtin (1981), a heteroglossia is a multiplicity of voices including “street songs, folksayings, anecdotes” (p. 273). The oral histories represent the local heteroglossia that has allowed me to learn from these living memories. Sameshima et al. (2009) wrote that a heteroglossia “expresses the intention of the character *and* the author or the single discourse of a large community *and* [emphasis in original] the multiple discourses of a single community” (p. 129). Hence, I have approached the interviewees’ oral histories as the heteroglossia of their personal expressions and the discourses of their community. The

heteroglossia is both a literary text and context of discovery. The context of discovery is a process through which I have reflected on my ideas, values, and beliefs during my data analysis (Leavy, 2011). Hence, I have discovered meaning and reflections through the heteroglossia of voices which I have rendered the participant–voiced found poems and interpretive lyric poetics (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Glesne, 1997; Leavy, 2015; Prendergast, 2009). I have not only learned from the findings about the research question, but also about myself as an a/r/tographer. Hence, the context of discovery has helped me to make the research process transparent in meaning and authentic in artful trustworthiness (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009, 2011). I discuss the findings below with the help of the six main a/r/tographic renderings such as openings, living inquiry, reverberations, excess, metaphor, and contiguity (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005).

Openings invite the readers to enter the historical scenes with an open mind and heart, as well as to participate in an ongoing lyric (re)construction of their multiple understandings and interpretations in a broader critical dialogue (Sullivan, 2010). I have (re)created these openings as the poetic impressions and reading experiences that have evolved from my readings of the oral histories. The openings are the lyric movements of thinking and feeling with the people; the openings are “the cuts, cracks, slits, and tears; refusing comfort, predictability, and safety” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905). The openings invite the readers to listen to and for the elders’ voices in verse, paintings, and photographs.

I share the openings as a multiple-voiced poem that represents the collective historical background. I began my data collection or a process of coming to know these histories and experiences with the help of the archives and the pre-existing oral histories. I have read all of the transcripts and listened to all of the audio–video oral histories found in the Tibet Oral History

Project (including the Tibet Oral History DVDs at the University of Toronto Cheng Yu Tung East Asian library). In my journal, I recorded the excerpts of the elders' stories and conversations about their childhood memories. I first delved into all of the oral histories that had a conversation about the elders' childhood experiences without schools. I then read about the elders' experiences with homeschooling and monastic schools. Even though my research questions are not specifically focused on the concept of local (non-compulsory) schooling, I nevertheless attempted to understand children's learning experiences in the different social contexts.

Hence, the limitation of the study is in the absence of renderings in the context of local home schools and non-compulsory governmental schools (e.g., urban schools in Lhasa, Shigatse, and Gyantse) as well as in the context of local monastic training. If I had included other participants, I would have had to render the intricate Tibetan Buddhist culture of monastic educational practices including religious meditations, local literacy, astronomy, star knowledge, medicine, rituals, art, and script. Many interviewees spoke about a highly complex educational system in the context of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. Some of them described their educational experience with the Tibetan Buddhist schools of Nyingma, Gelugpa, Sakya, Kagyu, and Bonpo. The local communities used to belong to one of these schools and observe its traditions. Each school sustains a highly detailed set of the Buddhist monastic precepts, rituals, beliefs, and scripts. For example, one interviewee, who was a part of the Sakya school, recalled:

The followers of Sakya go to Sakya Gong, Ngor and Nalanda [Monasteries] to study. ... While in the monastery [the teachers] mostly taught prayer recitation and then scriptures are taught at Dzongsar Sheta; scriptures pertaining to debates is taught. ... There is the Shungchen Chusum, which is the 13 different fundamental root texts that [I] studied.

Then [I] learned *dhagyik* “spelling,” *sumthak* “grammar” and *nyengag* [emphasis in original] “poetry.” (Dhongdup Rinpoche, 2014, pp. 8-9)

As a non-sectarian Buddhist outsider without the Tibetan language, I could not fully develop a mindful and spiritual connection with the highly complex cultural context of monastic education. Hence, the research limitation is directly linked with my purposeful choice of the participants. I have chosen my participants because I was deeply inspired by them and was moved to tears by their histories.

All of the elders spoke to me at heart and I wrote my poetic lyric reflections of the emergent understandings. This poetics is somewhat impressionistic and interpretive in its lyrics and free verses. The embodied moments of poetic presence were the subtle openings that I felt but couldn’t simply represent and restate in prose. They spoke to me as the living histories in the present (Chalmers, 2004). I felt overwhelmed with the intensity of feelings that seemed to flood my psyche with the memories and thoughts of compassion. The poetic openings express these psychic experiences; the poetic openings are my affective ways of knowing *with* the people and our/their world.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “Affects are becomings” (p. 256). I was deeply affected by the sincerity and hope with which the elders spoke about their childhood. Irwin (2013) wrote that being affected initiates a process of intense becoming “through the dynamic movement of events with learning to learn” (p. 206). Poetry has become my open process of learning to learn from the elders’ oral histories. The lyric free verse of becoming has helped me to create a multi-layered opening as the historical cloth with “its fibers woven and strands joined together with spaces in/between. There are openings like holes worn with time, reflecting the fragility and temporality of meaning” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 906). The artistic

in-between spaces invite the readers to find their openings either in these rendered voices or in the self. The openings are my affects.

With these openings, I have explored how the children had been learning before the advent of schooling. The question “how” is about a learning process in its personal experiences and expressions. This meaning didn’t have one explanation in their oral histories; it was elusive and implicit. Hence, the poetic openings weave an impressionist cloth of natural learning that spirals from the collective multiple-voiced representation to the situated and particular individual place of remembering. To me, these individual stories are the places of living inquiry. I situate them in between the poetic openings and impressionist reverberations as a place of connection and contemplation.

Hence, my living inquiry has been shaped by, and in turn, shaped my “emergent understandings, and creative analytic texts as they integrate knowing, doing, and making through aesthetic experiences that convey meaning rather than fact” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). I represent these impressionist and analytical understandings (Chapter 5) with the help of the main generative themes that are specifically connected with my research questions (Leavy, 2011). The living inquiry is an embodied awareness and encounter with the oral histories and archives. I was specifically mesmerized by the encountered silence but not the absence of meaning. The silence of transcripts and photographs has created a sense of presence in the unknown and unfamiliar past. Even though the place was colonized, it was never conquered. The oral histories are the living memories that I witness in the moment of my encounters with them and through my creative interpretations. Rich (1978) poetically wrote,

Silence may be a plan

rigorously executed the blueprint to a life.

It is a presence

it has a history a form.

Do not confuse it

with any kind of absence. (p. 17)

I have lived in and with this historical silence of the archives. The silence has many voices that are transcribed and are on paper. The history is never absent; it is encountered in between silence and voice, art and text. Silence teaches about the importance of a dialogic relation and other “primordial characteristics of the cultural and historical world” (Freire, 1973b, p. 136). I rendered my living inquiry with/in silence and through the transcribed dialogues, in-between art and poetry. Irwin (2004) wrote,

To live the life of an artist who is also a researcher and teacher, is to live a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us, a life that intentionally sets out to perceive things differently. Those living in the borderlands of a/r/tography recognize the vitality of living in an in-between space. They recognize that art, research, and teaching are not done, but lived. (p. 33)

I render my learning experiences as the a/r/tographer in these historical borderlands that the oral histories have evoked and provoked through their conversational meanings, theoretical contributions, and my impressionist art. Further, the living inquiry allows me to perceive the oral histories as the places and sites of encounters between the past and present, self and other, place and meaning. Sinner (2013) also approached her archival research through a/r/tography and perceived the archival space and text as *the hybrid site of living inquiry* (p. 242). The hybridity is a process of coming to know the unknown histories from within my imagination, intuition, and creativity.

For Sinner (2013) and Irwin (2004), a living inquiry has a potential to create the hybrid space of meaning generation, knowledge sharing, and, perhaps, interbeing whereby the researcher's subjectivity and emotional complexity are a part of the research aesthetic in its diverse textual and imaginative dimensions. The hybrid space is a location of culture, or rather an intercultural place of the interbeing (Nhat Hanh, 1991) that I define as a non-essentialist engagement with differences. Hence, my living inquiry is my subjective experience of the interbeing with the individual/collective oral histories and their reverberations.

Reverberations are the personal and social liminal spaces that trespass the rational understanding and include my respectful recognition of the mysterious and unknown. Springgay et al. (2005) found that reverberations were about resonances, vibrations, and other subtle processes that exist in the movement between different experiential contexts and in conversations (pp. 906-907). The reverberations invite my readers to attend to the subtle interbeing that emerges within the hybrid of the textual and visual spaces and resonances. I hope that my readers will be able to listen for the reverberations and their affects of becoming.

Further, the reverberations have led me toward the reflective and relational theorizing with the help of the oral histories and archives about the importance of natural learning in its diverse historical experiences and places of memories. I theorize through and with the help of the excess of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005). Excess is an embodied process of writing that reflects my experiences of knowing and unknowing, learning and unlearning. Biggs and Büchler (2012) found that excess "allows for the process of unravelling and rewriting, leading to meaning-making" (p. 36). According to Irwin and Springgay (2008), excess is "created when control and regulation disappear and we grapple with what lies outside the acceptable" (p. xxx). I render the excess with the help of my

theoretical perspectives and the literature review (Chapter 5). These experiences of excess have also been about my feelings of perplexity and wonder, emotional tensions and spiritual contemplation in “re-assembling the mundane” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 907). In inviting new perspectives into the historical scenes, I engage the a/r/tographic metaphors and metonymy (in visual arts) that should speak to the senses and engage the sensuous experience of readers throughout this chapter. I further render the contiguity that is about my subjective renderings of the self and self-positionality of my a/r/tographic identities for the ethical and epistemological purposes of the artful authenticity and ongoing systematized reflexivity.

My generative findings have evolved from my questions:

1. How had the local Tibeau children been learning before compulsory schooling was introduced in their communities?
2. What was the understanding of learning at the time? What were the children’s ways of learning?
3. How has learning changed since then? What might we as educators learn from these lived experiences about learning, local knowledge, and place?



Figure 4.2. Sharugon, Tibet, 1927. Archival image #405187. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York.

Multiple-Voiced Collective Poetic Openings: The Historical Background

There were no schools,
 No schools were in the village.

When I was young, I enjoyed life.
 We had a home, we stayed home,
 Playing, making merry, singing

Learning from mother,
 Learning from each other

Weaving, laughing, playing,

Swimming, running, haying

We were happy with each other

We were all together

We were free.

(Dawa Dolma, 1924, Toe Yancho Tanga, Utsang I77DD; Tsamchoe, Toe Yancho Tanga I77T)

*

“Schools were never started there.”

We played all day. We didn’t work.

We played without limits, without worry

We played as much as wanted

All day, without schools.

We played all day.

(Anzi, 1927, Motho, Kham, I10M)

*

There were no schools.

I tended animals in meadows, pastures, fields.

It was ok. I had to work for sake of food.

I also used to play at home with sisters, brothers, friends.

We used to play by running, skipping, catching.

We made these games ourselves, invented them, imagined.

I played, I worked, and I enjoyed my living.

(Chonzom, 1928, Seralung, Utsang; Lhamo, 1935, Reting, Utsang, I5)

*

No schools were in the village

I learned to dance, to sing, to chant

I learned from parents, uncles, aunts

from neighbours, other nomads, peasants

My life was like a song. I was in bliss.

I learned with sky, with meadows, rivers, trees

...[sings]

(Tsering Chonphel, 1935, Shungpa, Utsang, I35D)

*

I didn't go to school, I learned by being,

I naturally learned what I possess – compassion

Since generations back, since time of the beginning

I naturally learned by living in believing dharma,

the timeless Buddha wisdom from within, my passion. . . .

Happy life with freedom, knowing simple depths of Being

In learning living dharma of compassion.

(Kunchok Tashi (alias), 1937, Utsang, I13D)

*

There were no schools,

We learned ourselves.

(Cho Lhamo, 1941, Dhotoe, Kham, I92)

*

I cared for the yaks, sheep, horses

I loved it very much. Enjoyed this time.

We played all day with other kids.

And then we ate together our meals.

There were no schools.

All children grazed

yaks, sheep, horses, mules.

(Sonam, 1943, Jang Namchung, Namru, Utsang, I75)

*

No time to play

But this is how it was

I never felt upset, no sorrow

What I wanted was to finish all my tasks today

to make my parents happy for tomorrow.

I cared for the yaks, the sheep; I didn't play.

And this is how it was,

I worked, I never played.

I never disobeyed my mother

And I was happy, yes I was.

(Choekyi (alias), Phari. Utsang, 1935, I21)

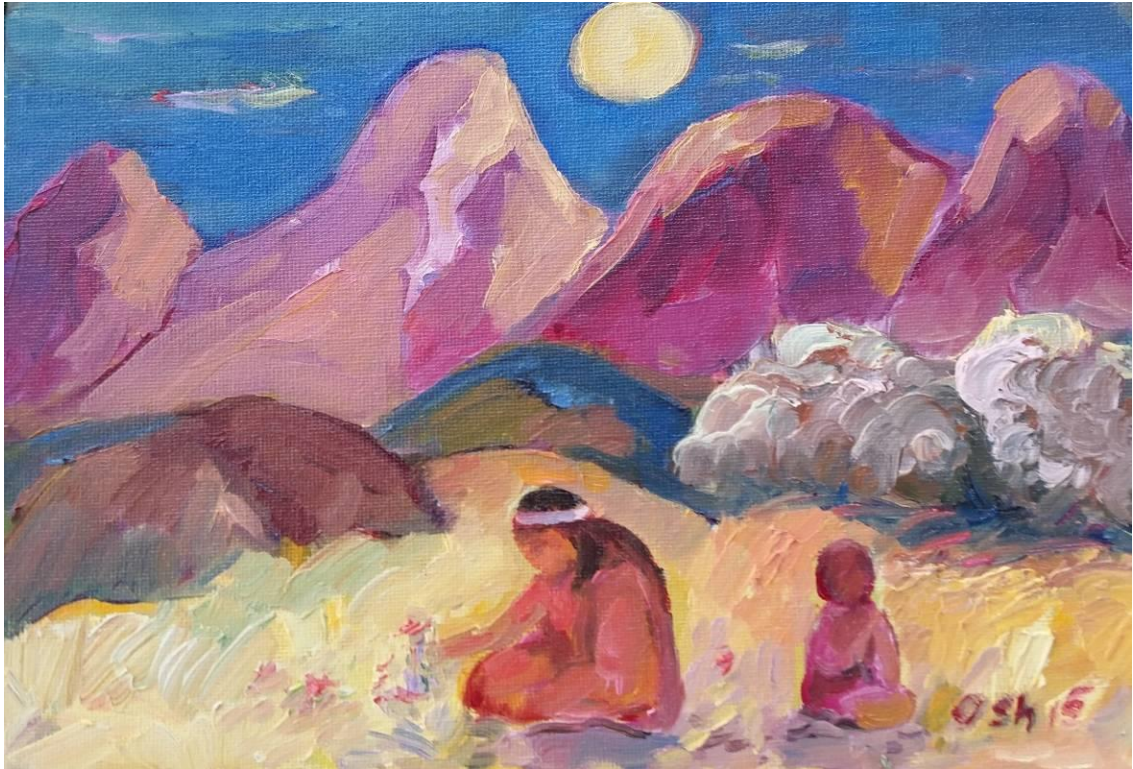


Figure 4.3. Learning as a part of everyday life. Oil on Canvas on Board. 2015.

Figure 4.3 represents my impression of an everyday life in rural Tibet. The scene depicts a young female child with her mother. The mother is taking care of the wheat field. The child is looking at the mountains and she is free to move around in any direction. The field is surrounded by the compost hills and high mountains. The atmosphere feels peaceful, as it is the evening time with the rising full moon. The painting allows the viewers to perceive and feel the beauty of the historical place-conscious background with the glacial mountains, prosperous farmland, fertile soil, and compassionate family relations.

I was inspired to think with Dawa Dolma and other interviewees about their childhood experiences with attention to their emotional expressions, such as laughter. All the interviewees indicated the importance of their family life and its memorable moments of their childhood. In particular, I was inspired by Dawa Dolma's story about learning from her mother in the context

of her daily life on the farm. This painting illustrates the multiple-voiced poetic openings with a thought about the local childhood amidst the places, where schools had never been a part of the daily livelihood. I felt inspired to render the sense of children's freedom amidst the beautiful natural environment as well as to render the children's sense of a cultural place with their families and community members.

The openings also invite the readers to connect with this historical background by understanding a diversity of children's learning experiences, such as free play, intergenerational learning, and cultural practices in the place-based context of their family subsistence. Throughout all of the above poetics, I have tried to stay close to the transcripts without altering the interviewees' voices. Hence, the poems attempt to capture the heart-felt reality within the situated past with hope to inspire the readers to find attunement with these moments of "the simple depths of being" in happy and sustainable childhood.

Living Places of Childhood: Land and Self-Sufficiency

In order to render the historical context of childhood place and its significance in children's lives, I have decided to focus my interpretive openings on the concept of living place. The openings gather multiple voices in hope to represent children's learning experiences through an expanded context of their communities and with attention to the generative theme of learning as a cultural subsistence/self-sufficiency.

Place was beautiful, life was happy for us

Before the colonization

Before the occupation.

Before the invasion.

*

The place was beautiful:
 large and vast fields;
 Mountains stood still
 Just like the shields
 pastures laid bare,
 rare flowers, green meadows
 of wheat, barley, beans.
 open scenes of my childhood.
 Happy scenes of my past.
 Beautiful flowers, pastures
 for yaks, sheep, all beings.

(I77DD, I92)

*

The place of flowers.
 Tokla, Shoton, Ghoechen, Sumen, Bhalue
 Beautiful in scenes, in fragrance
 Meadows covered hills, unseen in distance
 Visible in presence of this place of pastures.
 Towns gathered in the curvatures of space
 Beyond the colours of the scenes
 Embraced by places in the veins of streams,
 And rivers: turquoise, purple, blue aquamarine
 Like skies, like meadows, visions, dreams

In fleeting presence, flowing scenes of
 Memories, of timeless life,
 My childhood!

*

“There was Kayol and there rested Pekars...”
 And many other flowers scented Being in air, aura,
 captured in the memories of Place:
 these enigmatic Pastures.

(Pasang Dolkar, 1936, Phari, Utsang, I23)

*

Fertile soil!
 All kinds of grains were grown;
 Wild walnuts, apricots, and other fruits.
 A lot of mushrooms in the woods.
 Abundance of variety of foods.

(I92)

*

Gyangtse Khelkhar, a small village
 Holy village, very holy.
 There is a nearby cave, a sacred ground
 There in retreat, Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava
 spent three years, meditating for the well-being of all:
 infinite, unbound.

(Sonam Bhuti, 1923, Khelkhar, Utsang, I13B)



Figure 4.4. Children are playing. My impressions of Phari in mixed media. Oil, pastel on canvas on board. August 2016.

All of the interviewees described with vivid details their childhood places, such as the home villages and natural environment. Their descriptions conveyed an overwhelming feeling of love for their homeland and its diverse manifestations of beauty. In fact, their childhood memories seem to be tied with the sense of childhood place. In response to a question about his favorite childhood memories, Tehor Phuntsok said, “Well, special experiences. ... There is our region and if [I] were to speak about it, it was a very happy place. If it is fine for me to speak about my region, I can describe the region” (I55D, p. 3). Pasang Dolkar also shared that her home village was the happiest place in the whole world. She said, “There was no other place more enjoyable than Phari” (I23, p. 5). She also named various wild flowers that covered the

nearby pastures, such as Tokla, Sumen, Bhalue, Sumen, and Shoton. These flowers filled the place with incredible fragrance. Many interviewees recalled the wonderful smell of flowers, pastureland, rivers, lakes, and mountains that permeated their childhood spaces and places.

Likewise, Griffith (1847) described the flora above 9,500 feet high in Tibet,

I noticed Galium, Valeriana, Crawfordia fasciculata, Sphaeropteris Betula corylifolia, Hypericum, Spiraea gillenioides, Rubus Cordifolius [Bhalue], Senecio Scandens, Juncus effusoideus, in wet places, Rhododendron majus, coming into flower, (flower white), Cerastium bacciferum, arborea, canescens, Cissus, Rubus moluccanus, Eleagnus, Rubus potentillifolia, Plantago, Ligustrum, Berberis pinnata, and asiatica. (p. 221)

It is also interesting to note that Phari “at a height of 15000 feet is the highest town worthy of the name in the world” (Chapman, 1847/1988, p. 129). For Pasang Dolkar, Phari was her home village that was embraced by three majestic glacial mountains such as Chomo, Jowo Mingyur, and Chungdhue (Khyungdhue Dhakong). These mountains were sacred to the local people and held many important legends about romantic relationships, gods/goddesses, and the healing powers of place as a whole. For example, Chomo is a female goddess mountain and spiritual manifestation of the Goddess Tara. Chungdhue was a jealous male god-mountain who shot an arrow and hit Chomo’s Baa (i.e., the pot of beer). Chomo was carrying this home-made beer on her way to see Jowo Mingyur. The sweet water springs were formed out of the beer spill. The interviewee recalled, “If you drank the water on holy days of the month like the 8th, 10th, 15th and 25th, the water was very sweet. That was natural water out from the ground. They were the manifestations of the Buddha” (Pasang Dolkar, I23, pp. 11-12). Likewise, all interviewees recalled the importance of various sacred sites in their childhood as the memorable places of their lived experience. Pasang Dolkar has drunk this sweet water and felt its purity, sweetness,

and divine manifestation of the Buddha. For Cho Lhamo, the beauty of her home village was also about the mountains, river, and sacred place of Pema Koe (2006). Pema Koe was known as a very peaceful and fertile place where there had never been any problem (Lhundup, I12M, p. 15). The childhood place was often described as a holy and happy place that was embraced by the sacred mountains, pastures, rivers, and lakes.

In this context, I felt deeply inspired to render the sacred beauty and heart-felt memories of these childhood places. Figure 4.4 depicts my fascination and awe that have emerged during the data analysis and interpretation. I have tried to express the spiritual inspiration that I felt from these distant places in time and space, yet very near at heart. Specifically, I have depicted Chomo and Jowo Mingyur mountains in the act of embrace. Their snowcaps are attuned toward each other. The space in between them doesn't signify separation, it rather appears as an affectionate hug. Chungdhue stands apart from them; he is in the distance. His bow is settled on the ground in the shape of a hill. The arrow rests on top of the hill. The other arrow is right above the purple hill. This legendary arrow hit Chomo's Baa and spilled the home-made beer. The Baa is on the ground; it is upside down. The beer has spilled over the hills. The streams of sweet water are running behind the hills toward the village, where the children are peacefully and happily grazing their animals. The children are immersed in their self-directed playful activities. The centred hill looks like the Baa that was turned upside down by the blue and white arrow. The scene calls for attunement not only with a general historical background in multiple voices but also with a place-conscious context of children's memorable experiences in everyday life. These experiences have historically been shaped by the natural beauty of the local legendary knowledge and Buddhist spirituality.

Further, the painting conveys a sense of subsistence that has been associated with the

natural environment. The pastureland is abundant with grass for the animals; the soil is fertile. For example, the black space beside the village signifies the productivity of the land. In the distance, the viewer sees various fields of wheat and barley in the yellowish and green colours; the colours indicate the agricultural and wild diversity (e.g., plants, mushrooms, and other species).

A very happy childhood. And not just me. All kids were happy.

No tasks assigned. All food was grown at home, in fields.

We owned the land. And that is why we had no worries,

Laughter, happiness, and freedom; these words....

And this is how we lived.

(Tehor Phuntsok, 1937, Tehor, Kham, I55D)

*

Happiness, excitement, bliss

I've lived amidst

The blooming scenes and hills

Deep pastures, rivers

Expansive space: all seeing,

Transparent, luminous

With living beings

Abundant fields

Melodic birds who sing

In bliss, in peace

Wild rabbits, yaks, wild horses

Oceanic bliss, my childhood

In the timeless freedom
Day and night, without worries
With the land and flowing waters
I've learned by living happily by being.

(I35D)

*

We were a self-sufficient family
We made our clothes, sustained the land
The land sustained us in return;
We worked together: hand-in-hand
And children could participate in learning how to earn
Their future self-subsistence
Happiness

We followed kindness, dharma rules
We used the sheep for wool
All our food came from the fields
We cared for each other,
shared what we've earned
and gathered in its yields
all lived together: elders, father, mother

... we were happy. I wish I could return
In memories, in dreams.

We didn't have advancements, lux

It was all simple, simple life.

The wool was used for weaving clothes

The cows gave us cheese and curd

We were just self-sufficient

The children learned to be efficient

Without lessons and without scripts

They didn't write and didn't read

Yet scriptures were respected, treated

With a daily observance of the prayer

Besides the farm, the children played

Together outdoors in freshness of the air

In beauty of the day

In happiness of life

*

We grew grains, barley, wheats

To make bread, eat turnip, peas

We preserved all seeds

There was enough food for all, indeed.

Yes, water came from the river

There was plenty of water, irrigated, delivered

To our land, our farmland.

(Ama Kalden Chama, 1929, Kochak, Utsang, I10C; Dawa Dakpa, 1933, Phenpo, Utsang, I27B; Dolma (alias), 1929, Tsepana, Utsang, I8B; Yeshi Lhadon, 1921, Doktsa, Kham, I12; I13D; I35D).



Figure 4.5. Living places. Inspired by a photo (#405089). Oil on canvas. August 2016.

Figure 4.5 depicts a scene of sustainable childhood place with a focus on one's household. The household supports and is supported by the mountains. The child is near the house. She is playing with the water in some cultural activity or practice that resembles a farm-related form of irrigation. The blue water stream is situated at the forefront and is connected with the river that flows from the top of the mountains. I have highlighted this interconnection between the stream and the river with the different shades of blue. This interconnection illustrates how children's lived experiences were intimately connected with their natural

environment. They could see and observe how and why “the water came from the river” (Dolma (alias), I8B, p. 2). Overall, the painting represents a concept of self-sufficiency in the context of children’s household and broader place.

Your village is your playground
 And you are free to run around
 We played on hills, we swam in rivers
 We liked to skate and play snowballs in winters
 We played together: boys and girls
 We played with mud and played with tricks
 Yak horns and bones were great for games.
 We coloured them and made them into shapes.
 We made imaginary beings from pebbles, clay, and trees.
 We played all day in happiness, in joy, in peace.
 (Lhamo, 1935, Reting, Utsang, I11M; Tsewang Khangsar, 1949, Yancho Tangkar,
 Utsang, I93; I12)

This poem shifts the readers’ attention from a sense of childhood place to the particular context of children’s experiences, such as a creative, gender equal, and self-directed play. The poem attempts to convey the children’s feelings of freedom in their daily lives. I have composed this poem with a particular attention to the interviewees’ exact words and expressions. The poem also invites the readers to contemplate a complex interconnection between the children’s sense of freedom and the lived experience of happiness.

An age of timelessness:
 Time is yours, you choose, you make it.

You work when you think you want to work

You rest when you think you should rest; no clock.

I think we lived a self-sufficient way of being.

My village had it all: no luxury, no plentifulness, and no famine.

The words “famine,” “starvation” were maybe in the dictionary

We never heard “starvation,” “hunger,” and never used them literally.

We were completely self-sufficient: we got from animals, we grew in fields.

And what we got from the environment was all enough to feed us.

Each one had their job and did it peacefully in our village of 50 houses

Where time was timelessness, where everything was ours.

(I93)

*

Noone was hungry

We shared with those in need.

We had grains, barley, wheat.

We had enough to share, to eat.

Noone was hungry.

(I92)

*

We were merry. My childhood was happy.

“There were no schools, No schools for children.”

No schools in the village.



Figure 4.6. Daily life in a Tibetan village in Utsang. Inspired by a photo (#405153). Oil on canvas. August 2016.

Figure 4.6 renders children's daily life (i.e., playfulness) in the villages of Utsang. The viewer can see that each figure is busy with her daily activities. This scene attempts to convey the interviewees' expression that "each one has their little job and we just do it and that's it" (Tsewang Khangsar, 193, p. 7). A child is roaming around the street. She is also observing the members of the community and their daily tasks. One of the community members is carrying water to the house. The other community member in a yellow dress is walking toward the gompa (i.e., the Tibetan Buddhist monastery and temple). The sun is setting behind the mountains. The atmosphere of the village feels playful and peaceful in the embrace of the sun, mountains, and gompa.

Place of Health

Hot Springs made all us happy

We went there to leave all ills

To be healed from ailments
 Sorrows, pain
 To lull the diseases to sleep
 I've never been to a doctor in life
 I've visited hot springs around Phari
 In Khambu, where all community goes to
 There were 14 hot springs in total
 All kids feel healthy there,
 Happy childhood, happy life.

*

Visionary Place to See the Future.
 Sacred place — future space
 Seeing through the big lake, Chomo Lana
 I prayed to the Gods. I offered the khata.
 I saw my future: the road was crooked, ragged land
 With tents, prayer flags; lamas.
 It was the escape from Tibet.
 I could not imagine this;
 I thought I'd be living somewhere else.
 I prayed to the Gods and offered the khata.
 I saw the future in Chomo Lana.
 The waters were clear, the vision was clear.
 As a young girl, I didn't know its meaning
 I simply saw the vision in Chomo Lana, like in a mirror.

(I23)



Figure 4.7. Praying for a vision near Chomo Lana. Oil on canvas. September 2016.

The poems above and Figure 4.7 further expand the readers' understanding of the local childhood experience in the context of living place, land, and self-sufficiency. One of the interviewees described her childhood experience of seeing the future in the sacred lake of Chomo Lana. She said,

There are two lakes, one is bigger and one is smaller. In the bigger lake you could see images if you prayed to the Gods and threw in a khata 'ceremonial scarf.' In it you would see where you would reach in the future and whether you would die. If you were to reach another country, you could view it in the lake. Q: And what was your experience there? #23: I told you earlier about my experience. There was a crooked road, a lot of prayer flags flapping and many tents. Then I reached here. (Pasang Dolkar, I23, p. 6)

I was inspired to render this finding because it represents a unique connection that the children had with their childhood place. This connection has given them a vision of their future

that some of them didn't fully understand at the time. With the help of this poem, the readers are invited to imagine how learning takes place through one's visionary communication with the lake. In addition, the readers may feel that the local knowledge has been embodied and sustained in these living places of childhood.

In this perspective, the image in Figure 4.7 depicts the child's learning experience with the sacred lake of Chomo Lana. The child is sitting on the shore. The ceremonial white scarf (i.e., khata) is flowing toward the centre of the lake. It is presented with the white colour amidst the blue water; the khata is reflected in the water (i.e., white dots). The yellow, purple, brown, and violet colours express the visionary experience as embodied in the mirror waters of Chomo Lana. The child is contemplating the image; her thoughts and spiritual feelings are depicted in the white aura around the shadow of her body. The white emanation symbolizes the blessings of the Buddha. Kulananda (2000) explains that "Avalokitesvara appears in the realm of the gods as the white Buddha, called 'the Powerful One of the Hundred Blessings,' playing the music of impermanence of a lute" (p. 123). The child's figure is surrounded by the white aura. The white colour is the symbolic rendering of her unity with the divine light stream and the Buddha of compassion.

Interpretive Reverberations: Playfulness, Childhood Place, and Local Knowledge

Playing all the time

Without rest, without lunch

We ran all over, loved to play so much

We played in ourselves, in roles

We made imaginary homes

Some kids pretended to herd sheep,

Some stayed at home, while all we did

Was playing free without troubles.

I also used to swim in rain lakes, in thunders.

Such games were played

when we were children,

We were free.

(Tashi Samphel, 1939, Ngari. Utsang, I39D)

*

We played some games, but not too much.

We played with stones and made some clothes for dolls.

We had to work. We had to earn a living

Since I was nine, I had to spin and weave the woolen cloth

Tibetan dress is made from cloth.

And this is what I made by spinning wool.

All girls had weaving skills.

And this is how I learned:

By working hard since I was nine.

By weaving woolen cloth,

Tibetan dress.

(I23)

*

Wandering as free playing

roaming about the street,

Mountains, lakes, hills

Bathing in rivers, splashing, scratching

Living together, big families

Rearing pigs, sheep, dri...

(Norga, 1935, Tsawa Gokyamthang, Kham, I48D; Norbu, 1937, Sang, Utsang; Tsering Chonphel, I35D)



Figure 4.8. Playfulness. My impression of Shungpa, Utsang. Oil on canvas on board. Fragment. August 2016.

The fragment shown in Figure 4.8 renders the theme of playfulness. The children are grazing the yaks on the Changthang Plateau. One of the children is playing with the mud and stones on the ground. One of the interviewees was born in Shungpa (Tsering Chonphel), and I was inspired by his story.

Game of making mud houses.

Like architects, we made mud houses

With stones, with branches, grass

We carved a fireplace in it, and made

The human figurines from clay, from dust,

and this is how we played.

[The interviewee laughs]

(Dolma Choezom, 1924, Ganzi, Dhotoe/Kham, I15D)

*

We, children, played in dust

From dawn till dusk

We made small pots

To cook green leaves.

At times we brought

Black dirt, pretended it was tea.

We played in joy, we played in peace

We lived together: parents, relatives,

All animals like yaks, sheep, dri.

We shared lives

With happiness in hearts;

And nobody oppressed us.

We were free.

[*dri* is a female yak]

(Dickey, 1931, Phuma Changthang, Utsang, I68; Migmar (alias), 1929, Kala, Utsang

I3M)

*

Riding horses was my play

When I was twelve

I thought of names for them
Like Sakpa or the reddish mane
I taught myself, I rode them every day.

*

We played together, we were friends,
we roamed all the streets
We took bamboo
and turned it into sticks
into a set of arrows and a bow.

And then we placed some bets

The arrows were shot

With these inventive sets

The target was a dot.

*

All games I know, remember.

It was a happy time, you know.

Let's say this game, like Pile of Hay

When harvest came, all hay was piled

In story high, we played with it, we climbed

And jumped from here, from the height

I truly loved this game, it was a sheer delight



Figure 4.9. Gathering hay. Oil on canvas. Fragment. Spring 2016.

Game ghopo ghopto.

We place eight stones in line

We gather other stones

and throw them at the center

Of the line. Whoever hit the center is the winner

We, boys, like to play this game, girls didn't like the stones.

*

We played in dust, in waters

with Apchu....

The ankle of the sheep,

So thapoelikti can be played

You start by yelling, thapoelukti

Deity!!! Oh Deity!!!

Then threw it.
 Tt should show a horse or donkey.
 If apchu was like a horse, it was all good,
 The sheep was also good,
 But donkey was so so.
 Whoever had all horses
 was the winner.
 Apchu was painted in colours

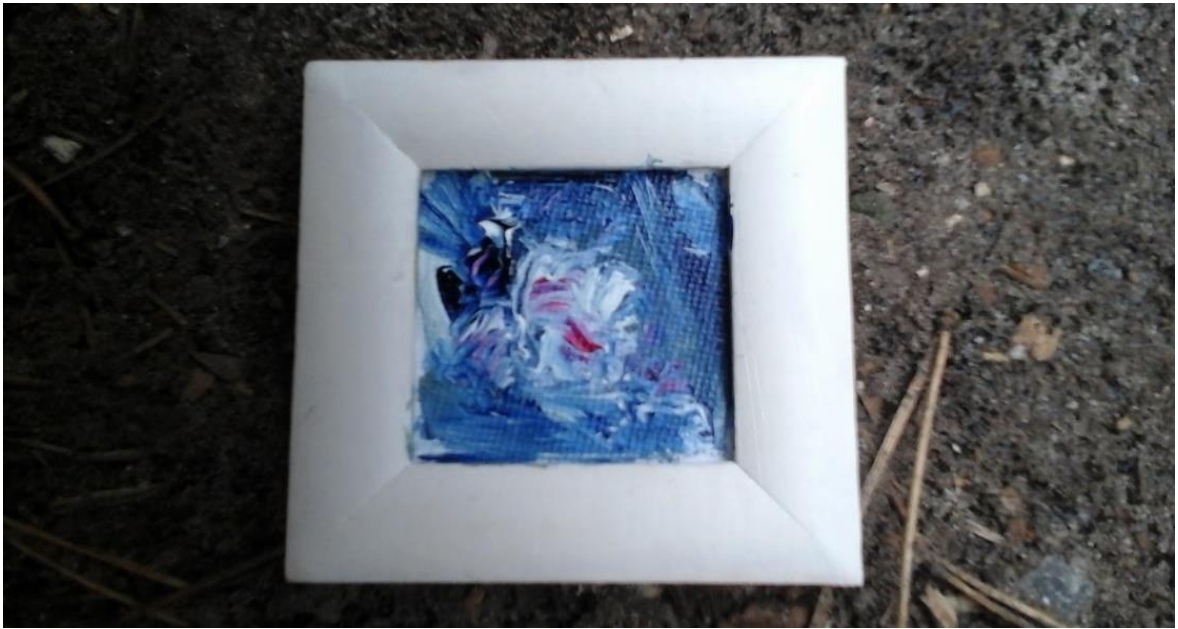


Figure 4.10. Apchu transformations. Acrylic on board, enframed. May 2016.

Games: Apchu.

We took a goat knee,
 We coloured it with dye from trees
 We made it into shapes and forms
 Whatever we envisioned, we transformed

With fantasies and new ideas

All kids had will to play

We liked it most of all

We didn't want to stay

At home, we roamed over places.

We loved to play, and this was our learning.



Figure 4.11. Apchu game. Acrylic. May 2016.

We used to play with pebbles

Named them as the sheep and yaks.

We played together: boys, girls.

And there was no division between us.

We also ate together, shared all provision

And sat in circle, eating, drinking, speaking



Figure 4.12. Playfulness. Fragment in oil. June 2016.

We made some masks
 Of deer, animals, and gods
 From mud, from clay, from dust
 We burned them in the fire, painted
 With dye, and let it dry.
 Then wore them and then we danced
 Like we were all entranced
 Transformed
 Performed
 Possessed
 We learned this game in Cham.



Figure 4.13. Cham festival. Fragment. Oil on canvas on board. August 2016.

And what is Cham?

Performed by monks with masks

Some masks of fairies were bad to look at;

And some were friendly for the kids

Like deer, tigers, leopards

Because these deities will not mislead

So we just sat there, prayed with chants

Observing monks in masks, transforming minds

Some people laid before the monks

So obstacles can be removed, in dust, with masks

With prayers, winds were dancing on the streets

And we sat quietly with parents, mesmerized by scenes

In wonder, awe, perplexity, and peace.

(Interpretive poetics of the collective voices: Dawa Dakpa, 1933, Phenpo, Utsang, I27B; Jamyang D. Sakya, 1934, Jekundo, Kham, I28C; Kalsang Yangchen , 1929, Miling, Kham, I24; Kunchok Tsewang, 1935, Tsari, Utsang, I12D; Lhakpa Tsering, 1935, Shari, Utsang, I69; Lhamo, 1935, Reting, Utsang 11M; Lhundup, 1939, Shidong Zong, Kham, 12M; Tashi Samphel, 1939, Ngari, Utsang, I39D)



Figure 4.14. Cham.

We played by making homes together: Boys and girls

We first made fireplace, assigned the roles

Like daughter, mother, father, brother

We then created fire, made some tea

And poured tea in our cups

From leaves and trees

We made some flour, pa

Imagined drinking, eating

Dough of tsampa.

Some boys and girls had will to herd

So they played mostly in the fields

While games of homes were on the streets

With meadows, animals, and birds

Some children slept with sheep

Right after lengthy games

Each took her blanket, fell asleep

And slept all night in pen, with dreams.

Yes, it was fun, and parents didn't mind

this kid's experience of playful times,

excitement, laughter, seriousness;

They were respectful, honest, kind...

[The interviewee laughs. . . some pauses in between. . .]

(I39D)



Figure 4.15. Place-based learning. Inspired by a photo (#405011). Oil on canvas. August 2016.

We made a fire place
 And sculpted figurines
 From clay and dust
 That's how we used to play.
 [The interviewee laughed].

All toys were carved
 Out of stones, out of mud,
 From living place, and the creative mind.
 (I15D)

*

I remember the time of my childhood

I was 5, maybe 8 years old
 I would wake in the morning
 At dawn, go on the roof, in the cold
 With my grandfather,
 I was learning from him.
 We would greet and welcome the Sun
 Spinning wheels of the Prayer
 Sitting together:
 Grandfather, grandson....

I remember the time of my childhood
 I remember his care.
 [Smiles]

(Tsewang Tenzin, 1936, Mukrum, Utsang, I19C)

The reverberations allow the readers to connect better with the situated children's experience in the context of a free, creative, and self-directed play. Specifically, I have rendered some of the well-known popular cultural games, such as apchu, ghopo ghopto, self-made bows/arrows, and pile of hay. Throughout all of the poetics, I have stayed close to the transcripts in order to render the people's voices with respect to the complexity of their individual expressions and collective meanings.

Furthermore, I have rendered an expanded learning context, whereas the children had a possibility to observe Cham, the local festival. This festival was experienced as a very exciting time of their childhood because all of the local children used to be mesmerized by the creative performances with animal masks and the overall playfulness. In addition, I have focused on the

lived experience by writing the poetic reverberations of children's feelings, such as happiness, excitement, bliss, joy, fun, perplexity, awe, wonder, care, and freedom.

The figures deepen the reverberations with a focus on diverse learning processes. Figure 4.9 presents a fragment where the child is sitting next to her mother. The child is gathering hay, and the mother is pouring milk for her daughter. The child is contemplating how and what to create out of the gathered hay. The scene shows that children's experiences were inseparable from their intergenerational learning activities. Figure 4.10 represents the concept of apchu transformations that the children envisioned and engaged during this game. The white dot depicts an ankle of a sheep. I further describe this game and its conceptual significance in Chapter 5. Figure 4.11 presents a different impression of the same apchu game. The ankle of the sheep is presented in a shape of a wind horse, *rlung ta*, that symbolizes good fortune (Loseries, 2009). This transformation was accompanied with diverse art-making activities and spiritual invocations of the local deities (Chapter 5).

Figure 4.12 shows a fragment that conveys a situated context of playfulness. The child is freely exploring her surroundings. Figures 4.13 and 4.14 depict Cham that is the religious dance festival. The dancers are wearing three masks: two tiger masks and one horse mask. Both masks are very auspicious to watch and observe for children. The children are sitting on the left hand side. It is interesting to note that Cham was first introduced by the Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava in the 8th century. According to the legends and local literature, the Guru had a meditative vision, in which the Buddha Amitabha revealed to him the dance of Cham and its transformational powers of spiritual blessings/purification. Cham is a form of the popular cultural education because its dances, masks, and costumes narrate and perform the lives of saints, gods, and goddesses (Altman, 2016). Figure 4.15 concludes the representational

reverberations with a scene of peaceful playfulness. Each painting has the date of its creation (i.e., during the data collection/analysis/interpretation processes).

Monasteries and Local HomeSchools: Unexpected Findings

I didn't go to school back home
 No school was in my village
 We've got two monasteries there
 And they were schools.
 Yet monastery wasn't like the school today:
 You didn't have to follow rules
 No getting up at certain times,
 No lining up, no going there,
 No classes, no routine, no things like that.
 There are some monks who may observe
 There are some monks who may say prayers
 "but never learn to read and write."
 It's all relaxed. It's up to you.
 You make your mind.
 No money needed, no permission.
 Just tell your parents, they should say "ok."
 No need to fill the forms
 All kids were welcomed
 Nobody was turned away.
 The school was there: free for all,

An open learning in the freedom

(I93)

*

I started home school when I was five, and finished when was 10

I spent all days in school, and summers— in the nomad camp, in tents.

It was more fun with them than in the school; the school was like intense.

I learned with nomads: milking, riding, making butter.

I rode horses, milked the cows, made the butter.

I learned so much with them:

not through the books, with hands.

I didn't need this, but I learned,

I learned to teach all others in the future.

Of course, I learned with hands.

From mother and grandmother:

“Cooking, milking, knitting, spinning.

My grandmother was the teacher of the spinning.”

She went from town to town, teaching, doing weaving.

We spin the wool, then weave textile,

all clothes were made by hands back then.

my mother, my grandmother wove.

I learned to weave from them

[-So, let me ask and let's go back to school,

so you were learning. . . You learned to read and write at school?]

–Not writing much. But reading.

Memorizing mantras, scroll

And I don't really know

what I was doing there then. . . . in school.

[School was all memorization. I learned at home with hands]

(I28C)



Figure 4.16. Local home, made of sod and mud. Acrylic on canvas. Fragment. Spring 2016.

*

Dharma is not just reading the scrolls

The lamas gave the teachings, told us

How to live without sins, to honor life

This life, the next one, afterlife.

To live in peace, to live in kindness.

The lamas tell us not to kill
 But to respect all beings
 We should abstain from sin
 That's what the lamas told us.
 I learned by listening to lamas,
 Leading life without sin.
 And this is how I practice dharma.
 Learning Being.
 The lamas shared Teachings in the fields
 Not in monastic schools, with people.
 If you want to study more, you go and study
 Just like the monk: you study scriptures, scrolls. . .

(I69)

*

Spirituality is always there.
 It is a force of life: a conscious and unconscious guide
 That is the way all things are led, conducted, unified.
 Spiritual are all walks of life: your marriage, child birth, haircuts,
 All things you think and dream inside, accomplish outside; your guts.
 It's what you do, it's what makes a*ll Tibetans who they are.
 Spiritual forces, blessings, life of planets, stars.
 You never really think about it: it's how life is
 For people, animals, plants, birds, trees.

And noone tells you what to do; you simply do it.

Let's see examples: If a Tibetan sees an insect

Suffering in mud without help, they always try to benefit

And help the little thing to dry the wings, to fly; it's inner instinct.

The path of life... that's how it was, it is, and will be in the future.

(I93)

*

Oh, the song Aladhi Thala!

The ancient oral tune of Thala

If you do not recognize this land,

It is the land of the great Ling Gar,

And if you do not recognize the person

It is I, the old keeper of Ling Gar!

(sung by Tashi Samphel, I39D, in these exact words)

These poems represent some of the findings that I did not expect to find and didn't specifically aim to locate. Jamyang Sakya shared her experience in a local home school with other six boys. She said it was a very unusual experience because there were no schools in the region. Rare home schools (i.e., private home schools) were mainly for boys from the affluent families (as recalled by Dolma Choezom; Lhamo; Pasang Dolkar), yet some girls could also attend (Jamyang Sakya). In that school, the boys were mean to her because she was the only girl there. She was not given the same food privileges as the boys. However, Jamyang Sakya recalled that the boys did not have the negative attitude towards her when they were all outdoors without any instructions and adult supervision. In response to the following question, "When children

were outside playing though, outside of the school, were the boys and girls did they get along better? Did they treat each other nicely?” She said, “Yes . . . I did everything like the boys did” (Jamyang Sakya, I28C, p. 6). Overall, she didn’t like her school experience because she didn’t learn anything there. She recalled, “I memorized lots. I don’t really know what I was doing. [Laughs].” (I28C, p. 8). However, she really liked her self-learning (i.e., hands-on) experience in an informal setting with the local nomads. The poems allow the readers to connect with her hands-on nomadic and broader intergenerational learning experience.

Further, the poems render a diversity of educational experience in the context of popular culture, such as the dharma spirituality and religious teachings of the local lamas. This section concludes with a popular song that teaches about the historical past through the heroic legend. The epic of King Gesar Ling is one of the most well-known and widely celebrated stories in Tibet. According to David-Neel and Yongden (1933/2013), it is “the Tibetan national poem” (p. 2). It is also considered to be “the longest poem in the world” (Schaeffer, Kapstein, & Tuttle, 2013, p. 309). Many parents used to tell and re-tell this legendary history to their children. In fact, the story has always been perceived as an educational experience that inspires many children to think and sing about the King Gesar’s deeds of bravery and courage. The story is usually shared and remembered through intergenerational dialogues and songs. Tashi Samphel recalled that as a child he “used to listen a lot to the stories of Ling Gesar.” He also said, “When I went to herd sheep, I used to sing the Ling Gesar story. I loved that very much. ... It was sung in a tune” (I39D, p. 7). Furthermore, Tashi often re-tells this story to his children and they also love it. Basically, the poem tells us how the King Gesar overthrew and conquered a demon. The demon’s wife put poison into Gesar’s beer so that he could fully forget his homeland (Tashi

Samphel, I39D, p. 8). Gesar also travelled to the Land of Death through the six realities and visited the sacred Land of Shambhala. According to Penick (2009), the six realities are

hell, the realm of hungry ghosts, animals, humans, jealous gods, and gods. These realms are traditional in Tibetan, India, and other central Asian cosmologies, but even as they may be considered ‘real’ places, they also represent the kinds of worlds that evolve from our own states of mind. (p. viii)

The underlying theme of the legend is Gesar’s intention to reveal freedom and to inspire awakening in the world. This epic is not like the Buddha’s story because Gesar seeks enlightenment in “the most horrific, grotesque, and frightening situations” (Penick, 2009, p. vii). I have concluded the renderings with the popular cultural epic poem in order to respect the local tradition and to acknowledge the educational context of this poetic legend, because it was and still is truly loved by many children.

Figure 4.17 represents a monastery in the mountains. The monastery holds a broader spiritual meaning of learning and a more general meaning of local education. The monastery conveys a feeling of meditation and contemplation. The fiery sky symbolizes a higher awareness of all meanings and experience. The land peacefully embraces the human abode of the historical wisdom and spiritual accomplishments. The yellow colour dominates the central scene because yellow symbolizes the earth element in Tibetan Buddhism (Lama Wangdu Rinpoche, I15C).



Figure 4.17. Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas. Inspired by a photo (#405281). Oil on canvas. May 2016.

Things changed when Chinese arrived.

They came, forced kids to schools.

The kids never returned from schools.

We fled. We walked.

I tell my children to come back

One day when Tibet Becomes Free

When Tibet gains Freedom. (I77DD)

Living Inquiry: Four Individual Situated Snapshots

Cho Lhamo.

Date of Birth: 1941

Birthplace: Kongpo Tham-nyen, Kham

Sex: Female

I92

Free verse.

I rode horses without a saddle

Racing, wrestling,

I was good in riding horses,

Catching them with my rope,

Riding without a saddle!

I rode all day long

Till I was sore.

I rode my horse

Without a saddle

Mountains roared

I rode horses

Without a saddle!

All by myself...

[as a young child of 12]

Cho Lhamo's childhood: The living inquiry of found poetics in her exact words.

Blank verse.

I was born in Kong-Po Tham-nyen

A river flows downwards there

From Lhasa to Kongpo

My father's name was Khampa Norga

Nyima is my mother's name

There were five children: two boys, three girls

We were farmers in Tibet.

We owned many goats, sheep, horses, dzo, dzomo

We tended those animals

My childhood. . . I led extremely happy life

I used to go riding by myself

I rode horses without a saddle

Catching them with my rope

I rode them all day long

The land was beautiful

The river was seen in the distance

Pasturelands were nearby

Next to that grew small bushes

Further away were the mountains

Covered with forests

I enjoyed dancing, so I danced a lot

I loved to play mah-jong

So I played all night long

We placed bets and played

During auspicious days

We practiced dharma

Recited prayers

Normally not many children

Practiced dharma

But I loved to

I also felt shy to tell people why.

I counted my prayers on the rosary

My father was a spiritual person

We practiced dharma

On all auspicious days

All the rich families performed a pooja

“Rituals of worship”

On the 10th day of each Tibetan lunar month

My father took part in it

At the end, all young men and women

Circumambulated the temple

I had a very good friend with whom I used to go with

At that time I was very beautiful

The boys would tease my friend,

“Are you the bodyguard of Cho Lhamo?”

Then I used to go out at night

Dressed in man’s clothing with a hat

They [the boys] then asked my friend,

“Where is Cho Lhamo?”

I love being a woman

But I dressed as a man

Because the boys teased

My friend for being my bodyguard

. . . .

Yes, we were Tibetan Buddhists

Yes, for many generations.

–Did you go to school or anything?

There were no schools in my region

We only had to learn ourselves.

Daily meals in Cho Lhamo’s childhood in her exact words.

In the morning, we cooked

Thukpa “a noodle soup”

In which we added radish and meat

Together with that we ate

Thick rolled out bread

And at time we ate meat

Curry of butter

That was the breakfast

Yes, I had a lot of energy to ride horses

With this breakfast

In the middle of the day

We ate pancakes

From buckwheat flour

Two for each person

And a bowl of tsangpa

“A flour made from roasted barley”

Along with that we ate curds, buttermilk

There was also curry

For the evening, we again prepared

Turnip and meat

We also ate a big bowl of tsampa

There was lots of food for all

And nobody was ever hungry

If someone came to ask for grains,

My father loaned them. And after harvest

They gave back the grains.

I've said it all

About childhood, my childhood

If I tell you too many

I will take too much time

How life learning has changed with the advent of colonial schools.

Chinese were good when they arrived.

They acted like it is said in the predictions

By the Guru Rinpoche

I didn't think too much about this

Because I was quite young

Then they said that we, the youngest ones

Would have to go to school to China

We had to hide from them. We feared that they

Would take us all away to school

We hid from them

I was 13–14

Then tortures, violence, murders...

We fled in 1959, the year of the pig

Today, I don't feel angry with Chinese

It must be our karma from the past

It's sad that we are separated from the place

From land. Yet here too, we get to practice dharma

With law of karma

We will acquire independence

If everyone is educated
 We can unite and strive for independence
 In Being together

I went back in 1987
 The mountains, the soil, people
 Didn't look as good as it used to long ago
 I felt, "Alas, everything has deteriorated."
 They didn't know the dharma
 They said they felt ashamed.

When I reached Kongpo
 I found all the families quite poor
 Sort of meek
 I felt myself tall among them

[Interviewee sings a spiritual song and ends with a prayer]

Cho Lhamo's childhood experiences were mainly shaped by her sense of freedom of being with the domestic horses in the natural environment. She spent every day outdoors. She lived with her mother and father in a village called Kongpo Tham-nyen, Kham province. Their house was located near a river that flows from Lhasa to Kongpo. There were five children in the family: two boys and three girls. She was the youngest child. They were farmers and owned many sheep, horses, yaks, dzo, dzomo, horses, goats, and cows. Her mother took care of the household and supervised all labourers. She also cared for the children. Cho Lhamo's family employed other less wealthy families by giving them work in the fields and providing them with the land. Cho Lhamo said, "To tell you about my childhood, I led an extremely happy life before

the Chinese invasion” (192, p. 3). She felt happy because she could ride horses all day long without any saddles. She rode the horses by herself in the wilderness. Cho Lhamo recalled,

I remember I was good in riding horses, racing and wrestling. I would catch hold of a strong horse with a rope and rode it without a saddle. I rode into the woods clinging on to the mane of the horse with my head bent against it and we rode away. I rode until I had a sore bottom. (192, p. 3)

It seems that horse riding had been her favourite activity since her early childhood till the age of 15 when her father took her and her brother to Lhasa on a business trip. Cho Lhamo’s story clearly shows how her natural learning pathway has led her to practice the freedom of being outdoors without any imposed rules and meanings from adults. These ways of knowing were open in meaning and fluid in definitions because she, as the child, was the main author of her childhood experiences.

As we can see, she could catch the horses independently and ride them without any help. I think that her physiological, cognitive, and emotional abilities and other talents were clearly advanced and articulated in this highly complex learning activity. She could accomplish this activity just like an experienced adult rider. Moreover, her communication with the wild horses seems harmonious without any struggle; she could cling on to the mane and follow the horse’s movement in the woods. Likewise, the horses also allowed her to ride them all day. It seems that this mode of child-horse communication was clearly based on mutual trust. Micklem (2012) found that successful horse-riding is based on trust; “the door to successful training will be open if they trust their riders” (p. 56). It is evident that the animals trusted Cho Lhamo and never harmed her (she didn’t recall any harmful experience). They carried her into the wilderness without any resistance. This activity was extremely fun and exciting. Cho Lhamo recalled her

childhood as the very happy lived experience.

It is interesting to note that riding activities were not explicitly taught to the local children. The oral history doesn't indicate anything else regarding any specific instruction. Cho Lhamo said that she had to learn everything herself. For Cho Lhamo, her childhood was about the active state of freedom in the community and with the natural world. The concept of freedom has been about her abilities to follow her intrinsic talents as the young rider without any socially imposed restrictions and adult supervision.

Further, Cho Lhamo's childhood experiences were clearly place-conscious as she recalled in her oral history:

My region was a very beautiful place. In the far distance was the river and pasturelands nearby. Next to that grew small bushes and the people lived at a higher ground which was flat. Further away behind the village were mountains with forest. When I looked out of my house, it was just like this [place of interview]. The area was beautiful. It was one of the most beautiful places in Kongpo. (192, p. 3)

The beauty of the land had inspired her to spend all day long outdoors embraced by the living places of her village and nearby wilderness. Her active lifestyle was also deeply spiritual. Cho Lhamo's childhood was shaped by her living experiences of happiness and freedom because all of her learning activities have emerged from within her intrinsic motivation of love. These learning experiences were diverse and multi-faceted, ranging from free riding activities in the wild to her cultural observance of the spiritual Buddha dharma on a daily basis and during the auspicious social celebratory events.

For example, Cho Lhamo enjoyed praying and practicing other communal spiritual events (e.g., pooja worship). She learned to pray and to sustain her prayers with her rosary. She

created her personal and intimate way of practicing the dharma without any religious instructions and explicit training. She remembered during the interview:

Normally not many children practiced dharma, but I loved to. When I was asked why I practiced dharma and accumulated prayers on my rosary, I used to feel shy and hide my rosary under the goshup, a gown worn in Kongpo. I counted my prayer on the rosary beneath the gown at night too. (I92, p. 3)

Her spirituality was self-emergent and self-directed. She followed her love for the Buddha dharma. It seems that all her childhood experiences were shaped not by some rules and disciplines, but her intrinsic love for being with the self, others, and living world. All her activities emerged from this intrinsic motivation of love. She loved riding horses and she rode them every day. She loved practicing the dharma and she practiced prayers at night with her rosary too.

As a young girl, Cho Lhamo also practiced her spirituality by participating in the special rites of worship (i.e., pooja) and by performing other Buddhist practices. She followed her father in the performance of the pooja and learned about it from direct observation and participation with him in the pooja “on the 10th day of each Tibetan lunar month” (I92, p. 3). In all of these learning activities of the pooja, she was surrounded by many friends (boys and girls). Some of the boys used to tease her close male friend for being her bodyguard during the pooja. In order to prevent these acts of public teasing of her male friend, she dressed as a boy and continued to participate in the pooja ceremony with her male friend.

During these communal events, she seemed to create her gender expression (i.e., the outer appearance of her gender identity) to sustain her friendship, so that she could also freely participate in the pooja. It is unclear from the oral history how girls were treated during the

poojas. It is clear, however, that Cho Lhamo could freely change her gender appearances as well as transform some of the negative ideas about her participation in the pooja with the boys. She said, “I love being a woman, but I dressed as a man because the boys teased my friend for being my bodyguard” (I92, p. 3). It is evident that she was a very self-directed young girl who could freely ride horses, practice spirituality, and engage in gender equal (i.e., performative) communal spiritual activities (including the pooja) with her male peers.

In addition to riding, Cho Lhamo described her childhood experiences as playful. She also loved to play all night long with other mixed age children (boys and girls). She recalled in her oral history, “I loved to play *mah-jong* [emphasis in original] with the boys and men of the wealthy families. We played the whole night through. We placed bets and played” (I92, p. 3). She didn’t share the details of this game. It seems that this game was an exciting form of entertainment that involved bets. Literature indicates that many Tibetans really enjoy this game as a form of gambling. Mah-jong is often accompanied with folk dances and songs (MacKenzie & Finkel, 2004). During all of her games and self-directed learning activities, Cho Lhamo was fully absorbed in these activities. In particular, she was fully immersed in the spiritual practice of the dharma. She said, “While we practiced dharma, we were totally absorbed in that” (I92, p. 4).

When she talked about her childhood experiences, she didn’t delve into too many details. She said, “If I tell you too many, I will take too much time” (I92, p. 7). She focused on the riding activities, spiritual practice, cross-dressing playfulness, and the beauty of the land (i.e., the living villages and the natural world). Foremost, Cho Lhamo told all readers about her happy childhood in the freedom of her being. Her natural learning experiences evolved from this living memorable place of happy childhood and involved her self-directed playful activities, self-learning of the dharma, and equal participation in the communal games with other mixed age

children and adults. I theorize about the educational significance of these pathways of natural learning in the context of happy and sustainable childhood in Chapter 5.

. . . Extremely happy life before the Chinese invasion

My childhood has been in freedom, with the Land

I danced, I played, and I sustained

The wisdom of the generations, dharma

Buddhists, we are Buddhists.

The land, fertile, gave us everything we need

Every type of grain grew in fields like barley, wheat

All kinds of fruits like walnuts, apricots

We found mushrooms in the forests

The Land had many stones, surrounding the creeks

And in the distance, monasteries guarded

Dharma: compassion, loving-kindness, peace.



Figure 4.18. Cho Lhamo's childhood. Oil on canvas. August, 2016.

Dawa Dolma.

Date of Birth: 1924

Sex: Female

Birthplace: Toe Yancho Tanga, Utsang 177D

Childhood place: Memories in her exact words.

Blank verse.

My village was large

Around 100–200 people lived there

Including children

That's fairly large

There were pastures for the sheep and yaks

To graze; and beautiful flowers

The place was beautiful

There was plenty to eat

Like butter and meat

We had good food

We wove our clothes, and spun yarn

Out of yaks and sheep

Other than that we had no work

–How did you learn to weave?

I learned from my mother

At a young age

I did a lot of weaving

We wove like this [points to her dress]

And this [points to her apron]

I used to weave like this and this

[points to carpet and her apron].

I wove the carpets used in my home.

Yes, I made them all myself

And they [the carpets] are spread inside.

Yes [myself] this one [points to carpet on which she is sitting]

And those inside the house.

[These hand-made carpets, clothes are life-long memories]

—Were there any schools?

There were no schools.

—Was there a monastery near your house?

Yes, there were two monasteries

One was called Chadur Gonpa

The other—Nupkoe Gonpa

They were destroyed

There are no monks

They [the Chinese] must have done what they wanted

Chadur Gonpa was Bon

[the earliest religion in Tibet]

It belonged to the good Bon,

The Bonkar, white Bon,

And not the bad one.

Yes, the Bonkar is the good one.

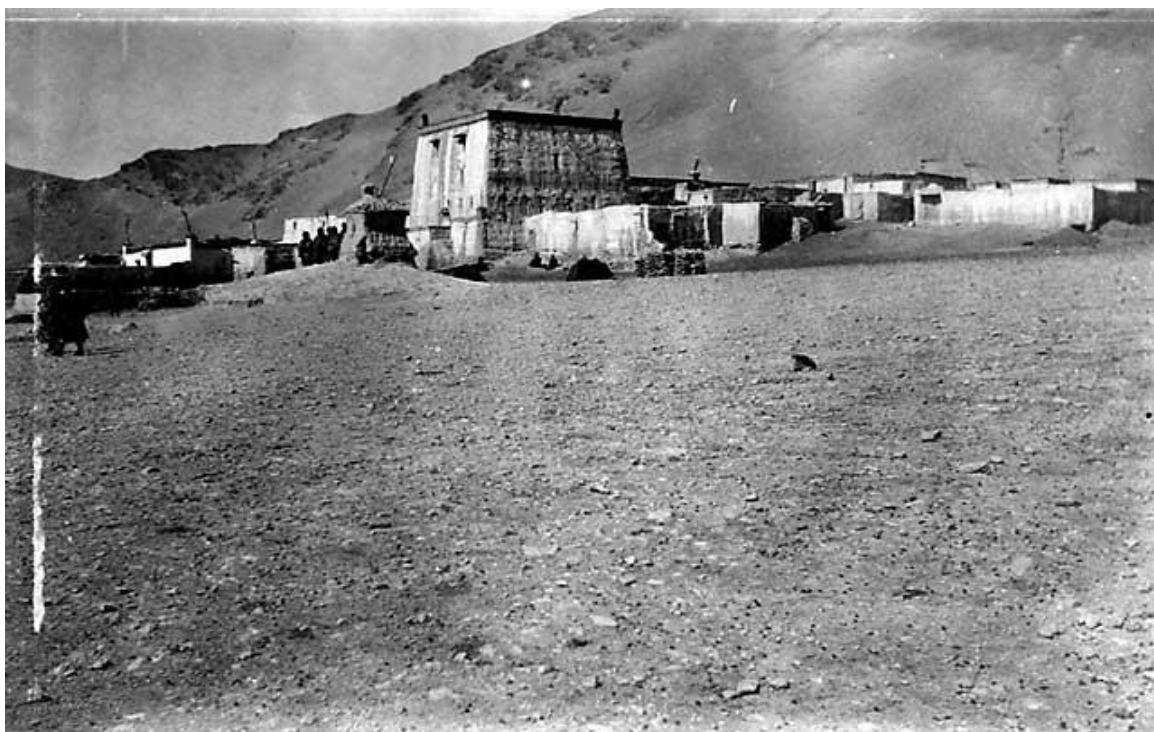


Figure 4.19. Chadur (Chattu Gonpa). April 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum. Archive #405246.



Figure 4.20. Chadur Gonpa. April 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405247.

The other monastery belonged to the Nyingma sect

[One of the sects of Tibetan Buddhism]

Both are equal

It was a good monastery

I was happy, very happy

Both the monasteries

Housed many religious idols

And holy scriptures

On the fourth month of our calendar

There used to be chants,

Religious performance by

Monks dance.

Now there is nothing.

Memorable celebration was Losar,

New Year, we had a lot fun

We ate meat and sheep's head

Made merry

The head was a fortune, like an omen

Good omen

We offered it to Gods

Yes, Losar was the happiest of times

[Laughs]

The year changes, new beginning,

And death comes closer.

Yes, we were farmers

My father was a good man

He died when he was quite young

Yes, he was there then [the whole childhood]

[Laughs]

My mother was also good

When the Chinese came she refused to come with us

So she was left behind in our village

She said she would remain there

The Chinese came to our village

Then we fled, we fled in 1961 or 1962

We learned that our daughter would be taken away

To school

We fled in fear

of this school

Some children were taken

They never came back

About three [children from the village] were taken

To school by the Chinese

I saw this with my eyes

The children from our village

Being taken to school

After a month we fled. It was not easy

To escape. We had to cross the Tsang-Po River

In coracles [small round boats]

The river was very wide.



Figure 4.21. Crossing the Tsang-Po River. April 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405257.



Figure 4.22. Crossing the Tsang-Po River. April 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405259.



Figure 4.23. Crossing the Tsang-Po River. April 1928. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405261.

My husband, daughter, and myself

We thought it we didn't flee

Our daughter would be taken away to school

So we fled secretly.

After crossing the river

We spent one night at the mountain pass

Then we reached Zongka

After Zongka, then Kyerong

From Kyerong toward Nepal

We were walking all the way

[It's all on foot?]

Yes

The youngsters of today would go back to Tibet

When Tibet regains freedom



Figure 4.24. Learning to weave together. Oil on canvas. I was inspired to create this painting by an archival photo found in the digital collection of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York #405287. August 2016.

For Dawa Dolma, childhood memories are inseparable from her memories of the beautiful village and its natural environments. To her, the village was large; “There might have been around 100 or 200 people. It was very large, maybe around 200 including the children” (I77DD, p. 4). She lived with her father, mother, and brother. They were farmers; her mom made all their clothes and wove yarn. In the conversation about her family subsistence, Dawa Dolma

noted that her ways of learning were about learning from her mother. Specifically, she learned from her mother how to weave clothes and spin yarn. This way of learning was embedded in her family's livelihood.

She recalled that they had no work other than their own ways of sustenance, such as grazing animals, weaving clothes, and cultivating farmlands. In this perspective, her learning experience was about the direct participation in all of the family activities. All the family members were there for each other. Everybody was engaged in the household without any imposed sense of obligations. It is difficult to define what learning meant exactly to her because it was inseparable from her family livelihood as a whole. Perhaps, learning was simply about doing weaving work, and this process didn't have any easily distilled and delineated meaning.

Besides these cultural family-led activities, Dawa Dolma had a lot of free time. She recalled in her oral history that she had a lot of time to play outdoors with her girl friends. It is interesting to note that her games involved a lot of hands-on real life activities such as making tea and cooking. The interviewer asked whether her games were pretend games. Dawa Dolma replied, "We made tea. We collected provisions and cooked. We would bring tea stuff from our parents and the girls would make tea together" (I77DD, p. 8). All players could bring their own food from their homes and share with each other.

These games didn't have any explicit adult supervision. All the games were organized by Dama Dolma and her best girl friend. They would create their tea parties and enjoy their time together. These games were mainly about a collective experience of being together and sharing food. There was no designated place for playing. The village seemed to be a place where Dawa Dolma and her friend could play and enjoy their free time together. Hence, her ways of learning may also be described as playing in real-life activities such as cooking and tea-making. In this view, the meaning of learning didn't have one definition because it was about the shared

experience of joyful time with her friends. Perhaps, Dawa Dolma didn't even define this experience as learning at all. What's important is that playing was embedded in a daily life of her family and community with a clear sense of cultural meaning and social purpose. Further, these playful activities were inseparable from the everyday living context of their family subsistence (i.e., cooking and tea-making) and the world of adults as a whole.

Moreover, Dawa Dolma's childhood memories were about playful community celebrations and activities. Specifically, she recalled the memory of Losar, New Year celebrations. She mentioned the importance of "singing and dancing and making merry" (I77D, p. 8). These childhood memories make her happy every time she thinks about the past. Her oral history then delves into her relations with her husband later in life. She mentioned that her marriage was a love marriage and not a usual pre-arranged marriage. They met each other in the same village and fell in love. Her childhood memories are all about her happy livelihood with her parents, and then her youthful love marriage. The question about her childhood led her to remember other life events that were not as happy as her childhood experience. She then recalled all the hardship and oppression of the Chinese invasion and colonization.

Dawa Dolma gave birth to a boy and a girl during this time. Her son couldn't survive; and it is unclear why he died. Her daughter was scheduled to be taken away from her to the Chinese mainland schools. The Chinese troops had a plan to separate all children from their communities. Compulsory schools were used for the purposes of colonial rule including its political communist ideologies. Dawa Dolma said, "When we learned that our daughter would be taken away to school because we came under the monastery office, we fled in fear. It was just the three of us—father, daughter and myself (I77D, p. 15). The interviewer asked why she was afraid of schooling her daughter. Dawa Dolma said that many children, who were taken to China for schooling, had never come back. The local people knew that the schools were used as a means to

destroy their lifestyle and to disconnect their children from the families. The soldiers and not the teachers drove away the children from the villages to schools. Dawa Dolma continued her recollection, “I saw with my eyes three children from our village being taken to school. They were of the same age as my daughter. We feared that she would be the next on the list” (I77D, p. 15). Her daughter was about 6 years old then. They fled right after she had witnessed these schooling procedures. They didn’t ask any permissions to do so because they were afraid of the imposed obstacles from the Chinese soldiers. Dawa Dolma and her family decided to flee Tibet because of the threat of compulsory schooling.



Figure 4.25. Crossing the Tsang-Po River. Oil on canvas. May 2016.

Tsering Chonphel.

Date of birth: 1935

Birthplace: Shungpa, Utsang

Sex: Male I35D

Childhood memories in his exact words.

Free verse.

I was born in Shungpa Matsen in Ngari

Both of my parents were nomads

There were eight [children]

With five brothers and two sisters

The place was clean and vast

As a child, I felt blissful

Because there was good grass,

A large river

Mountains, covered with snow

Rocks were settled around the middle

Huge pasturelands below

It was most blissful.

We had our yaks, sheep, goats, horses

As the middle class

We had around 1500 goats and sheep

Around 20 odd yaks,

Six horses

From the age of six and ten

I didn't have any chores

I was old enough to herd

I was the youngest

I was loved the most

It was a very happy time

I was blissful

I was very happy

I wish to say something about that time

I was not called Tsering Chonphel

At home in Tibet

I was called Nowo

The oldest was called Phowo

Since my family called me that

Most of the people called me Nowo

Here, one must register one's name.

My name should be Nowo

I lived in a *ba*

We also called it a *gur* "tent"

Our *ba*, made from yak hair, had two pillars

Four pillars outside and two inside poles

There were no schools

One learned to dance, sing, chant

Naturally from parents, relatives

Neighbours

I used to sing and chant very well

And have taught many [songs]

At the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts

[sings]

This song is about the sky, the earth, and home

There are [songs that are] sung at

Certain times, but this can

Be sung always

In the wintertime, in the morning

Around 7 am

[the animals] must be taken to graze

[They] are allowed to graze the whole day

During the summertime, the mother sheep

And goats were taken

To the grasslands before daybreak

[We] left around the break

Of dawn and then [brought]

Them back to the pen

At around 9 at the end of day

My mother and her sister did the milking

Boys didn't engage much in milking

Since, I was the youngest

I helped my mother with milking

The dri were milked early around 7

Then were left to graze in the mountains

When I was herding

I had a lot of fun

[I] ate the buttermilk and tsampa

On the mountaintop

Birds sang, rabbits were there

Flowing waters, snowy mountains

Everywhere

One stayed there happily

One spent the day with the sheep

Unmindful of time

One was very happy

When the Chinese came,

All the people showed signs of sadness

I was a child and was not aware much

Well, not a child, a teenager

I must have been around

14 of age

There were not any fears

Because the announcement said

That [they] were the Messer Dolmag

“Liberatory Army” and noone knew

What Messer Dolmag was

All the older [people] were sad

They remarked, it was a bad omen

But I didn’t know much, didn’t

Know what to say

All the elders became sad

And we too were not happy

We were living happily

We were extremely happy prior to 59

I felt that [I] was leaving this happy village

My mother was with me, she said

“You must pray that [you] can return.”

So when we reached the top

Of the mountain, we [prayed]
 To our village
Farewell, we are leaving now.



Figure 4.26. Farewell to the village. The village is crying. Oil on canvas on board. Spring 2016.

For Tsering Chonhpel, childhood was a blissful way of being. In response to a question about his life as a young boy and his favourite childhood memory, Tsering Chonhpel said that everybody in the family loved him very much. As the youngest child among his seven siblings, he was the most beloved son. He had an extremely happy childhood. One of his first childhood memories is, however, about the beauty of the natural environment and its living places. He said,

[We] were living in a nomadic region. The place was clean and very vast. As a child one felt blissful because during summertime there was good grass in the pastures. There was no forest cover. Likewise, there was a large river in the region. The mountains were

covered with snow at the top, rocks around the middle and huge pasturelands at the base.

It was most blissful. (I35D, p. 2)

The feeling of bliss shaped his early experiences as a child (from birth until about the age of 15). As nomads, they were dependent on the abundance of good grass and pastures, and the overall fertility of the land. In addition, his family owned about 1500 goats, 20 yaks, and 6 horses. They led a subsistence life because they could produce their own food and exchange it for grains or other products with their neighbours. Tsering spent all his time outdoors without any particular responsibilities and duties. Sometimes, he herded the animals and took care of the yaks and sheep. It seems that he really enjoyed helping his family in this way. He neither felt obliged nor forced to look after the animals. It was a natural continuity of his blissful living with his family. It is interesting to note that the family didn't have a built house. They lived in a nomadic tent (ba):

Our ba was among the smaller ones and there were two pillars. There were four pillars outside and two inside. The bigger ones had three pillars and the very big ba were with four pillars [inside]. These were very big. [They] were made from yak hair. (I35D, p. 3)

This home seems to have an organic structure that is shaped by the natural environment. Hence, his childhood experience was deeply connected with the sense of blissful living in close proximity to the natural environment and its vast beauty. Further, Tsering spoke about his education as a natural learning experience that involved creative and exciting activities outdoors. He said, "There were no schools or any kind of education that was given. One learned to dance, sing and chant prayers naturally from one's parents, relatives and neighbors. There was no education as such. There were no schools" (I35D, p. 4). The term "natural learning" has many different meanings in this context of his childhood. It was natural because Tsering could learn without any instruction or schooling. It was also natural because he was immersed in his community life that had many possibilities for his engagement with his parents, relatives, and

neighbours. It is important to note that he learned not just *about* dancing and singing but *how to* dance and sing. We don't know the details and contexts of his learning experience, yet we know that Tsering really succeeded in singing, dancing, and praying. He recalled that he later became a teacher of songs at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in Dharamsala, India. He also sang a song during his oral history interview. The absence of school neither prevented him from learning in his childhood nor from teaching in his adulthood. I would like to cite an English version of his song below to demonstrate my respect to Tsering Chonphel and his talent:

The sky is vast and boundless
 Surrounded by endless clouds
 Brilliant stars shine in the sky
 The sun and the moon are triumphant
 Let us rejoice with the dance of success!

The earth is immense and lush
 Decked by flowers that bloom
 The sheep in the meadows eat and thrive
 The sheep are surely triumphant
 Let us rejoice with the dance of success!

The tent needs no building yet makes a home
 Within it are pillars and beams that hold
 Incense and butter lamps are faithfully offered
 The deities and nagas are triumphant
 Let us rejoice with the dance of success!

The cup that is white and blue

Is filled with delicious chang 'home-brewed beer'

The cup is decorated with silver

Let us rejoice with the dance of success!

The cup is adorned with designs

Of the twelve birth signs

It is overflowing with tea

Flavored with butter from the dri

Let us rejoice with the dance of success!

Let us swirl round and round!

(This song is about the sky, the earth, and home. It can be sung anytime. Tsering sang this song during his oral history interview).



Figure 4.27. Learning from Cham. Oil on canvas on board. August 2016.

Kunchok Tashi (alias).

Birthplace: Utsang

Sex: Male

Born: 1937 I13D

In his own words: Childhood memories.

Blank verse.

While I was growing up

My paternal grandparents

Were there

Everybody was there

It was a happy time in Tibet

One herded goats and sheep

Farmers cultivated their lands

Everybody was happy

One was free

Tibet was a happy place

One practiced the dharma

And worked in the fields

It was a happy time

Earlier Tibet was an incredibly happy

[place]

It was very peaceful

Incredibly so

After the occupation of Tibet

My father and I

At around dusk

At around 6 or 7 am

Wearing whatever we had been wearing then

Father and I fled

We crossed the mountains pass

At Sha Khumbu

My early memories of childhood?

I herded sheep

Along with my paternal grandfather

Each one was free to do

What one wanted

There were never any [restrictions]

We were village children

And had not been to school

Yet we learned from parents, elders

They told us even it was a simple worm

“The worm may die, keep it aside

[or] you will sin.”

Do not throw stones at birds.

We practiced the compassion of the dharma

The common people didn't know to read and write.

Yet farmers' children were told,

“Do no harm. Don't throw stones

At birds. Don't throw stones at dogs.”

Compassion of the Buddha dharma

Has therefore been taught

One was always told about insects,

“Be careful, don't step on it.”

We naturally have compassion

Since generations back

We led a happy life with freedom

Kunchok Tashi's childhood was happy. He grew up surrounded by his grandparents and other relatives. He recalled in his oral history,

While [I] was growing up my paternal grandparents were there, everybody was there and it was a very happy time in Tibet. There were no problems in Tibet earlier. One herded the goats and sheep and the farmers cultivated their lands. Everybody was happy. (I13D, p. 1)

He emphasized that his childhood was a happy time and that Tibet was a happy place.

The way of life was about peaceful being without any thought of harm to other countries and to other communities. In thinking about that time, he repeated a couple of times that “earlier Tibet

was an incredibly happy [place]” (I13D, p. 2). Everybody seemed to be immersed in their everyday work activities. Everybody had a place on the land and could live sustainably and peacefully.

His most favourite childhood memories were mainly about his time with his grandfather. They used to herd sheep together. In addition to herding the sheep, he liked to play with other mixed age children. His favourite game was with coins. Kunchok said,

There were the *khakang*, *karma*, *karchung*, *chegye* and *kachen*. As children we used to take these various kinds of coins like the *ngulsang chu*, *chugor* and *sangsum gormo*.

There were such kinds of money earlier in Tibet. Little children used to play with the coins. The big currency units like the 100 and 50 were made of paper. There were small coins made of copper called *khakang*, *karma*, *chegye*, *zhogang*, *sangsum gormo* and *zhongang gormo*. The *sangsum gormo* was made of silver. (I13D, p. 3)

As a child, he used to put the coins in his pocket and play with them. The coins were made of silver and copper. This game was always played outside. Children had to aim at a coin with another coin. Those children who could hit the target collected the defeated coins. In addition, to playing this coin game, the children used to play with each other. During their playful activities, the children would also learn about the dharma, or the Buddhist way of good life. Even though the local children had never been to school, they used to listen to their parents and grandparents. Kunchok shared,

We were village children and had not been to school. However, our parents and everyone told us even if it was about a worm on the ground, “The worm may die. Keep it aside or [you] will be sinning. Do not throw stones at the birds. That is a sin.” Such compassion of the Buddha dharma was prevalent. (I13D, p. 4)

Hence, the compassionate life was at the heart of the children's ways of learning. They listened to the parents and tried to practice the dharma in all their games. He then mentioned that the villagers didn't have formal education. In order to study reading and writing, some children could join the local monastery. At the monasteries, dharma studies were practiced. The dharma studies included religious and scripture studies, as well as the study of the Tibetan script. The children were always told to be compassionate toward non-human beings and to be, particularly, respectful of birds, insects, and domestic animals. Compassion was the foundation of all teachings in the family and in the community. Kunchok highlighted, "So, such compassion of the Buddha dharma was taught. Even upon sighting an insect one was told, 'Be careful, [you] may step on it'" (I13D, p. 4). He then remembered that even chicken were not killed for their meat. The people didn't fish because they respected the natural well-being of fish in the rivers. Kunchok said that compassion was the natural way of learning about the self and the world; "we naturally possess the compassion of Buddha dharma since generations back. We are aware of the dharma but do not know the scriptures because one does not have education" (I13D, p. 5). The people were immersed in their work with compassion for all sentient beings and the world. It seems that children's learning experiences were not separated from this way of life with dharma. Kunchok said,

[They] lived that way. It was a happy life with freedom. There was no problem on account of your livelihood. It was like that. The Tibetan's compassion for the animals is incredible. Though we do not know to read and write—[I] do not know the scriptures very well as [I] do not have good eyes and did not get the chance to study earlier—yet [we] naturally have compassion. Even if someone is speaking badly, we say, "Do not speak [that way]" since it can happen due to arrogance at times. (I13D, p. 5)

Learning meant compassion. Compassionate life led to community happiness and well-being. Compassion was embedded in all activities including conversations. Kunchok didn't know how to write in his childhood. Later in life, he learned to write by copying newspapers in India. As a child, he spent his time outdoors with the animals. He herded their family flock of about 160 sheep and goats. Kunchok learned mainly from his grandfather because they used to spend every day together in the pastures;

Grandfather did not know to read and write but of course, he recited prayers like *benza guru* the mantra, *Om ah hung vajra guru padma siddhi hung* and the *mani* [emphasis in original] mantra of Avalokiteshvara and prayed. So [I] am not very good in my writing. (I13D, p. 6)

He learned from his grandfather not only the prayer, but also different stories about life. His grandfather used to share folk and intergenerational stories about the pastureland. These stories had a special meaning because they taught Kunchok how to live well and sustain the well-being of the land. Through the stories, Kunchok could relate to the animals and learn how to care for them. In addition to the stories, he also learned how to make the local clothes with his hands. The grandfather showed him how to stitch boots and how to wear them on the land. These boots were called *zompa*. Kunchok learned to make these boots by observing his grandfather while they were herding the animals.

Also Kunchok learned the importance of knowing all 150 sheep by their names. His grandfather had an excellent memory and knew all of their animals. Learning about the sheep was also a way of learning about people. His grandfather used to say, "If animals became familiar, they learned to be affectionate and when people became too familiar, [they] start to fight" (I13D, p. 7). Animals taught him about the importance of affection, compassion, and care.

When they herded the sheep, they had to constantly move around from one pasture to another. Kunchok said that they had to walk the whole day. As they walked, they also did weaving and spinning to make their own clothes. Everything had to be made by hand, as there were no machines. The shepherds did this work in the fields. Boys and girls did the spinning. Usually girls made the traditional Tibetan dress, such as the chupa, whereas boys made tsipa from the yak hair for thicker clothes and woven tools (e.g., ropes). Kunchok said that he had herded the sheep from the age of eight until the age of eighteen. When he was 22, he had to escape the Chinese invasion and flee to India.



Figure 4.28. Leaving the village. Oil on canvas. Fragment. August 2016.



Figure 4.29. Path toward Sha Khumbu. Inspired by an archival photo (#405232) in the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Oil on canvas.

OM MANI PADME HUM

Chapter 5 Generative Theme-Based Interpretations and Personal Reflections



Figure 5.1. A Tibetan child. Nomads. 1927. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Archive #405103.

Natural Learning: Creative Agency

Interpretation: Natural learning was a self-learning existential experience, through which children could construct their subjectivities, as well as express and perform their creative agency of knowing the world through their self-directed and community-based cultural practices.

Before going any further, it is important to note the importance of spirituality that was an implicit context of daily life (Chapter 4, p. 147). This spiritual worldview is, therefore, implicitly interwoven throughout all of the generative themes with respect and acknowledgement of this context.

The rural and nomadic children had learned naturally before the advent of colonial compulsory schooling in the 1950s. This way of learning had mainly been about their free and often unsupervised-by-adults experience in the household and outdoors. It was an existential experience because learning was about living, subsistence, and, ultimately, afterlife experience. Natural learning was the implicit context and process of children's being and becoming. Walters (2008) defines existential learning as "the investment of one's person or 'subjectivity' [i.e., inner realm] in a process central to daily events and the social context" (p. 113). For Greene (1995), an existential learning context is about the human condition, in and through which learners develop an awareness of their situated life and its meanings. In this perspective, learning is always a lived experience (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Furthermore, the very meaning of social context was about the immediate surroundings that included the living culture of the children's household. Existential learning had been embedded in these social contexts of daily experiences. Greene found that an existential "focus is on process and practice; the skill in the making is embodied in the object made" (1995, p. 14). These objects were

mainly related to specific cultural practices, such as attending to animals, weaving, spiritual communication, and other daily activities. Natural learning practices had, therefore, sustained the social context of the local knowledge and, hence, the rural subsistence, because the children could engage with and experience these cultural practices on the basis of their genuine interests, and not on the basis of the imposed compulsion from adults and social institutions.

Based on the individual oral histories and collective multiple-voiced memories, I define the term “natural” as children’s conscious choice and intention. In this view, choice was about the children’s understanding of their interests, such as horse riding, herding animals, weaving, and spirituality. Children’s intention was specifically connected with the intrinsic motivation to enact and perform their chosen cultural activities and practices in diverse social contexts. Culture, in this view, is an educational force that allows children to become its intentional agents of knowledge production. Natural learners were the creators of their existential spheres of public life. Hence, the cultural process of natural learning had been a self-learning experience that was characterized by the children’s existential powers to lead their life.

The concept of children’s powers was about their self-expression and unrestricted community engagement. There is no power without one’s agency, and there is no agency without power (Giddens, 1984). Power is not something essential. It is a cultural process through which learners can express and enact their intentional consciousness (Freire, 2004). In particular, the idea of a cultural power may be conceptualized as the children’s *creative agency* to be and to become active and equal members of public life (Aries, 1979; Freire, 1997; Holt, 1972, 1989; Oswell, 2013). As I indicate in Chapter 2, the foundational definition of agency is about children’s freedom to learn through their authentic will and to act in accord with their intentions.

For the local children, this freedom was about the fulfillment of their personal interests and expression of their cultural consciousness. The cultural consciousness was the children's awareness of their family subsistence (i.e., a way of being) that have shaped the material and spiritual structures of their household and collective lived experience for many generations. I use the term "consciousness" to emphasize the creative process of meaning making that the children used to perform as their natural learning experiences. These experiences, in fact, became the vehicles through which their cultural consciousness developed and expanded in the existential context of being *with* (Freire 1968/1973a) the world in its micro-social contexts of the household and macro-social contexts of their village. Freire (1968/1973a) explains, "As men [*sic*] relate to the world by responding to the challenges of the environment, they begin to dynamize, to master and to humanize reality" (p. 5). The local children had multiple possibilities of self-development through these agencies of responses and mastery of their places and existential realities. Cianci (2015) found that agency is a power to act on the basis of understanding and not on the basis of social determinism (i.e., enforcement and other imposed predicament) for action; "that is to think and then act" (p. 32). The children were perceived as fully conscious, and hence, equal knowledge makers in their families and village.

It is, therefore, important to note that the concept of "nature" in natural learning is not about an essential and a passive (i.e., objective and socially determinist) nature of the environment (Evernden, 1988, 1992). There are three basic ways to understand nature in the cultural context of existential learning experience: (a) nature as an object (i.e., instrumental exploitation of nature as a resource), (b) nature as the self (i.e., nature as a projection and extension of identity), and (c) nature as a miracle (an existential experience of personal wonder and mystery) (Evernden, 1988, p. 157). Nature in self-learning processes is an existential and an

ontological experience of one's conscious sense of wonder and, perhaps, miracle that has many subjective meanings and interpretations (Hewitt, 2014). In this existential context, a miracle is an embodied way of mindfully knowing the world without the habitual perception of reason and instrumental rationality of domination (Nhat Hanh, 1976). For example, Hewitt (2014) shared his natural learning experiences of wonder and miracles during their unschooling adventures on the farm,

I am just realizing, later learner that I am, the extent to which it is not just the sights, but also the smells, sounds, tactile sensations of our little farm that add to my life. Past the tomato house, the thick scent of soil and sharp, strangely acrid-sweet smell of ripening fruit. Past the sawmill, and the smell of sawdust, like bread baking. At the sugar bush, the movement of the leaves, like someone whispering something in your ear that you can't quite make out, and with it the push of breeze across my face. . . . Growing food is one of those rare undertakings with the capacity to alter your perceptions so completely that something that might once have seemed objectionable and even disgusting becomes beautiful as the elegance of its true purpose is revealed. (p. 16)

Miracles are the lived experiences of a present reality and its existential relations, meanings, ideas, and processes. Nhat Hanh (1976) wrote that the awareness of these miracles is a qualitatively different mind state from the habitual "machine like thinking" (p. 12). The engaged awareness of existential (i.e., natural) attention to the embodied moment of one's experience is an act of "infinite wonder and joy [as it] opens our hearts like a flower, enabling us to enter the world of reality" (p. 12). The meaning of nature in natural learning seems to emerge *within* or *during* children's cultural practices, including the ordinary activities and daily experiences of their realities amidst farming.

Hence, nature has a creative context in learning that may also be viewed as more than the human agency (Abram, 1996). The concept of “more than the human” refers to the field of sentient beings, including the elements and place such as “the color of sky, the rush of waves—every aspect of the earthly sensuous” (Abram, 1996, p. ix). For Cianci (2015), educators should recognize and acknowledge the power of more than the human agency in all learning activities and cultural practices because this personal power creates a possibility of understanding how people experience the world “through the non-human other” (p. 32). It is also important to acknowledge that the Tibetan parents and community members had, in fact, created the place-based cultural context whereby their children could enact their existential powers because the children had an unregulated and open *access* to a broad range of natural learning experiences, embraced by the miraculous beauty of the land. Holt (1989) wrote,

What adults can do for children is to make more and more of that world and the people in it accessible and transparent to them. The key word is *access* [emphasis in original]: to people, places, experiences, the places where we work, other places we go. (p. 127)

The open access enabled children to embody and experience their creative agency as the active and equal participants (even as creators) of their immediate worlds. Hence, self-learning experience should not be conceptualized as the individualized experience because the children were immersed in their worlds with other people and animals. It is evident that some children could really wander on their own into the woods and independently explore the wild nature (I35D, I92), while others were more interested in participating in the adult daily life of their communities (I13D, I77D). In all of these experiences, they were not directly and intentionally supervised by adults. In this context, the children had multiple possibilities of creating their

natural learning places and entering diverse realities of life within the social context of open access and, consequently, existential freedom (I92, I77D, I35D).

The existential sense of freedom was intricately connected with the children's creative agency to make sense of their culture, as well as to embody these senses and to perform their meanings. This local view of natural learning resonates with Holt's (1989) concept of learning as living. He wrote,

If we are alive we are receiving various sorts of messages from our environment all the time. We take these in in one form or another and make use of them. We are constantly experiencing reality and in one way or another incorporating it into our mental model of the universe. (p. 157)

Children were capable of organizing their learning experience directly from their ways of being with the world and without any external instructions. Further, Holt (1983) found that Piaget was wrong in thinking about children as being less developed than adults and having inferior logical functions of reasoning. The oral histories show that the children were never perceived as less human than the adults in their reasoning. Likewise, Roshi (1974) observed that the Buddhist child is often educated without the sense of original sin that often dominates the western (i.e., European and North American) views of learning and development. He wrote, "However childish the remarks, however silly even, the child will always be treated as if it is a serious human being" (p. 15). The local children were respected as equal meaning makers in public life who were capable of knowing the world through their senses, observations, games, labour, and other existential activities of everyday life. Natural learning is always situated in this existential context of reality and cannot be separated from its ongoing sociocultural processes.

Therefore, children should also be considered as the creative agents (i.e., leaders) of their personal and public life.

The child's public world had always been in making and re-making itself. Their activities were always serious meaning making processes and experiences, because children could make knowledge *through* their chosen activities. I define meaning making with the help of Gray (2013) as children's ability to "find their own way in life" (p. 3). All of the meaning making activities were purposeful and intentional processes that the children had performed on a daily basis. These processes were embedded in "the concrete reality of their lives" (Freire, 1998, p. 36). The reality was diverse as it was perceived and experienced through the multiple subjectivities. Generally, in Tibetan Buddhism meaning is considered as an emergent and subjective reality (Simmer-Brown, 2002). Federman (2011) found that Buddhists think that one's subjective experience *is*, in fact, the reality. The concept of subjectivity encompasses a child's sense of self that she/he perceives and develops from her/his experiential realities. A sense of self has a dynamic and creative nature in Buddhism. Drawing on the works of the Dalai Lama, Flowers and Stahl (2011) wrote, "Because the mind likes continuity, it uses a self-story to link multiple but separate experiences of self into a cohesive story" (p. 23). The sense of self emerges from the experiences of self; and these experiences are stories. It is, however, important to note that not all stories contribute to this development and one's subjectivity, because a self-story is, ultimately, a *self-authoring process*.

Through creative meaning making processes, the children could develop a cohesive story about their place in the world and, hence, their self-stories (i.e., subjectivities, identities). The sense of self emerges from within an *authorial agency* of meaning making in which children act as the main authors of their lives and, hence, cultural producers (Matusov, 2009, 2011; Matusov

& Marjanovic-Shane, 2014). Matusov (2009) defined a learner's authorship as an ongoing engagement with "historically unfolding discourses" (p. 5). These discourses were the cultural meaning making activities through which the children could author themselves. A natural learning activity, then, was inseparable from adults' cultural meaning making activities through which they could mutually experience their realities as well as discover, narrate, and embody their individual and collective sense of self *in* the real life (i.e., living together).

For example, Cho Lhamo's riding activities help us to understand that she used to make her own way of knowing the real world by actively exploring it with the horses. In so doing, she had also learned about the horses and her own physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual knowledge/skills (e.g., balance, communication, local knowledge of place, self-leadership) that were necessary to catch and connect with a horse without any adult help (Micklem, 2012). This knowledge is implicit, natural, and authorial. The concept of authorial knowledge is about a contextualized process through which a learner engages with the self as the subject of knowledge (Matusov, 2015a). Likewise, many children learned naturally by engaging in the cultural practices of their household (I77D, I13D, I35D). In this view, natural learning should be analyzed as a child-led activity that is, primarily, shaped by the child's creative agency of being in and with the world (Holt, 1974, 1989).

Cho Lhamo's agency as a child was about her sense of self-leadership (i.e., power) in life. Holt (1972) wrote that children's agency is about their experience of the world's wholeness and their sense of continuity with it. Many local children could connect with this experience and make meaning from it because they felt themselves as the leaders of their life. As I state above, it is evident from the oral histories that the creative agency of children's leadership was possible due to their unlimited freedom of access to their immediate communities and cultural resources

(I35D, I92). Having access to various cultural places, including the natural environment, helped them to feel immersed and engaged in their family-based cultural practices. Usually natural learning takes place in “an atmosphere in which children, free to be themselves, would show their interests, let them come out” (Holt, 1972, p. 98). Hence, a child’s creative agency is a feeling of freedom to be oneself, to explore, and, consequently, to experience one’s curiosity, wonder, interests, and powers. These explorations are educational because children could learn not from various books, but from direct experience. In this way, they could learn “what can’t be said” (Pritscher, 2010, p. 132).

Freire (1997) found that curiosity usually emerges from within the concrete experiential context, whereby learners intentionally form an understanding through a personal engagement with and reflection upon their world. The intentional explorations of learning or learning explorations were perceived and felt by the children as something they did because they *loved* and enjoyed doing it (I92, I13D, I35D, I77D). The children were capable of creating their cultural experiences in following their sense of joy, fun, and love. Children actually discover their interests through diverse self-led activities and experiences (Ricci & Pritscher, 2015). In so doing, children can critically discover themselves as equal citizens and respectful family members.

In an expanded perspective, creative agency should be perceived as a process and a cultural context through which individuals may realize and develop their subjectivity in the world (Holt, 1976). The subjective agency was about children’s *decision-making* activities in the multi-faceted contexts of their daily life (von Duyke, 2013). Subjectivity in decision-making processes seems to be as vital as children’s intention and will. The oral histories show that the children could do something and, hence, learn something important because they were interested

in this knowledge, and this knowledge was a living part of their public sphere. Ricci and Pritscher (2015) wrote that “willed learning is not just about the individual, but includes others, the world, and the universe—it is community focused as well as self-determined” (p. 3). Perhaps, the best way to understand children’s subjectivity is to imagine it as the personal expression of the inner values “where unity with all life energy occurs” (Weinhold, 1976, p. 146). Lake and Dagostino’s (2013) work on Freire found that “subjectivity implies an internal depth” (p. 106). Subjectivity is an ontological context of children’s well-being that is crucial to the wholeness of children’s cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and psychic development (Kessler, 2000). Holt (1974) further observed that children’s subjectivity should not be thought of as something as inferior to adults and their presumed objectivity. On the contrary, educators, parents, and community members should focus on children’s subjective competence in giving children “a chance to feel independent and trusted, to be like other people and do what they were doing” (p. 30). The oral histories indicate that the children had (or could develop) this cultural competence because their subjectivities and creative agencies were valued, recognized, and nurtured in the family and broader community.

It is, however, important to note that the children didn’t specifically perform learning activities for the purposes of gaining agency, subjectivity, or learning per se. They had explored diverse cultural ideas (e.g., tea making, family life, compassion, gender, spirituality, dharma) and enacted their interests; this is how they had come to know themselves and their place in the world. Likewise, Holt (1976) wrote, “I have learned much about music and music-making by going to rehearsals and concerts. But I do not go to them to ‘learn about’ music, but because I love what I see and hear there” (p. 11). Non-schooled learning was also an intentional (i.e., conscious) exploration of diverse cultural ideas and practices that was intrinsically connected with the

learners' love for these ideas and practices. In that historical context, there was no learning without a meaning making activity and cultural practice. Hence, there was no learning devoid of creative agency.

Furthermore, the notion of creative agency didn't have any normative sociocultural context that was specifically set by an institution or an organization, such as a school, monastery, or government (Matusov, von Duyke, & Kayumova, 2016). There was, however, a collective adherence to the socioreligious principle of the Buddhist agency that was perceived and practiced as the observance of compassion in everyday life (I92, I35D, I13D). Further, the sense of the Buddhist ethics has, primarily, been shaped by the children's engagement with their parents, grandparents, relatives, and neighbours. During their self-learning activities, the children could explore the meaning and purpose of all life in the community because they were directly involved in this real life. Life itself was perceived as sacred; and more than the human beings were perceived as the teachers of the Buddha dharma. The ethics of one's creative agency were about one's ongoing cultivation of compassion toward the world (human and non-human) without any set of guidelines or imposed instructions.

Nhat Hanh (1987) also found that children naturally feel this intrinsic awareness of their being with the world as love. He shared with his readers,

Children understand very well that in each woman, in each man, in each child, there is a capacity of waking up, of understanding, and of loving. Many children have told me that they cannot show me anyone who does not have this capacity. Some people allow it to develop, and some do not, but everyone has it. This capacity of waking up, of being aware of what is going on in your feelings, in your body, in your perceptions, in the world, is called Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding and loving. (p. 18)

The Buddhist notion of creative agency is the intrinsic awareness of dharma that is an ethical awakening of compassionate and intentional consciousness (Bai & Scutt, 2009). In this perspective, it is difficult to analyze a particular situation, experience, practice, or activity of natural learning because learning is an embodied *being* through which children perform their creative agency. A performative aspect of creative agency is a process that makes certain cultural realities visible and active (Butler, 2010), such as the realm of nature. It is clear that the children constructed their realities in a non-anthropocentric worldview (i.e., non human-centred) because their experiences took place outdoors and in direct contact with animals and places. Taguchi (2014) found that performative agency of children's action (activities) is an existential context through which "humans and non-humans are to be understood as performative agents that have power to act and to transform each other and themselves" (p. 80). These transformations had allowed the children to understand and to practice the intricate Buddhist ethics of dharma, in which humans and non-humans co-created their realities of mutual freedom, happiness, and, consequently, the collective well-being.

Their parents didn't seem to interfere with their intentional or spontaneous performances and explorations of meanings; these agencies were respected for their own intrinsic value of joyful happiness. Therefore, the creative agency of natural learning doesn't have any instrumental meaning because it is enacted without any pre-determined goal in mind. The children could perform all these activities (e.g., cross-dressing, riding, singing, running, swimming) because they felt genuine and spontaneous interest in them.

Further, the oral histories demonstrate that the creative agency of childhood natural learning experience had led the people into the future with a clear and vivid memory of their happy past. Overall, the meaning of natural learning seems to reflect the cultural Buddhist

meaning of life. The Dalai Lama said that the meaning of life is about the collective and personal feeling of happiness and joy (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998). Based on my poetic reflections and renderings of the chosen excerpts, I further discuss and explore the process of natural learning as the lived historical experience with a focus on the specific children's ways of learning such as learning about the self, free time as learning, intergenerational learning, physical activities, learning as creative playing, living places, and freedom as cultural subsistence. The reader will find these interpretations below.

Natural Learning as Learning About the Self

Interpretation: Natural ways of learning were often experienced as the personal way of learning about the compassionate self in the cultural–spiritual context of the Buddha Dharma and its daily practice. The local children experienced this way as their happiness of being.

The epistemological concept of natural learning has been shaped by a broader cultural–spiritual worldview of the Buddha dharma that was characterized by the people's belief in the intrinsic value of compassion. This worldview has created an environment of natural learning in which the children could experience and feel happiness in their lives. The Dalai Lama and Cutler (1998) explain that the spiritual sense of happiness is not about a temporary relief or some romantic entertainment; happiness is a life-long purpose of being human. The oral histories show that childhood happiness has a long lasting effect that fills one's life experiences with joyful memories and peace of mind. The Dalai Lama (2015) also said,

As Buddhists, however, we aim not merely for temporary relief and temporary benefit but for long–term results. Buddhists are concerned not only for this life but for life after life, on and on. We count not on weeks or months or even years, but lives and eons. (p. 8)

The concept of life is considered as the consciousness of being (including more than the human) that extends and expands into the previous lives, pre-natal lives, and future becomings (Rinpoche, 2002). To think of life as consciousness means to experience life as the joy of being (Dalai Lama et al., 1997). Consciousness, in this view, has the basis of compassion. It is almost impossible to define the very meaning of consciousness because it is a very complex mental process of cognition, reasoning, analysis, affects, and feeling that has multiple mental levels (Dalai Lama XIV, 2016, pp. 3-4). In fact, consciousness is the universal phenomenon that is present in all sentient beings (Dalai Lama XIV, 2005). It is, however, important to note that consciousness doesn't emerge spontaneously; it is rather a historical phenomenon (Dalai Lama XIV, 2016).

The interviewees said that they had developed their cultural consciousness of happiness through their childhood experience of natural learning and its creative agencies. The Dalai Lama explains, "According to the Buddhist explanation, the ultimate creative principle is consciousness" (as cited in Rinpoche, 2002, p. 95). The participants didn't specifically talk about consciousness, yet they spoke about their creative experiences and historical memories of their communities. Freire (1997) wrote that "in being conscious that I can know socially and historically, I also know that what I know cannot be divorced from the historical continuity. Knowledge has historicity. It never is, it is always in the process of being" (p. 31). The consciousness of learning is always shaped by this social and historical process, through which people become aware of themselves.

Likewise, Holt (1970), drawing on the works of Dewey, discussed the importance of the continuum of experience. In the historical continuum of experiences, children creatively construct their mental awareness of the self and mental consciousness of the world in which they

live. This historical awareness forms children's understanding and new knowledge because "the children have been learning, all the time, for all of their lives" (p. 23). Consciousness seemed to develop from within this creative continuum of self-directed experience, through which children can happily and freely explore their different ideas and sociocultural practices.

Further, consciousness is the creative awareness of life. Pritscher (2010) found that awareness is one of the foundational processes of learning because "awareness precedes thought" (p. 134). Children become aware of things through free observation and unregulated (i.e., mindful) explorations (Hyland, 2011). The local sense of freedom has been embodied in the concept of the Buddha dharma; "we followed kindness, dharma rules" (I13D). Freedom is an integral consciousness of kindness and compassion. The Dalai Lama also said that kindness helps people to ethically develop as social animals and, therefore, to sustain the dharma-consciousness across the lifespan (Dalai Lama XIV, 2016).

Hence, the local children could develop the consciousness of freedom through their self-directed meaning making activities. Yet this concept of the self has to be properly understood with respect to the cultural-spiritual concept of the Buddha Nature of all peoples and other sentient beings. The Buddha Nature is the basis of the self and self-consciousness; it cannot be taught nor imposed. The Dalai Lama explains,

the clear light or the Buddha-nature itself is not the person or the sentient being but the basis of such a being. It is part of the consciousness and is therefore the basis of a designation of a sentient being of the self or a person, but it is not the self itself. (as cited in Kyabgon, 2003, p. 65)

The clear light (gnas lugs) is the universal spiritual consciousness that expresses itself as the natural way of being. In this view, the meaning of the self is about one's consciousness of the

self as a part of the Buddha nature itself. The Dalai Lama said, “What we think of as ‘I’ is a succession of instants in a continuum of consciousness” (as cited in Novick, 2012, p. 34).

Therefore, the self and the mind should not be perceived as objective vessels to be filled with information decontextualized from experience.

Rinpoche (2002) found that “the very nature of the mind is such that if you only leave it in its natural state, it will find its true nature, which is bliss and clarity” (p. 75). Lama Wangdu Rinpoche (II5C) explained the Buddhist idea of the mind and mental consciousness of the self, and I have poetically rendered this thought,

Oh, the infinite ocean

Infinite, free, calm

Changing, omnipresent

Embracing, becoming

Sky, fire, air, ether, ether

Motion, action, intention, prayer

Inner forces of kindness, compassion, care

Creation, creation, creation

Air, air, air, air

Peaceful meditation

Within the Mind is a tiny mind

Creating beauty, joy, sadness

This is awareness, this is awareness

In it we are infinite, endless

Oh the mind, the Infinite Ocean

Oh, the Infinite ocean of life

Infinite, infinite mind

Beautiful, loving, kind

Knowledge is a process of one's intrinsic awareness of life and its living phenomena, places, and sentient beings. The Buddha said in one of his dialogues with students that a true knowledge of the self is delightful when it arises in peace and freedom of the mind; people usually "find this delight in the forest" (Fronsdal, 2011, p. 111). The natural world seems to embody the ideas of self-freedom and realization of the Buddhist self-consciousness.

In this view, the children could authentically *practice freedom* (Freire, 1968/1973a) by being mindful of and compassionate with their world. The practice of freedom is about learners' ability to be self-reflective and to lead a "self-managed life" (Giroux, 2010, p. 716). When children have the creative agency to discover themselves, their existential learning becomes the practice of freedom. Further, Freire (1968/1973a) wrote that the practice of freedom is the fundamental ethical responsibility for subjective action in the world. The oral histories show that the local children were conscious of the world through the experiential and spiritual connections with its diverse environments, and therefore, had developed their self-consciousness of kindness and compassion. Kessler (2000) wrote,

Moments of deep connection to the self—when we really know ourselves, express our true self, feel connected to the essence of who we are—nourish the human spirit. Some people define this connection to the self as the bedrock of spirituality, from which all other connections flow. (p. 20)

For many local children, their childhood was primarily about their growing awareness of the compassionate self and the Buddha dharma (I13D, I92). The world of the Buddha dharma is the world of kindness in which no harm could be done to other beings, even tiny insects and worms (I13D). Natural learning experiences have, therefore, helped the local children to develop their compassionate consciousness of the self, to learn about themselves, and to create their lives.

Free Time and Timelessness as Natural Learning

Interpretation: Natural learning experiences had no temporal meaning for the children.

In fact, natural learning was not structured by time, it was described as the experience of timelessness (i.e., free time) without clocks and deadlines.

An age of timelessness

Time is yours, you choose it, you make it

*

The sunset, sunrise, dawn

Time is natural

We make it as we live it

From play to dream

From dawn till dusk

In land and stars.

(I93)

Natural learning happens all the time, even during “sitting-around-not-working-on-anything” (Griffith, 2010, p. 103). This free time is as valuable as the time of a priori determined activities. Ricci (n.d.) found that “the more free time children have and the more comfortable they become with having the free time, the more opportunities they will create for themselves to learn and to grow and to unfold” (para. 1). Further, free time meant that no specific activities were assigned for the children without their consent and intention. Hence, the children felt happiness without the socially prescribed ideas and roles. Free time enabled the children to create their playful social contexts of discovery with a sense of joy, fun, and happiness.

Martin (2015) found that free time helps children to develop strong interpersonal relationships of care and happiness with other family members and friends. He emphasized the intrinsic value of free time in this process and wrote that it is “quality time, creative time—precious moments for children to take up and internalize their own freedom. ... In this way children learn to know themselves better, discover new responsibilities, and figure out how to fulfill them” (pp. 105–114). Free time is a natural learning process that allows children to be responsible members of their families and communities, because children have the freedom to develop meaningful connections with themselves and others.

In the historical perspective, the children, who had a lot of free time, could build their life-long friendship with their siblings and children in the neighbourhood, as well as with their own parents and grandparents (I13D, I35D, I77, I92). Not all of the local children had a lot of free time, as they had to help out in the household. One lady recalled that this time consuming experience of helping her mother, however, didn’t mean a compulsory chore. It was a happy time of being together with her mother (I21). Generally, time was not measured objectively with clocks but perceived as the lived experience. Also the meaning of time was fully aligned with the seasonal changes and the living calendar of the lunar phases. The living calendar included the farm dates (e.g., time to plant crops, harvest time) and religious celebrations (e.g., festival Cham and New Year/Losar).

It is interesting to note that Fattore, Mason, and Watson (2016) in their study listened to children (126 children, ages 8–15, from New South Wales, Australia) and recorded their definitions of valuable time and well-being. For the children participants and co-researchers, the meaning of free time was “a creative way of asking what [they] would really like” (p. 23). They found that children’s free time means leisure which develops into their subjective sense of well-

being. Drawing on the works of Deci and Ryan (2001, 2008), Fattore et al. (2016) defined well-being as the subjective experience that is mainly driven by an intrinsic desire for self-actualization and the realization of one's "true nature" (p. 10). They also found that children's well-being was characterized by playfulness and fun in a broader social context of children's engagements with other children of different ages and adults.

Free time was the experiential context of natural learning through which children could embody their creative agency of being. For some of the children, free time meant their personal freedom to choose what/when/how to spend their days and to participate in their environments. For example, Nowo (i.e., Tsering Chonphel) described his free time activities that he chose to perform,

When I was herding
 I had a lot of fun
 [I] ate the buttermilk and tsampa
 On the mountaintop
 Birds sang, rabbits were there
 Flowing waters, snowy mountains
 Everywhere
 One stayed there happily
 One spent the day with the sheep
 Unmindful of time
 One was very happy

Free time was also about playfulness and other creative agencies, such as herding animals. Through these timeless ways of being, the children could develop strong connections of

care and compassion not only with other kids and adults, but also with the non-human beings, such as the domestic animals and wild nature.

Free Time: Delightful, memorable times;

We were allowed to be free,

To wander up the hills,

to spend two days alone in wilderness

without fear amidst the flowers, rivers

delightful sheer and bewilderment;

and there we would sing good songs

eat meals, drink curd, and milk.

This time was true delight

when we were kids

[the age around six].

(I48D)

When the local children had a lot of free time in their childhood, they didn't seem to perceive the idea of age as a social barrier in their activities because they could engage with the people of different ages freely on the basis of mutual respect (I13D, I92, I35D).

Free time was playful

We played together: boys and girls;

Placed bets and played all night long.

We played together: elders, kids, and youth.

We were absorbed in time, in playing bets.

(I92)

Timelessness (i.e., free time) was the existential experience of natural learning that the children felt as their personal happiness and subjective freedom in the social context of their being.

Intergenerational Learning

Interpretation: Natural learning was an intergenerational experience because children could learn from their parents, grandparents, relatives, and neighbours by engaging and being immersed in the adult activities of cultural production. Intergenerational learning was a dialogic event that was characterized by the mutual sense of care and well-being.

The oral histories demonstrate that natural learning experiences were situated in the family- and community-based context of moral support and encouragement of children's self-directed initiatives, interests, and activities alongside adults. This context was shaped by the profound sense of care and respect for the ancestors and their wisdom. For example, Kunchok Tashi (I13D) recalled that he had been fortunate to learn from his grandfather's wisdom about the land and its histories. He used to accompany his grandfather in the wilderness in search of the best pastures for their yaks and sheep. During these travels, the grandfather used to share important conversational stories and oral legends about the local places and beings. Some of these stories were practical, as they had taught Kunchok *how to* make all necessary tools and clothes (e.g., *zompa* boots) for herding and farming (I13D). The stories were the lessons that have been shared from the *generations back*. Some stories have to be narrated at certain times because they were dedicated to the deities of the land and its sacred places. Specifically, Kunchok remembered the importance of care for the land, people, and spirituality during these dialogic lessons. Likewise, Dawa Dolma learned from her mother about weaving (how to weave) (I77D).

During their intergenerational learning experiences, children could observe, listen to, and engage in various activities of knowing and understanding a particular lesson and activity (i.e., a cultural practice). This understanding was embodied because they could immediately practice, perform, and, even transform this activity. It seems that all lessons were connected with the spiritual teachings of the Buddha dharma, sustenance of the land, farming, and cultural production (including hand-made clothes and agricultural tools). Through these learning experiences, the children could engage with and be immersed in the adult world as the equal knowledge makers. Hence, intergenerational learning included children's active engagement in adults' work through a shared dialogic context of cultural production.

Further, intergenerational learning experiences allowed children to learn from others and, in so doing, to sustain the cultural structure of respect and care for the ancestors. Childs (2004) found that "for Tibetans, actions of the ancestors offer a model of behavior that can be used to assess people's conduct in the present" (p. 4). The historical memory of the people has created the intergenerational model of children's learning experiences, whereby they could explore the present daily lives of their families in and through the cultural structure of freedom.

Holt (1972) observed that it is important to analyze all learning situations as having a particular structure. Often people say that free learning is unstructured; yet this is an error. As Holt stated, "Let us instead speak of two different kinds of structure, and to see how they differ" (p. 10). The rural communities had their distinct cultural structure of freedom that was deeply rooted in the intergenerational respect for the ancestors and the children (Dalai Lama, 1962). The very meaning of freedom seems to be embodied in the way of life with other people and beings, whereas nobody was afraid of living together. The Dalai Lama (1962) eloquently described this way of life in his autobiography,

Clear springs of water fell in cascades, and the birds and the wild animals—deer, wild asses, monkeys, and a few leopards, bears and foxes— all wandered unafraid of man [*sic*]; for our people were Buddhists who would never willingly harm a living creature. (p. 11)

This cultural structure of freedom from fear has been shaped by the belief in the Buddha dharma. People were free in all their ways of learning and knowing, because they could practice the dharma “at one’s free will and [without] oppression” (I48D, p. 13). Allen (2009) also found that intergenerational learning fosters a spiritual development that is rooted in a sense of freedom from fear and domination. Spiritual development is about children’s clear understanding of the cultural values, such as compassion, kindness, and happiness. These values cannot be explicitly taught through imposed instructions because they are subtle feelings and emergent epiphanies. As I noted earlier, the very process of learning about the self was a process of learning about compassion. A feeling of compassion emerges from *within* one’s intrinsic awareness (Trungpa, 2010). Anderson (1995) found that “you can’t force the heart. Genuine compassion cannot be imposed from without” (p. 72). Intergenerational learning creates a cultural structure of freedom where these spontaneous feelings, insights, and understandings can be realized and acknowledged. Allen (2009) suggested that “some things are learned best in authentic complex communities where children and others participate regularly with experienced members of their culture” (p. 10). The values of dharma were learned through these authentic communities of respectful communication about compassion with grandparents, relatives, and parents.

Scholars of unschooling and critical pedagogy of place also emphasize the importance of intergenerational learning context in childhood and children’s well-being that may be constructive or destructive, critical and creative (Bowers, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003; Holt, 1964,

1989; Leidums, 2016). This intergenerational context is shaped by, and shapes, the “traditional, noncommodified cultural patterns, such as mentoring and intergenerational relationships” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). The very meaning of context is about the mutual understanding that is always situated in a historical structure of a local culture (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). As we can see from the oral histories, the local cultural pattern was about the profound respect and care for elders, ancestors, and children. This cultural structure has been produced, reproduced, and transformed by diverse natural learning experiences, in which the local knowledge (e.g., stories, artifacts, labour objects, and place) was its *medium* of the local subsistence.

For example, the elders spoke about their childhood memories as being embedded in their local places whereby they could listen to their grandparents and connect with their historical experiences. It is evident that the meaning of these places didn’t exist outside of the grandparents’ stories about them. Through learning about their local knowledge of inhabitation, the children could learn about the local histories and their intergenerational stories. This intergenerational rural learning occurs on a micro-level that is the implicit and tacit cultural structure of a local place (e.g., sense of place, belonging) through which parents, grandparents, relatives, and children could not only share experiences in a conversation but also engage in purposeful cultural production (i.e., making boots, clothes, hands-on experiences). Perhaps the cultural structure of freedom was rooted in the sense of purposeful living [in a?] place and its real life experience. These conditions were conducive to the children’s meaningful engagement with each other and their family members without any age-based separation of their activities and experiences.

Holt (1989) found that “real learning is a process of discovery, and if we want it to happen, we must create the kinds of conditions in which discoveries are made. We know what

these are ... time, leisure, freedom, and lack of pressure” (p. 100). The oral histories teach us that these conditions were, in fact, effective because the local children were inspired to practice and discover the real (i.e., intergenerational) knowledge for their life subsistence. This intergenerational learning model is often described as a *life-learning* process, whereby “children have regular opportunities to be embedded in the daily social fabric of family and community life, interacting across ages and generations” (Leidums, 2016, p. 2). The interactions are ongoing and dialogic, relational and reciprocal (Loewen, 1996). The children encountered diverse learning experiences during these intergenerational interactions. This diversity helped the children to develop a sense of place and their sustainable future with it. The intergenerational concept of sustainability was inseparable from the children’s daily engagement with adults, which, in turn, contributed to the formation of children’s social responsibility as the cultural agents of their families. Sustainable future was, therefore, situated within the culturally engaged intergenerational context of social responsibility.

It is also important to note that the intergenerational learning process meant that the children could *sustainably engage* in the culturally productive work of adults and not just become temporarily involved in meaningless activities. Pushor (2012) explained that the concept of educational engagement implies an equal relationship in the context of power, whereas children, parents, and communities work together to achieve a shared goal (as defined by themselves and not by the external structures of governance). For the local children, their intergenerational engagement with others was their cultural practice of sustainability. bell hooks (1994) also found that engagement is a pedagogy of well-being, because it leads toward a self-actualization of learners and their communities. In the case of intergenerational learning, children

and adults used to work together toward a shared goal of self-actualization through their family-based subsistence.

It is evident from the oral histories that the process of cultural production and subsistence was dialogic. The children were clearly told what they should *not do* (i.e., not harm other people and other sentient beings) in the community (I13D). This dialogue emerged from the feeling of mutual responsibility and relational trust between parents, grandparents, and children. Ricci and Pritscher (2015) found that “fascination and trust are what allow for internal motivation to flourish” (p. 3). The family environment created and sustained a cultural dialogic structure of freedom, in which children’s internal motivation could bloom and expand in an effective, productive, and meaningful social context. Further, trust is, ultimately, the interpersonal relationship between the self, other, and the world (Holt, 1983). These relationships emerged organically and spontaneously between the different age groups from early childhood to senior citizens (I13D; I92). Trustful relationships made children happy, because they could freely explore diverse cultural ideas and forms of knowledge *with* their family members. Further, trust is inseparable from kindness, respect, care, compassion, and love (Ricci, 2012). Drawing on the wisdom of the Seventh Dalai Lama, Mullin (1999) explained that trust is the natural force in all human activities. He wrote,

Just as we cannot use a ladder effectively if we do not trust its strength, and a farmer will not plant seeds in spring if he does not trust the powers of nature to carry them through a harvest, we cannot do anything effectively if we cannot develop a basic trust in the process. (p. 96)

The children’s ways of learning have emerged from within this intergenerational fabric of trust in their parents and grandparents, as well as in other family and community members.

Trust-based relations usually generate meaningful conversations not only about local knowledge, but also about the moral values of being (Dalai Lama XIV, 2005). Perhaps, these learning/teaching conversations and dialogues may better be conceptualized as sustainable relationships of cultural practices through which children could partake freely in the local life of their communities. Ultimately, dialogue has many meanings, including “deep, bottomless, unfinalized understanding; dialogic relationship with important others; growth; life itself; creativity; becoming somebody different; experiential” (Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014, p. 4). In this view, children could explore their ideas, perhaps test their ideas, in the midst of unfolding dialogic relationships with their family and with the world. In so doing, children’s ways of natural learning were dialogic, because they were a part of real life itself (Marjanovic-Shane, 2011). The moral values of trust and openness, as well as compassion and kindness, also developed naturally through the living context of dialogic relations with all family members at all ages.

It also seems that the grandparents really enjoyed talking with the children in the open public spaces about abstract and practical applications of diverse local knowledge, including the dharma. The children could accompany their grandparents and listen for their teachings on these walks. Mintz (1995) also found that “it is important to take kids with you whenever we can. They learn as much by seeing how you live your life as by anything else” (p. 19). Watchfulness and observation may enhance and deepen children’s learning as understanding of their community life as a whole. Yet this watchfulness seems to be meaningful when it is initiated by children’s curiosity and wonder without the use of adult’s psychological force (e.g., imposed rules) and pedagogies of fear (e.g., domination over children; Kizel, 2016). Children’s watchfulness was something natural to their life dialogic contexts, because they could choose and be attentive to

the objects of their interests. It is also interesting to note that the Buddha's earliest dialogues with his learners were about the importance of watchfulness as the path of immortality (Fronsdal, 2011).

Overall, intergenerational learning was a home-based process because it was deeply rooted in the children's sense of family, household, and place-conscious belonging. Home, however, was not an idealized space, because some children did not even have parents at all and were raised by their relatives. We can, nevertheless, see that this home-based dialogic process was a particular relational way of knowing with the grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers about the cultural place of dwelling with a clear sense of purpose and value (I13D, I77D). This dialogue, then, has an ontological meaning, because all existential relations and situations are dialogic in their social nature of mutual understanding (Bakhtin, 1981; Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014).

Dwelling, itself, is dialogic, because the children could have a watchful dialogue with the self and, mainly grandparents in the context of their home environment. hooks (2009) also remembered her intergenerational learning experience as the trustful and inspirational dwelling with her grandmother, Baba. She wrote, "Baba lived in another time, a time when all things were produced in the individual household. Everything the family needed was made at home. She loved to tell me stories about learning" (p. 140). Dwelling creates the cultural place of learning and intergenerational sustenance. It is also a place of aesthetic feelings because children come to know and learn about the immediate structures of their lives.

The oral histories show that children could become attuned to the household aesthetics of songs, prayers, and conversations. For one of the elders, this aesthetic was a part of the land because their temporary home, *ba*, was made from the organic parts of the immediate

surroundings such as the soil, yak skin, wool, and wood (I35D). The household was a creative abode of meaning that inspired children to think about their life as being interconnected with the local places and its natural environments. Duarte (2012) found that the aesthetic dwelling manifests itself as and through “the peaceful play of freedom” (p. 164). Intergenerational learning has created the cultural structure and social context of sustainable childhood experience as the creative dwelling in the household and in the natural environment that the local children had experienced *as* their freedom.

Physical Activities

Interpretation: Learning was experiential in the context of outdoor physical activities; these activities were gender equal.

Children were engaged in various physical activities, such as swimming, herding animals, running around, and riding horses. Physical activities seem to be connected with the children’s interests and not with a certain set of social rules. Physical activities were not gender-specific; boys and girls alike could engage in the same activities and play together (or by themselves) (I35D, I92). By moving from place to place or roaming around, children usually learn about their environment through senses and motion (Kessler, 2000). This process may be critically conceptualized as a part of the *sensorimotor stage* of development (Piaget, 1951/2000, 1952/1965, 1959/2005, 1972). The sensorimotor stage begins at birth and ends at the age of two. During this stage, a child actively interacts with her or his environment. This interaction involves reflexive behaviour that is about a child’s expression of innate impulses (Piaget, 1952/1965). Throughout this stage, children develop various *verbal schemas* (Piaget, 1951/2000, pp. 216-221). Piaget thought that children are incapable of thinking at this age and stage because they cannot conceptualize and think about non-immediate and unseen objects. From the age of two

until the age of seven, children go through a *preoperational stage* that is primarily about the development of language and formation of cognitive schema of their world (i.e., mental schema). Piaget thought that children, at this stage, are not interested in others and multiple perspectives; children tend to be ego-centric due to a lack of reason. At the age of 7, children tend to reach a *concrete operational stage* of logical thinking that resembles the logical thought of adults. Yet this stage is devoid of abstract thinking. From the age of eleven/twelve and throughout life, a child develops abstract thinking and reasoning through a *formal operation stage* that is the final stage of cognitive development (Piaget, 1959/2005, 1972).

This linear model of child development has a well-structured framework of generalizations about children and their cognitive development. The biologically determined age factor is the central variable that leads a child's innate development to a more advanced form of adult-like cognition. With the help of the oral histories, I deduce that children at different ages had a highly advanced logical thought about others, including their family members and animals. This logic was not necessarily based on their immediate perception of material objects but on an abstract thought of freedom and compassion. Many children were interested in exploring their environments through various physical activities, including active games, because they really enjoyed the freedom of being with other children, by themselves, and with animals (I35D, I92). Further, their physical activities and interaction with the objects and each other were not necessarily based on their lack of abstract cognition. In fact, some of the naturally found objects were transformed by the children themselves through their abstract reasoning in the playful context of creative imagination and communication with a spiritual (i.e., unseen) deity (e.g., apchu game).

Kessler (2000) found that physical activities are the embodied ways of knowing that usually begin to unfold in children's development at the age of seven. Through these physical activities, children could develop not just an adult-like rudimentary logic, but the embodied knowledge of their livelihood. Embodied knowledge forms the basis of children's creativity (Kessler, 2000), because it is not about the automated reflexes but about the consciousness of feelings. For Abram (1996), this conscious experience is the sensuous and physically active immersion in the natural environment that, in fact, shapes the mind and leads to (i.e., inspires/motivates) cognitive development. He explained this process with the help of air:

What a mystery is the air, what an enigma to these human senses! On the one hand, the air is the most pervasive presence I can name, enveloping, embracing, and caressing me both inside and out. ... I cannot act, cannot speak, cannot think a single thought without the participation of this fluid element. I am immersed in its depths as surely as fish are immersed in the sea. (Abram, 1996, p. 225)

The children's creative agency emerged from within this embodiment that was shaped by the immersion in and engagement with the sensuous environment. Physical activities usually engage multiple senses and complex body experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). This means that natural learning is an active process, in which the body and mind are fully integrated. Drawing on the works of Dewey, Krieglstein (2002) found that, in fact, "the process of learning involves the whole body. Each organ learns when the brain learns ... we need to activate each cell and neuron in our body for good learning to take place" (p. 179). When children could use their whole bodies, they could easily transform a diversity of their embodied experiences into conceptual impressions (e.g., ideas about subsistence, work, nature), practical knowledge (e.g., herding, weaving, spinning; intuition and clairvoyance), and abstract ideas (e.g., happiness, deity,

dharma). The transformations were the creative meaning making processes through play (see below). It also seems that physical activities were the bridge between the outer environment and the inner experiences of the children. The local children had a lot of opportunities and possibilities for the development of their embodied knowledge through their self-directed physical activities.

Further, physical activities didn't have one specific meaning, because the children could freely explore these meaningful contexts in the daily environment, and *create* them through their activities and embodied knowledge. These contexts also included the social life of adults, such as the physical activity of roaming around on the streets with other children and being outdoors with animals. I define these dynamic contexts with the help of Holt (1976) as the reality of embodied activities in the continuum of children-led experiences. This continuum was about children's uninterrupted activities that they had chosen and constructed without any specific intervention from adults. Perhaps the continuum of experience has a historical significance, because the children could discover and construct their knowledge on a daily basis. Freire (1997) explained that the historical continuum of knowledge is not based on memorization but on an *active* engagement with experience. Hence, physical activities may be seen as constructive; "knowledge is constituted as it grows and refines itself through the very exercise of knowing" (Freire, 1997, p. 31). In addition, these free range physical activities have informed the children's experience of freedom. The oral histories demonstrate that the children's freedom was, indeed, experienced as the historical continuum of physical activities outdoors in the context of their home and dwelling.

Forgetting our lunch,

We plunged in running waters,

Running after other boys and girls
 On streets, in wilderness without rules,
 Without orders, borders
 Creating sense from mud
 From meadows, fields;
 with goats, cows, mules
 Amidst the pastures, hills, and huts.
 (Chapter 4)

The children felt, and, therefore, experienced this physical reality as their lived context of their sustainable happiness (I35D, I92, I77D, I13D). Holt (1976) suggested that “there can *never* [emphasis in original] be reality of encounter, truthfulness, honesty, when one person holds power over another” (p. 25). Free physical activities seem to be conducive to the reality of truthfulness and compassion, because the children had the power to lead their lives and to be together with others without any pre-determined ideas about their age-based stages of cognitive development. In this context, physical activities were experienced and felt as the real freedom of being. Freedom meant their existential happiness and happiness meant ontological freedom.

Wrestling, roaming
 Swimming in rivers
 Splashing, scratching
 Real experiencing.
 (I10; I12; I28B; I35D)

It is interesting to note that the Dalai Lama (2011) said that the life of the mind is highly complex, and the difference between the body and the mind is very subtle and, perhaps, elusive.

He explained that “between mind and body, it is particularly our mind or consciousness with which we identify as this mere ‘I.’ Our mind is transient, existing momentarily, each moment of consciousness affecting the next” (Dalai Lama XIV, 2011, p. 68). Physical activities allowed the children to become mindful of their experiences and to come to know the embodied moments of consciousness in all its transience and flux.

All children loved horse-riding:

Being free, being fast;

In the woods, pastures

Meadows, path-finding...

Exciting! Riding, riding.

(I12D; I92)

*

I rode horses all day long

Wandering into the woods.

(I92)

It also seems that these child-led physical activities had a very important life-long meaning. The Dalai Lama (1997b) explained that “the physical activity of this lifetime may be observed and understood, and things have a way of working themselves out in time” (p. 46). The meaning of social life unfolds in and through various activities that people construct on a daily basis. It is also clear that many local children had a highly complex motor development. We can see some of the examples of this process in children’s horse-riding activities (from the young age, perhaps, the age of 12). These motor activities are both learned and unlearned. According to Tomporowski, McCullick, and Pesce (2015), “Some motor programs are innate and unlearned

(e.g., walking and running) and underlie the development of fundamental motor skills; learned motor programs are specific to conditions such as those in games and sports” (p. 80). Hence, the children developed both the skilled motor programs that are associated with horse-riding and the innate (i.e., unlearned) motor skills through their physical activities outdoors. The children could do so by understanding their interests and, ultimately, strengths. Further, physical activities are the actual experience of their being in real life.

In addition, it is important to note that the local physical activities were gender neutral and gender equal. The children could play together in various physical activities without any sense of gender division or separation.

We played together: boys and girls

And there was no division between us.

We also ate together, shared all provisions.

(11M)

One of the elders, Kalsang Yangchen (I24), recalled a particular physical activity that the local boys and girls played together. It was called the tug-of-war and it was experienced as a very happy time. She said,

the boys (10) would stand on one side and the girls (10) on the other side. Then we pulled at the rope. We played this a lot. The winner would be given a present, while the loser got nothing. . . . The girls did win. (p. 1)

She then recalled that they also did a lot of gender-equal wrestling as a community-based celebratory activity with food. It was mainly held during the New Year celebrations, known as Losar. All physical activities were gender equal, whereby girls and boys could do the same activities together. Kalsang recalled that “we played like equals” (p. 2). Generally, children could

choose what activities they wanted to play and with whom. There was no specific dominant assumption about gender and physical activities. Further, these physical activities were inseparable from the creative play outdoors. This creative play involved different self-organized games, such as sculpting mud houses, enacting social roles, tea-making with real food, and playing different activities.

Learning as Creative Playing

Interpretation: Children's ways of learning were self-directed playful activities outdoors that involved not only physical activities but also the arts and crafts with diverse natural materials. Through self-directed play, children also created a micro-social context of gender equality.

Play (playfulness, playing) was one of the central childhood themes in all the oral histories (female and male). Many interviewees described their childhood experiences as playful. Some of the interviewees specifically described their favourite games and playful outdoor activities, such as the apchu, hand-made sculptured mudstone-clay houses, and tea-making (family making), and other interesting games. Apchu is a game that involves a sheep's ankle. An elder described apchu as "found between the sheep's ankle" (I27B, p. 3). Children used to make the apchu into some particular creative shapes of animals and used natural dye to colour it. The apchu is usually painted in red, yellow, or blue. Apchu allows children to play the game thapoelukti (Chapter 4). The game was played like this:

One yelled thapoelukti and threw it, and it showed either a horse or a donkey.

Thapoelukti, what to offer the deity? A horse. What will be given in return? A goat.

Children played such games. ... An apchu can be played to show a horse, sheep, donkey, or goat. (I27B, p. 3)

The animals symbolized the luck from the deity. For example, horse is a very good sign to get. Sheep is not so good. Donkey is a really bad sign for the players. The apchu is thrown a couple of times and the children had to recognize its shape in the form of a horse, donkey, sheep, or a goat. One of the interviewees explained that the “one having the most number of horses sides up is the winner” (I27B, p. 3). During these games, the children could recognize shapes and forms as well as invite the local deity of place. The game began with a question, “Thapoelukti, what to offer the deity?” (I27B, p. 3). In addition, the children liked to play with other natural materials, such as mud, clay, and stones. Girls and boys used to make huts from these objects with a particular set of details such as a fireplace and kitchen. All of these games seemed to be very important for the children as the life-long memories of their happy childhood. It is also important to note that these games were led by the children (of mixed ages) themselves without any script or guideline from the adults. What follows is my theorization of playfulness with a focus on children’s self-directed meaning making activities, gender equal organization of play, and creative connection with nature.

Play is a natural context through which children explore and make meaning (Holt, 1983, 1989). Holt (1983) found that “a child has no stronger desire than to make sense of the world, to move freely in it, to do the things that he sees bigger people doing.” (p. 32). Morrison (2016) suggested that “play *is* [emphasis in original] a child’s work” (p. 49). This means that children play on a daily basis. Playfulness is unplanned; it just happens. All playful contexts are educational (Holt, 1989), and children can “make them out of anything” (Holt, 1983, p. 33). Further, playfulness is an educational experience of joyful well-being and excitement. Fattore et al. (2016) found that children of all ages experience well-being in the context of play only when

their meaning making “involves freedom from rules or adaptation of rules” (p. 167). Self-organized play led the local children to the development of their cultural competence.

Scholars define self-direction as a child’s natural instinct and creative impulse to learn about the world without adult-enforced rules (Gray, 2013; Holt, 1977; Ricci, 2012). Self-directed learning may also be defined as a self-organizing experience through which children do something (therefore, learn something important) on the basis of their intrinsic motivation. The concept of intrinsic motivation, in this view, resonates with Deci’s (2011) notion of self-motivation. Self-motivation is about autonomy and authenticity, whereby autonomy is personal control over one’s behaviour, and authenticity is a personal action from within her or his inner self (Deci & Flaste, 1996). When the local children were self-motivated to perform playful action, they did these activities with love and without any extrinsic rewards. Ryan and Deci (2000) found that extrinsic rewards can diminish intrinsic motivation, which may undermine children’s psychological development of skills, talents, and knowledge competence. Children, whose parents support their autonomy and authenticity, tend to develop greater mastery in various knowledge areas of their interest than the family-controlled children (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997). Further, self-directed children often develop spontaneously (i.e., through free play) with the highly articulate skills of self-expression and with an expansive spectrum of interests (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Moreover, self-directed learning is playful and is highly complex in the development of children’s creativity (Benware & Deci, 1984). The oral histories also show that the self-directed playful children were highly creative in sculpting and performing their social ideas about the world of adults, such as making tea, making huts with stones and mud (Chapter 4) as well as engaging in the apchu process with the deity.

Further, self-directed playfulness helped the local children to relate to one another in the social context of gender equality. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, gender equality means that "girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike" (LeMoyne, 2005, p. 1). It is also important to note that gender equality is the foundational part of the Tibetan Buddhist worldview and local cultural practice of the dharma, in which boys and girls, women and men have equal opportunities to seek, achieve, and sustain happiness in their lives (Dalai Lama, as cited in Doepke, 2011). Some of the interviewees recalled that they all played equally together without any separation between girls and boys. For example, Lhamo said, "We played together. There was no division between boys and girls. We also ate together. We sat in a circle—those of us engaged in grazing the lambs—and ate together" (I11M, p. 4). The context of play was shaped by the children themselves when they were herding their animals in the pastures and meadows. The children didn't specifically construct any gender separation among themselves. During these outdoor experiences of work/play, they could relate to each other as equals and organize themselves as a fun community. They cared for each other and shared their food with each other. Some girls preferred different forms of play than boys. Everyone had an equal opportunity and possibility to play their favourite games either as a community or as an individual (Chapter 4). An interesting example of gender equal play is described by Cho Lhamo, whereby she could play both as a boy and a girl because she could dress as a boy. Gender equal play seems to be a natural (i.e., self-organized and self-directed) way through which the local children could organize themselves in playful activities outdoors.

According to hooks (2004), gender is a learned social behaviour through which children form their perception of the self and others. These perceptions usually convey a certain set of the cultural characteristics about femininity (e.g., how girls should think and behave) and masculinity (e.g., how boys should behave and think), as well as of the social responsibilities (e.g., feminine and masculine social roles, duties, and cultural practices). For example, she learned that girls were not supposed to express anger and boys were allowed to be angry and, even, violent. She noticed that this presupposition had contradicted their natural impulses, ideas, and behaviour; “my brother and I remember our confusion about gender. In reality I was stronger and more violent than my brother, which we learned quickly was bad. And he was a gentle, peaceful boy, which we learned was really bad” (hooks, 2004, p. 19). Gender is a socially constructed pattern of cultural ideas and assumptions about people’s abilities, interests, and talents. Dadon-Sharling (2014), an elected female member of the Tibetan parliament in exile, stated that gender is a process of socialization through which children are being shaped by their cultural surroundings and which they also shape as individuals.

The oral histories show that when children could perform and enact their gender through their own experiences and without the imposed adult pattern of gendered social expectations, they tended to construct gender equal games without any pre-determined or normative social ideas about themselves. During their self-led activities, the children didn’t tell each other what they *should* be or become *because of* their gender. They all played together as an equal community of players. Their parents didn’t seem to interfere in their playful processes and didn’t seem to instruct them how they should behave and think about themselves. Self-directed playful context has shaped a micro-level of their social worlds, whereby gender was neither specifically perceived nor constructed as the cultural category of difference.

Priesnitz (2017) observed that children usually experience themselves and each other more mindfully when they follow their interests and ideas; this way of life-long learning allows children to respect each other for who they are (para. 14). In this context, gender becomes a unique expression of children's sense of self; it is also about emergent playful relationships. The oral histories teach us that self-directed play was *gender creative* because it allowed the children to explore their ideas about themselves and to discover their gender-associated social responsibilities. Gender creative children, in fact, usually establish their own rules and ideas regarding nature, culture and nurture in a complex meaning of you and I, we, and us (Ehrensaft, 2016). Gender equality is a shared experience, where a child could play together without the adult social mediation. All interviewees said that they felt themselves happy during these games.

Generally, gender equal cultural practices led to a life-long feeling of happiness in the household and in a global society (Qian, 2016; Tansey, 2009). Specifically, Qian (2016) found that in order to “facilitate the greatest happiness of all individuals, we should promote gender equality” (p. 13). Tansey (2009) observed that children's ideas about gender equality emerge from within their local communities; gender equality takes place on this social place-based plane. During these organic playful activities, children seem to “negotiate the terms among themselves, to work out disagreements and injustices” (Hewitt, 2014, p. 84). Hence, children-led experiences allow them to create and negotiate their social place as the mindful and responsible *authors* of its playful (i.e., performative and shared) meanings.

It is important to note that most of the playful negotiations, performances, and creations were mediated by the natural environment and its diverse objects including sticks, branches, stones, pebbles, rocks, bones, and other raw materials (Chapter 4). As I mention above, the children invented their games with the help of these surrounding materials. The games took place

outdoors in various places including the wild pastures, rivers, meadows, and village spaces (e.g., streets). The oral histories seem to specifically outline the importance of the natural world in these games.

Yet the meaning of nature was not about the outer wilderness that had a separate ontological and epistemological location apart from their everyday life; nature was their inhabited and familiar place of dwelling. For Cho Lhamo, wilderness was not wild because she rode horses there all day long. Wilderness was an extension of her home and social habitat. For Tsering Chonphel, wilderness was a social place of inhabitation where he could herd the animals and swim in the river. For Dawa Dolma, wilderness was about the beauty of the surrounding mountains and their wonderful flowers. It was the feeling of peaceful place. Nature had never been a wilderness (i.e., noun), but an embodied and playful way of being (i.e., a verb). With the help of nature, the children could make their toys and experience social inclusion.

Wilderness is not wild
in self, in other, in place
playing with contexts of being:
duties, behavior, stories,
histories, moments,
becomings as play.

Hewitt (2014) also describes his children's learning adventures at home in the natural world. He poetically speaks about the importance of nature connection, because this experience teaches children how to live their lives. For example, his children usually love to play outdoors in the rain. Yet not all children do this because of the socially imposed ideas about the rain and nature. Hewitt asks, "Is it possible that the only difference between a child who plays in the rain

and one who doesn't is that the latter has been taught to avoid the rain" (2014, p. 81). Nature is inseparable from a child's overall experience and her or his playful activity. Learning in the natural world has helped the local children to become attuned to the socially unmediated processes as well as to attend to their inner life of ideas, intuition, and imagination. We should not forget that nature is an organic *process*, through which complex cognitive experiences originate because children can actively perceive and feel different mind states, such as excitement, joy, happiness, wonder, curiosity, and freedom (Dewey, 1925/1958).

Further, nature seems to be a bedrock of creativity, because children used its objects to re-create, transform, and perform diverse sociocultural meanings. Specifically, stones and mud served as the raw materials for imagining shapes, forms, and patterns that all had social values and significance. The apchu engages children in active sculpting and carving various animal-like shapes for the purposes of speaking with the unseen deity and, in so doing, laughing and playing with other children. Robertson (1974) found that children tend to enjoy the discovery of natural materials and their potential meanings/applications. At the basis of children's ways of learning is a way of seeing and understanding the shapes, forms, and processes of the surrounding world; "learning to identify visual shapes is part of an essential knowledge of our environment" (p. 15). Shape recognition was one of the foundations of the children's local knowledge that had been acquired through their creative play in the natural world.

According to Louv (2008), nature "serves as a blank slate upon which a child draws and reinterprets the culture's fantasies. Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses" (p. 7). I disagree that nature is a blank slate because its meanings have been shaped by the intergenerational histories and the continuity of communal experiences. Hence, nature has multiple meanings and layered histories that allow children to

create their own places of social ideas and thoughtfulness, excitement and creativity. I do agree that nature evokes and sustains creativity. Yet this creative development does not simply occur because of the sensuous engagement, but because of the self-led, and, therefore, conscious and intentional engagement of children *with* the world. Indeed the embodied immersion includes the use of senses, however, it is not caused by the sensuous consciousness. The Dalai Lama (1992) explains that “according to Buddhist teachings the innermost subtle consciousness is the sole sort of creator, itself consisting of five elements, very subtle forms of elements” (para. 4). Hence, the subtle consciousness (i.e., the intrinsic motivation, intention, will) gives rise to the sensuous experiences that, in turn, originate from within the human-nature connection and broader interbeing. In this view, nature is an ontological learning process and context of being and becoming (Abram, 1996).

Living Places of Learning

Interpretation: Children’s ways of natural learning were place-based experiences through which they had playfully discovered and constructed their cultural practices of the local knowledge such as herding animals and weaving artistic textile.

Natural learning places were not separated from the children’s sense of home. Many scholars approach this concept of learning place (and place-based learning) from a variety of angles such as the lived embodied experience (Gruenewald, 2003; Van Eijck & Roth, 2010), local knowledge (Bowers, 2001, 2013), and production of cultural subjectivity (Elbaz–Luwisch, 2008). The oral histories show that the sense of childhood place was produced through playful learning experience in the situated context of local knowledge and its cultural practices.

The sense of a childhood place is alive with dreams, hopes, experiences, and stories; it is an emotional locale in the human soul, mind, body, spirit, and the visible land (Tuan, 1977). This

place embodies multiple subjectivities (i.e., identities, experiences, histories, memories, ideologies) and, therefore, cannot be understood as isolated from these subjectivities (Van Eijck & Roth, 2010). The lived experience is always embodied and expressed through, in, and from diverse physical places of the world (Casey, 2009). Van Eijck (2010) wrote that a “place can be considered the channel through which students act globally from their locality, that is, from their ‘own’ world to the world ‘out there,’ and make ‘their world’ relevant to others as something that is ‘taking place’” (p. 323). The place is a dynamic hub between a child’s sense of the known and unknown world. This learning place is a lived reality of feeling, sensing, thinking, dreaming, and communicating that is situated in the immediate natural environment.

In this view, a cultural place of learning is a chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981), that is to say, “a lived entity that results from a transaction between the forms of narratives available in and constitutive of a community and its material environment” (Van Eijck & Roth, 2010, para. 3). The oral histories show that these narratives were primarily conversations, dialogues, and oral legends that had shaped the meaning of places as the embodiments of the local knowledge about the wild pastures and meadows, rivers, lakes, spiritual sites, and sacred grounds. These places were meaningful for the sustenance of their family well-being and their home-based cultural practices. The chronotopes have emerged from the child’s experience of place as the meaningful “connection between space and time” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 100). Both space and time are the lived intergenerational experiences of childhood place that were characterized as a way of being together with the family (i.e., *shije nyamzon*).

Natural learning experiences helped children to create their chronotopes of meanings and local knowledge in the context of daily cultural practices. Hence, these chronotopes are from and in *real life*. In fact, learning place as the chronotope becomes “the most immediate reality”

(Bakhtin, as cited in Holquist, 2002, p. 149). The very process of learning takes place within this place of the moment that includes not only the physical environment but also the social narratives about it (Van Eijck & Roth, 2010). Bakhtin (1981) wrote that “every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (p. 258). Learning, in this sense, emerges from the connection with the local knowledge of place and, simultaneously, as its cultural production.

For many interviewees, the local knowledge had no meaning outside of their direct encounters with the dialogues and stories about it, as well as the cultural practices within its social locations (e.g., farms, gardens, pastures). In fact, all ideas about knowledge seem to have a connection with the land and a certain time for its social narratives (I35D). Hence, the very concept of place as the chronotope signifies the local knowledge that is not about the universal and globalized knowledge but about the lived experience with and within diverse ecosystems. According to Bowers (2001), the local knowledge of place embodies “the layered nature of interdependencies of life-sustaining processes” (p. 152). The oral histories teach us that a place-based learning context is a synthesis of children’s self-organized cultural experience and children’s immersion in the local ecological processes. These ecological processes are intangible and subtle; they include human-nature relationships (I13D, I92). Through these experiences, children used to envision and to construct their future cultural practices with respect not only to the sentient beings, but also to the living processes within the land.

Specifically, the local knowledge was mainly situated in the popular cultural (i.e., folk) context of the oral legends about various practices of self-subsistence, the land, and spiritual arts. The oral legends are diverse folk expressions that usually teach about the local histories, spiritual morals, and ancient relics (Roerich, 1949/1976). Schwieger (2002) found that these legends were

called *lo rgyus* in the province of Kham and they were the sanctuaries of the public “general knowledge” (p. 127). For example, Cho Lhamo remembered one of the legends about the spiritual mantra. This mantra was associated with a lama, Tsesam Lama, who had never been seen in person. Yet the legends have preserved the memories about him and his retreat somewhere in the sacred place of Riwo Tse-ngpa. All people who had practiced the dharma then really respected the lama and his teachings about the mantra. Even though nobody encountered him in their real life, he was honoured and remembered in the communities. The legends about his spiritual deeds have helped the villagers to immerse themselves in their dharma practices with devotion. The particular knowledge of this mantra and the legend about the lama was about the cultural practice of the mantra. Instead of the presumed and commonly accepted way of reciting mantras, the legendary way was primarily practiced through singing. Cho Lhamo said, “It was believed that singing the mantra once has the same benefit as reciting it a hundred times” (I92, p. 4). The local legends helped her to practice the spiritual art of the intergenerational dharma through the art of singing. She had learned about it through stories. She sang the mantra during her oral history.

Songs were the popular cultural media of the oral legends, through which the local knowledge was passed on from generation to generation. Nowo also recalled in his oral history the importance of songs as the popular cultural education. In fact, folk songs and dances were the natural pathways of learning in his childhood. He learned these legendary arts from his parents and community members by memorizing them. He memorized these forms of local knowledge by singing them and by performing the dances. During his interview, he sang the yanglu. This yanglu song describes the cultural meaning of home as a living place on the land (i.e., the chronotope). The meaning of home embodies “the sky, earth. . . and house” (Tsering Chonphel,

I35D, p. 4). One of the passages in the yanglu says, “The tent needs no building yet makes a home. Within it are pillars and beams that hold. Incense and butter lamps are faithfully offered. The deities and nagas are triumphant. Let us rejoice with the dance of success!” (Tsering Chonphel, I35D, p. 6). This song carries the nomadic local knowledge of place as it sings the glory of the deities and nagas that help to hold the earth home together. Moreover, the song conveys a detailed guide to a cultural intergenerational practice that describes how to construct and sustain a nomadic mobile hut (the ba). The song also depicts the details of the nomadic way of sustainable living.

It seems that the sustainability of the local, highly dynamic knowledge of the environment (e.g., diverse ecosystems of pastureland, meadows, and other habitats) has been observed through diverse cultural practices and, specifically, through the dance of success and songs about living together with places. In addition to the symbolic practices (e.g., oral legends), the local knowledge was also a hands-on daily cultural practice. This practice was about herding animals and weaving textile. For Dawa Dolma, this practice was about weaving carpets and clothes. For Kunchok Tashi, this practice was multifaceted and involved spinning ropes and making boots while he was herding animals and learning from his grandfather about the life of the land.

The local knowledge had a subjective place in the popular cultural consciousness of that time. In fact, the concept of local knowledge didn’t exist in itself as a reference to an object of place, it existed as an experience of being *with* the place. Holquist (2002) found that a “chronotope describes something that has always been inherent in experience” (p. 155). When children learned about the local knowledge in a free and unrestricted context, they could connect with the historical layers of its inherent experience of place. This way of learning conveyed the

intrinsic value of interbeing, as well as the complexity of human-nature experience. As I indicate above, the very definition of the local knowledge was the Buddha dharma, and the people of all ages understood it as compassion toward the world. However, the meaning of the Buddha dharma was not about a utopian (i.e., an idealized) place, but one's daily hard work toward life-long subsistence. Hence, this feeling and knowledge of compassion should not be idealized and romanticized in order to respect the cultural agency of the past, present, and future Tibetan people and their communities (Childs, 2004).

Freedom as Cultural Subsistence

Interpretation: Natural learning experiences have produced a place-based culture of the local subsistence that was characterized by sustainable farming and nomadic practices. The cultural subsistence was the context of children's freedom and its process of educational sustainability.

As outlined above, there was no one particular view on learning that was specifically practiced in the communities at that time. Through natural learning, children could engage in diverse cultural practices (i.e., ways of learning) such as physical activities, intergenerational learning, learning as playing, and learning through popular cultural places of local knowledge. These practices and activities were situated in the cultural structure of freedom that reflected and embodied the broader philosophy of the Buddha dharma. It is important to emphasize that the concept of freedom was, mainly, about the freedom to maintain their family-based subsistence. For many families, freedom meant the reliance on the agricultural fields and domestic animals. Hence, learning in the ontological context of freedom was about the children's immersion in the family subsistence. It seems that learning was effective insofar as the children could understand the intrinsic value of care for the land and its intergenerational wisdom. The family subsistence

was co-dependent on the community-based exchange or trade through which people could obtain all the necessary goods that were not a part of their home-based cultural production (Chapter 4).

In order to understand the local concept of educational sustainability, one needs to start with the foundational living principle of subsistence. The oral histories teach us that subsistence was about self-reliance and self-sustainability. Overall, subsistence was achieved with the help of the land productivity that was about the availability and abundance of wild pastures and water systems in the villages. Subsistence didn't have any essential meaning, because it had been embedded in the livelihood and the ongoing process of sustaining it.

For nomads, subsistence was mainly about the dynamic living on the land. Nowo recalled, "Oh, one must move many times, three times during summertime and three times during the winter. One moved as the grass depleted" (I35D, p. 2). Nomads were fully connected with the land. Domestic animals, such as goats, yaks, dri, cows, and horses, need productive land spaces and places for the grazing purposes and other cultural practices (e.g., milking, spinning, weaving). Families and communities nurtured children's self-reliance in all daily matters, so that they could support and sustain themselves in their future livelihood. Hence, natural learning had been embedded in this process of educational sustainability.

Precisely, self-sustainability meant the absence of poverty due to the shared cultural experience of subsistence. As I state above, many families practiced natural exchange whereby milk-based farmers could exchange the milk products (e.g., curd, cheese, eggs, milk) for grain products from the grain-based farmers. Hand-made clothes were also exchanged and traded with nomads and other community members (I77D, I92). Subsistence was a communal process of educational sustainability in which children had been engaged as the helpers. This shared culture of self-sustainability had further expanded the meaning of the Buddha dharma in the living place

of collective generosity and compassion. The collective generosity led to a community-based sense of well-being, prosperity, and land productivity (i.e., ecological productivity). The land productivity also included the wild environment, because it was full of various edible fruits, flowers, and other collectible items, so these fruits were free for all people and animals. Further, strangers were always welcomed as honoured guests.

One of the important pillars of self-sustainability and reliance was a concept of home or household. Many families shared their household with animals, such as the sheep. Kids often slept in the same lhara or a sheep barn that was often located on the first floor of their family house. All in all, the meaning of subsistence was embodied in this expanded cultural consciousness of home and community. Sustainability has emerged as the unity of culture with nature and its realization in the household and other social structures of people's freedom. Sustainability is a reciprocity of culture and nature in a way the inner and outer realms of being meet and grow respectfully, creatively, and evolutionary.

We were never ignorant

We protected the environment;

Never mined the earth,

Never harmed wild animals.

The term was not protection

Because we cared for the spirits

And guardians of nature.

They would become upset

If we touched the earth and turned it

In resources. They would bring landslides

And natural disasters.

(I39D, I75)

Colonial Compulsory Schooling

Interpretation: Children's ways of learning was drastically changed (destroyed) with the introduction of the compulsory and colonial schooling during the 1950s Chinese invasion in Tibet. As a consequence, many Tibetans had to flee to India and to leave their home places.

The arrival of the Chinese armies led to many tragic changes such as the ongoing torture of people, land destruction, and establishment of compulsory schooling. Colonialism has been described as the perpetual state of violence, deaths, and imposed regimes of domination and oppression. The Tibetans knew that the Chinese had brought suffering to their land. Tsering Chonphel recalled that the people used to say “‘There will be no happiness. The ones called Chinese are coming.’ All the people showed signs of sadness then. I was a child and was not aware much” (I35D, p. 8). The colonial invasion has been accompanied with the different lies and disguised slogans including “liberation” and “freedom” of the peasants from their social structure of inequality. The peasants hadn’t experienced any inequality prior to the colonization. For example, Cho Lhamo recalled,

Initially the Chinese were good and then they inflicted misery. The rich families had many people working for them. However, though they [the poor] were made to work, they were provided with food and clothing. But the Chinese said that they [the poor] were subjugated and ill-treated. So they wanted to destroy all the rich people. They accused the rich of being liars and of having abused the people. They [the rich] were punished. The father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter-in-law, even the pregnant women were punished. (I92, p. 8)

During the colonial violence, schools were used as a tool to impose the foreign ideologies and lifestyle onto the local people, as well as to destroy the traditional local knowledge and its Buddhist philosophies. Hence, children's ways of learning were disrupted and destroyed with the enforced attendance and separation from their families. At first, some of the children were forcefully taken to mainland China for the purposes of three years of primary schooling in 1957. One elder recalled that even babies (3-year-olds) were forcefully taken from their parents by the Chinese; and nobody knew what happened to these babies (Dekyi, I26M). The local children didn't want to go to these schools because it was not a part of the traditional way of life (Dawa Dolma). The Communist regime demanded that "every family who had two or three children" had to be sent to China's schools (Yeshe Wangdu, I78, p. 6). Basically, the Tibetan people didn't have a choice and the Chinese communist army didn't ask their permission (Kalsang Yulgial, I30C). Those children who didn't obey or couldn't physically travel to China were punished with physical labour, such as road construction. One of the elders recalled that as a young girl (14 years old), she had to work six months on the road construction because she refused to go to China. Overall, all interviewees recalled that schools were forcefully imposed, children were physically taken away from all villages, and parents opposed [and feared] this process through various means (e.g., leaving their villages, seeking refuge in the mountains, going into exile, hiding their kids). One interviewee specifically said that 90 % of all Tibetan people "became scared, worried, and sad, worried to become arrested" (Arjia Rinpoche, I7C, p. 10).

In 1958, compulsory schools were constructed in the urban and regional centres. The Chinese armies became worse when the Dalai Lama had to go to India (I35D). Dawa Dolma recalled that the children, who were taken on trucks to schools (around 1961), had never returned from the mainland Chinese schools (I77D). The compulsory schooling has slowly taken place in

rural Tibet. These schools were called “a makeshift school” (Kalsang Dolma (alias), I56M, p. 2). The makeshift was a part of the overall Communist plan to destroy the Buddhist culture and to impose the Communist ideology. Schooling was a part of this political process that the Chinese armies defined as the “liberation process of democratization” (Tenzin Dechen (alias), I70D, p. 8). In so doing, they killed many people and also killed animals.

The mass violence contradicted the principles and practices of the local dharma knowledge, yet the Chinese systematically sought to kill “all the wild animals that they sighted” (Pasang Dhondup, I5M, p. 9). The Chinese Communist ideology was developed by the Chinese chairman, Mao and the Soviet dictator, Stalin. Specifically, the Communist ideology was taught as something good for the people because it “stood for equality of everyone but the way they practiced it. . . . banning religious practice and saying monks were bad. . . . [They] were lying” (Gyendun Tashi, I52D, p. 10). As a part of the political makeshift, the local children were forced not only to become schooled in the Communist ideology, but also to praise the chairman Mao and his plans in Tibet. For example, all village children were forced to gather (every day from 4 till 8 in the evening) in the centre of the village and learn Chinese songs and stories about Mao Zedong (I23C).

Furthermore, Tibetan children were physically forced to attend these schools in order to learn the Communist ideology and to become the obedient citizens of China (I30C). Thousands of children were forced to live in the urban boarding schools in Lhasa and Shigatse (around 500–1000 students in one school) (Ginsburgs & Mathos, 1964). The oral histories don’t specifically describe how the children used to live in these boarding schools and the material conditions of these schools at the time. One of the interviewees said that all kids in the Lhasa school (about 100; 50 boys and 50 girls) were constantly controlled and supervised by the Chinese wardens;

“there were no words exchanged except the lessons. ... They didn’t have freedom to go out. ... There was a warden to watch the boys and another to watch the girls” (Wangla, I67W, p. 26). Learning was strictly governed and enforced throughout the day and night. The children’s physical movements in space were also restricted with this direct and closed surveillance by the Chinese guards and teachers (I67W).

Furthermore, one interviewee recalled his own lived experience in a commune school where he was forcefully taken in 1960. He said,

We were put in a school. Each of us was given a [bag?] to carry dirt. These were filled with dirt from the area where nomads used to live and we carried them. The others worked in the fields that had not been farmed for a long time, hoeing out the grass. One had to work without missing a single day. (Jangchuk Nyima (alias), I41D, pp. 10–11)

Clearly, the commune school was not meant to be educational. It is described as an internment labour camp where the local children were forcefully and violently separated from their parents. All of the commune members had to work on a daily basis with a handful of provision that was not enough to nurture and to sustain their health. The interviewee recalled that “there was nothing taught in school. One must work. The school for the children was just in name and not a letter of the alphabet was taught” (I41D, p. 11). In these hard conditions, many people died on a daily basis (about 10–20 people a day). They died mainly due to the lack of food and hard labour; his mother died in a nearby camp. Further, the children were not allowed to sleep at night in order to attend the meetings where they had to “speak against the lamas and leaders” of Tibet (I41D, p. 12). The commune-based “schooled” starvation continued until 1964 when the children and adults tried to help each other to survive by sharing their provisions. In 1970, the Chinese armies introduced animals into the commune such as the sheep from the

nomads of Amdo province. The animals provided milk, butter, and cheese; the problems with food and clothing had decreased (41D).

Perhaps it is important to note for the purposes of transparency that some of the children thought that this schooling was going to be fun and interesting. Of all the oral histories (278), five (5) interviewees felt somewhat positive about these schools. Specifically, one lady liked to study in this school (I70D); one man said that he really wanted to attend a Chinese school in China (Pasang Tsewang, I21D); one man thought it was going to be fun, yet he had to escape the enforced assimilation into communism (I30C); and one man and one lady said that the poor families had to send their kids in exchange for yaks (I75) and 25 silver coins (Namdhol Dolkar (alias), I26B). The Chinese army intentionally tried to deceive families with the compensation in order to take away their children. Gadak said, “Perhaps it was 1952 to 1953 when they [the Chinese] said they would take Tibetan children to school. There were 100 to 130 families in each division [of our district] and they selected two boys [from each division]” (p. 9). In response about the parents, Gadak said that all parents were troubled,

but there was no other way. ... In some villages, some people were paid by the village to send their children. [Laughs] In some cases poor families were paid five yaks per child by the village community to send [their children to the Chinese school]. While in some cases, people did send their children. (Gadak, I75, p. 10)

Furthermore, one elder also recalled that other kids in Lhasa “thought it [school] was fun” (Jigme Paljor, I47M, p. 15). Yet he personally didn’t like schools and didn’t attend them at all. In addition, one man said that he too, at the beginning of the invasion, wanted to attend a Chinese nationalist school that was different from the communist one. He had a desire to attend but was never admitted. At a later time, he didn’t want to attend any of the schools and decided to flee

Tibet in 1959 (Thupten (alias), I29C). Kalsang Yulgial explained in his oral history that schools, at first, were presented [by the Chinese] as a fun place. Yet many children realized that this presentation was an intentional deception and tried to escape,

They teach Chinese. They teach math. They teach geography and then Tibetan as well. I guess they started teaching Russian alphabet also. Yeah, but we were soon...we found out that the...this was not a really good trick to be in Chinese school. So we sort of by kind of sensing that we are being separated from Tibetan...from families then we try to escape from the Chinese class, you know. [Laughs] At that time we were few, quite few naughty kids. Whenever Chinese class starts, we start escaping, you know avoiding it. (I30C, p. 10)

Some children could escape and run back to their villages, while others were sent back to China. For example, Kalsang Yulgial asked the authorities to see his family in the village of Phari; this is how he could escape from the Chinese schools in Tibet and China. The children didn't like the communist ideology through which the Chinese wanted to change the children's attitude about Buddhism and their traditional livelihood. This ideology meant to change the Tibetan culture into the Chinese in order to naturalize the enforced dependency on the centralized politics of China. The portraits of Stalin and Mao were placed in all public buildings. Children were supposed to become different (i.e., more educated about Communism) than their parents through the compulsory schooling and to educate their parents about the necessity of becoming Communist citizens of China. Cho Lhamo recalled,

We'd heard stories that the Chinese make sons beat their fathers and the daughters to beat their mothers. I thought in my mind, "Now I am being told to beat my mother." I felt extremely miserable. I went back home in the dark after the meeting got over and cried. My

mother asked, “Did the leader scold you? What happened?” “No, he did not scold me. He said I had changed my mind while you had not. So I am asked to educate you. How can a daughter teach her mother?” Saying thus I cried and cried and cried. (I92, p. 14)

Cho Lhamo and her family escaped the Chinese violence. Dawa Dolma and her family could also flee. Tsering Chonphel had to leave with his mother and brothers. Kunchok Tashi also had to flee with his father to avoid the imprisonment and torture. One elder said, “After the Chinese occupation, everyone escaped with just an empty cup” (I5M, p. 4). All of the interviewees had to flee their homeland. Since 1959, 1.3 million (out of 6 million) Tibetan people were killed during the Chinese colonization of Tibet. According to Choesang (2014), “The Tibetan government-in-exile has estimated at least one million Tibetans have died under Chinese rule and around 80,000 refugees have fled the country” (p. 15). Schools have been constructed to naturalize the horrible violence against the Tibetan people and the systemic destruction of Tibetan Buddhism. All of the interviewees feel deeply for their homeland. They hope that Tibet will become free, gain freedom, independence, and self-determination. Toward the end of their oral histories, many elders shared their prayers for the freedom of Tibet and well-being of all.



Figure 5.2. Praying for the Land of Tibet. Inspired by a painting by Nicholas Roerich entitled Chenrezi, 1932. Courtesy of Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. Oil on canvas. August 2016.

OM MANI PADME HUM

Contiguity: Reflections

Learning from photos, oral histories
 Is like stepping into a silent temple,
 Where prayers await to be chanted,
 Where walls dream in frescoes,
 And air is still in moments, heart beats.
 I read the lines of the past on the pages
 Of time, it was here, before me, it is still
 In life, memories are alive, dancing
 Between temples, frescoes, and us,
 There in still-life of the words: told, translated, freed.

(September 2016)

Contiguity is about “giving attention to the spaces in between art, education, and research, in between ‘art’ and ‘graphy’, and in between art and a/r/t” (Irwin & Springgay 2008, p. xxvii). My attention to these in-between spaces has been a reflective process of learning from the historical and cultural contexts about natural learning and its life-long significance in people’s lives. This attention has led me to contemplate some of the ongoing tensions in the context of reflexivity and representation. I have recorded all of these tensions in my reflective journal with a focus on my emotional impressions through poetry and art. Springgay et al. (2005) wrote that a/r/tography is “a fluid orientation creating its rigour through continuous reflexivity and analysis” (p. 903). In this creative context, reflexivity was an ongoing dialogue (Calafell, 2013) through which I have engaged with the oral histories, archives, literature, and myself. This reflexivity has allowed me to actually include my personal experiences into the research process

through the poetic visualization and heart-felt contemplative art. Faulkner, Kaunert, Kluch, Koc, and Trotter (2016) wrote that reflexivity is “how he/she [a researcher] incorporates into his/her work a certain set of preconceived behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, and in fact, we argue that these personal experiences enrich the research endeavor” (p. 198). I present these reflexive accounts below with attention to the formation of my cultural sensitivity in the context of interpretation and representation. Hence, this contiguity is a process through which diverse meanings have *come together* (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900). To me, the contiguity is about in-between spaces through which I have developed reflexivity and constructed poetic representations.

Can I speak for others?

Silence answers.

I hear heart-beats.

I can't speak for others;

I can listen to the beats

Resonating, reverberating, renderings

Evolving meanings, within, without, with

Readings the symbols, winds, breathes, words

Stories, unfolding through dreams.

Voice is standing still amidst scenes

Like a pause in-between there and us, here and time.

(October, 2016)

At the beginning, I struggled with the concept of findings, interpretation, and representation. How should I represent the found meanings and synthesis? Were these meanings

found or simply attended to? I believe I have simply attended to the people's stories and listened to them. Have I really listened to them? Yes, I have listened by watching the videos. Hence, I have listened to the mediated representations of people's voices. I have read the oral histories. In so doing, I have learned from these represented dialogues. To me, the very meaning of history has become a representation. Giroux (1994) wrote about a representational pedagogy that is focused on "the relationship between identity and culture, particularly as it is addressed in the discourse of racial difference" (p. 33). During my art-making meditations, I have wondered whether my research surfaces and narrates the racial and cultural differences in the context of *othering* (Freire, 1968/1973a; Gruenewald, 2008b; hooks, 1990). For example, hooks (1990) critically described othering in the following passage,

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. ... I am still the author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk. (p. 152)

The voices of others are the echoes and mirrors of time that reverberate through these pages. I am a part of these reverberations, and the reverberations are the artistic spaces and times through which I haven't asked to hear the pain. I have celebrated the people's freedom and stood with them in the solidarity for the future freedom of their land and people. Faulkner et al. (2016) wrote that "reflexivity is poetry, an intentional and artistic act that requires a naked intimacy and a level of honesty. ... It is a window into the heart of human experience" (p. 207). I have touched the bedrock of human experience within the self where the heart pulsates and renders the invisible reverberations of the shared human history on this planet.

I pause
Pulse echoes thoughts
Breathing in, out
Words matter
Then, there, today
I read in-between lines
Scrolls, texts, lives
Visible, distant world
As it unfolds
In histories: self, others
Rivers take hold of terrains
World in itself
I wake, walk
Bare land is rendering
Me, I am carving its words
it isn't about me
Words mirror back, mirrored, mirroring
pages between time, and I as a stranger
am standing, writing, reading in bearing witness
*
Being reflexive:
Tender wind brings words
I wrap them in memories

I step out of my past to walk
 With the wind amidst the photos
 Seeing, feeling, contemplating
 I step in the heart, pulsating with love
 I write the pulsations of times: pages of words
 Piled together in one scroll of the land
 Freed in memories. I stop near silence;
 It is loud with voices.

(December, 2016)

Have I rendered their identities as homogenous, static, and frozen in time? For example, many Tibetan heritage people, living in Nepal, currently feel their cultural identities and lifestyle have become a representational zoo as “the frozen exemplars of ‘tradition’ by those who hold the purse strings” (Craig, 2004, p. 17). Have I unconsciously followed this ideology of globalized simplification of othering? Have I re-produced another Orient in a western imagination? Said (1978) found that western colonizers have produced a certain vision of other than western countries (i.e., Orientalism) through the representation of the western cultural strength and domination. He wrote, “Orientalism reinforced, and was reinforced by, the certain knowledge that Europe or the West literally commanded the vastly greater part of the earth’s surface” (p. 41). I certainly don’t hold this view, do I?

I gathered this still life
 From photos, from meadows.
 I smell it, its ancient fragrance;
 It knows, it remembers

The past in the presence

In present, in still lives of the moment,

Rendered on board, on canvas's poems.

(October–November, 2016)

There was no dialogue with the participants, some of them may not be alive today. Have I imposed my views onto their histories and historical experiences, just like a still life imposes itself onto a blank canvas? Have I become a cultural invader of their histories? Freire (1968/1973a) observed that cultural invaders not only impose their meanings onto the marginalized groups, but also silence them and restrain their creative expressions. In this view, othering takes place when the dominant groups (i.e., White researchers) perceive and narrate cultural differences as being inferior in meanings, experiences, and significance (Krumer-Nevo, 2012). I have certainly not invaded the communities with my imposed ideas. I have taken an intercultural stance that is more oriented toward a personal synthesis than appropriation (Freire, 1968/1973a). My intention has been to learn from the oral histories and to form an educational platform of solidarity (i.e., educational sustainability) with the Tibetan people and their collective mission. Kang (2015) wrote that “educators should work as agents of cultural synthesis” (p. 166). This agency has clearly been about learning from the people about their pedagogies of everyday life in the context of children’s playful happiness, freedom, intergenerational dialogues, childhood place, and life-long subsistence. My agency in this view has, certainly, lacked a dialogic component with the people due to the historical nature of the research.

Freire (1985) wrote that one’s agency in the process of synthesis should embrace the peasants (or the participants as the active agents of their worldviews). Specifically, the synthesis “begins with thematic investigation or generative themes through which peasants can begin a

critical self-reflection and self-appraisal” (Freire, 1985, p. 33). In my research, the people didn’t necessarily have this agency of reflection and action. Yet I believe my a/r/tographic synthesis creates a broader context of reflection. This intercultural synthesis is a poetic, that is to say, a rhizomatic *third space* as “an act of encounter which is always in a fluid state since it is always in a state of becoming and hence, cannot be fixed into any stable final formulation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 208). In this third space, I have encountered people’s histories and experiences that have taught me about their precolonial lives and their struggle against colonization. In this view, my third space has been shaped by solidarity that is my radical posture in trying to “enter into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity” (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 31). I have tried to enter their historical situations with the help of my poems and art.

Histories, places are
 walking through me
 as I touch bare rocks
 in the wild corners of memories
 reflecting with moon-like threads
 of memoirs — waves of this lake
 the ways to Self, ways to Other
 open in presence, heart-felt embrace
 entranced by a moment
 being with, immersed from within
 are these histories, places
 open on pages of winds
 I am reading, writing with ink,

Acrylic, oil, pastel

these bare moments of stillness

in poesis.

(Shugurova, 2014, pp. 2-3)

Through the participant-voiced poems and impressionist paintings, I would also like all readers and my students to become the agents of cultural synthesis in their lives as educators, researchers, and artists by witnessing the historical situations of happiness, freedom, injustice, and colonization. I would like my readers to encounter the third space and to cross the borders of differences across races, cultures, genders, places, and times. Anzaldúa (1987) wrote about the third space as the borderland, *la frontera*, where “the ability to respond” resides and lives well in resistance to the colonizing culture (p. 20). The third space is one’s encounter with the lived experience of self, others, and the world; this is the encounter with/in history in the present (Anzaldúa (1987). Harjo (1983) wrote poetically about this encounter as the ability to witness and to speak against injustice without fear and to claim one’s responsibility in answering/questioning the silenced corners of history. This history doesn’t necessarily reside in the past because it is *in* the present as the third space of reflection where the pedagogies of hope and representations become visible and heart-felt. She said, “I release you, fear, because you hold these scenes in front of me and were born with eyes that can never close” (Harjo, 1983, p. 69). The historical scenes of children’s ways of learning and their colonization make my research a witnessing a/r/tography, through which I render my subjective interpretations of people’s stories and engage the third space of the intercultural synthesis.

The third space is both the borderland and the borderless process of learning from the people whose histories have been oppressed and colonized. marino (1997) said that learning is

never a neutral process. Hence, learning from the oppressed and *giving* voice to their histories in the dominant institutional spaces of education (i.e., research) means supporting them in their struggle to achieve self-determination, peace, freedom, and preservation of their cultural heritage. On March 10, 1961, The Dalai Lama of Tibet eloquently said,

Foreign rule, alas, still continues in Tibet but I know that I am proud to know that the spirit of our people remains uncrushed and unshaken in their resolve to fight on till independence is regained. ... Our country, which was till recently independent, has been reduced to the status of a colonial possession. We cannot in any event be denied the right to self-determination. (paras. 2-16)

Hence, this dissertation is my subjective stance of solidarity with the Tibetan people in their struggle for self-determination. I have created this third poetic/visual space as a “site [place] of radical possibility, a space of resistance. ... It offers to one a possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks, 1990, pp. 149-150). I have begun my contiguity within my critical paradigm of unschooling research and critical pedagogy of place, focused on an intercultural synthesis through writing and art-making. Yet my contiguity has expanded to reach a postcolonial stance of the critical pedagogy of place and unschooling. During my reflections, I have experienced the personal transformations through which I sought to envision a new world that is rooted in the compassionate interbeing (the Buddha dharma). I have been immersed in contemplative meditations with a poetic look within the self as I have encountered the oral histories and archives. Kincheloe (2006) wrote that “as teachers from the dominant culture explore issues of indigenouness, they highlight both their differences with cultural others and the social construction of their own subjectivities” (p. 181).

The postcolonial gaze has been about the representation of the self and other in a way that supports the people's hopes, histories, and prayers.

With this inner gaze, I have found my sense of identity as an artist/teacher/researcher who is constantly crossing borders in between places and times. Giroux (1994) said that critical pedagogy allows researchers, educators, artists, and cultural workers to take a "position of nonidentity with their own positions" (p. 13). This nonidentity has been about my meditations about the meaning of my identity as an artist, researcher, and teacher. As an a/r/tist, my identity is already liminal and in flux. I could not identify precisely what the concept of identity or nonidentity has meant in my research. I have considered my cultural heritage with a privilege to conduct research in an academic institution. This privilege is my platform and voice, through which I render the silenced experiences in the local histories of Tibet along with the silenced histories of the self/artist/researcher/teacher. Yet I am aware of my white privileged identity and the ambiguity of giving voice to others (Howard, 2006; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). Howard (2006) wrote,

Whites often speak of 'giving voice' to marginalized groups, as if *their voice is ours to give* [emphasis in original]. From the position of privilege, we have often attempted to construct the stage on which other people's drama are enacted. We have even tried to play their parts. And of course, we have usually sold the tickets. (p. 89)

In fact, I haven't sold the tickets and I am not going to. I have aligned myself with the mission of the Tibet Oral History Project, Dalai Lama's hope, and prayers of the participants. In any way, I have tried to appropriate their stories or to enact their histories. Being aware of my social location helps me to understand how this location includes not just my privilege as an individual but also the privilege of the academic institution. Learning from the Tibetan people's

histories allows me to learn about a broader historical context of social justice and injustice. McIntosh (1997) found that a researcher has to make the power dynamic visible in order to analyze how oppression is structured in a social system. The research has allowed me to understand how the concepts of power and privilege have been structured in the lives of the Tibetan children. McIntosh found that privilege “exists when a group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to” (as cited in Ferber, 2013, p. 578). Clearly, I have the privilege of going to Tibet and many of the interviewees don’t have the same privilege. Hence, I will use my privilege as an educational tool to contribute to their collective mission of cultural preservation and self-determination. In so doing, I have also been able to reflect on my sense of privilege that was shaped by the historical struggle of the Jewish people against the histories of persecution, oppression, and genocide. These reflections were the moments of compassion and contemplation, indignation and thoughtfulness. I could connect with the Tibetan people’s stories from within this social location (e.g., my privileged identity) of compassion that gives voice to the intercultural struggle and collective (yet diverse) memories.

As i am walking through the woods

borders erase ease

troubles cease

pain fears

rivers are flowing

beyond borders

lands are changing lens

heart as a center

sun as a guide

pathways, walks, woods
borderless space-time
reading self in a moment
gazing beyond to an empty
depth where meanings
come from, go to,
range place self.
(Shugurova, 2014, p. 28)

When I was reading about the childhood of the Tibetan people, I couldn't stop dreaming about my own childhood. I was not dreaming about my schooled childhood in the Soviet Union. I was dreaming about my unschooled childhood in my grandmother's garden where I was allowed to play my own games and to organize my days without any imposed rules and limits. My grandmother and grandfather had a farm house on the outskirts of Dnipropetrovsk.



Figure 5.3. I am in my Grandmother's garden in the winter time.

They respected my freedom and nurtured my happiness on the farm; they never told me to do anything. I was free to explore my interests and passions in the garden with the cherry trees, apples, onions, parsley, dill, potatoes, chicken, goats, and baby ducks. It is here that I imagined myself as a teacher and taught the cherry trees and potatoes about astronomy. An astronomy textbook (Grade 11) was the only available textbook on the farm. Every morning, I played at being a teacher with my textbook. Each plant and tree in the garden had a name as a student. I would teach them astronomy and ask them to reflect on the shared knowledge. I then wrote poems about the grand questions that came to my mind about the purpose of life on this planet and human mind. Some of these poems were later published in a city newspaper under the column Poets. From within this place of my happy and free childhood, I could connect with the oral histories.

Are oral histories places

of knowing, stories

that live beyond,

Texts?

They are voices

inscribed, written,

in mind, lens

over being

thoughts are in them

thoughts of the past

consciousness moves: us, them, we

in-between here and there

time, place, space, self

other than real.

(Shugurova, 2014, pp. 29-30)

Even though one can never step into the studied phenomenon and experience it in the same way as the participants (Charmaz, 2014), one can come closer to the phenomenon and study its processes. I have come closer to the historical phenomenon of children's ways of learning before the colonial compulsory schooling systems by dwelling in the third space of a/r/tography. I hope that this borderland in-between space (Anzaldúa, 1987) will help all my readers to reach beyond the national and cultural boundaries, identities and subjectivities, academic and local communities in solidarity with the Tibetan people. This space has also allowed me to contemplate the historical importance of cultural sensitivity during the research.

meanings are living streams

like rains, gathering, pouring through

clouds, over regimes of habits,

transparent, transbound

free in the woods, hills

cultures are coming together

in histories of the living streams

showing, revealing thousands voices

in-between

here and there

in the Silence of Now.

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 37)

*

I care with truth

Wrap in a fabric of memory

Weave with the art of Land

Include as IS in a story

Shared as Gift for the Future.

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 36)

There is an intricate connection between a sense of childhood place, local knowledge, and learning. This connection is a historical context of meanings and experiences. Places keep memories. Local knowledge includes all intergenerational teachings about subsistence and happiness, freedom and compassion. If teachers want to practice educational sustainability, they should learn not about sustainability, not even for sustainability; but *as* sustainability (Sterling, 2010). The oral histories and archives have taught me about this *process*. I discuss this process in my next chapter with a focus on further recommendations and conclusions.

Decoding meaning through texts

I see, I feel, I perceive

how knowing comes within self

in reflective glance of meaning

in being with unseen, others

with pauses with moments

seeing, feeling, perceiving

the world in life forces,

creating new meanings,

stories, poesis, worlds

Am I a listener of the world?

Am I story-creator?

What is the real being?

the soul-felt

unnoticed reading of meaning

unfolding as spaces between

art, poem, and self

learning, unlearning life.

(Shugurova, 2014, p. 53)



Figure 5.4. Self-portrait. Learning as sustainability. Oil on wood. November 2016.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

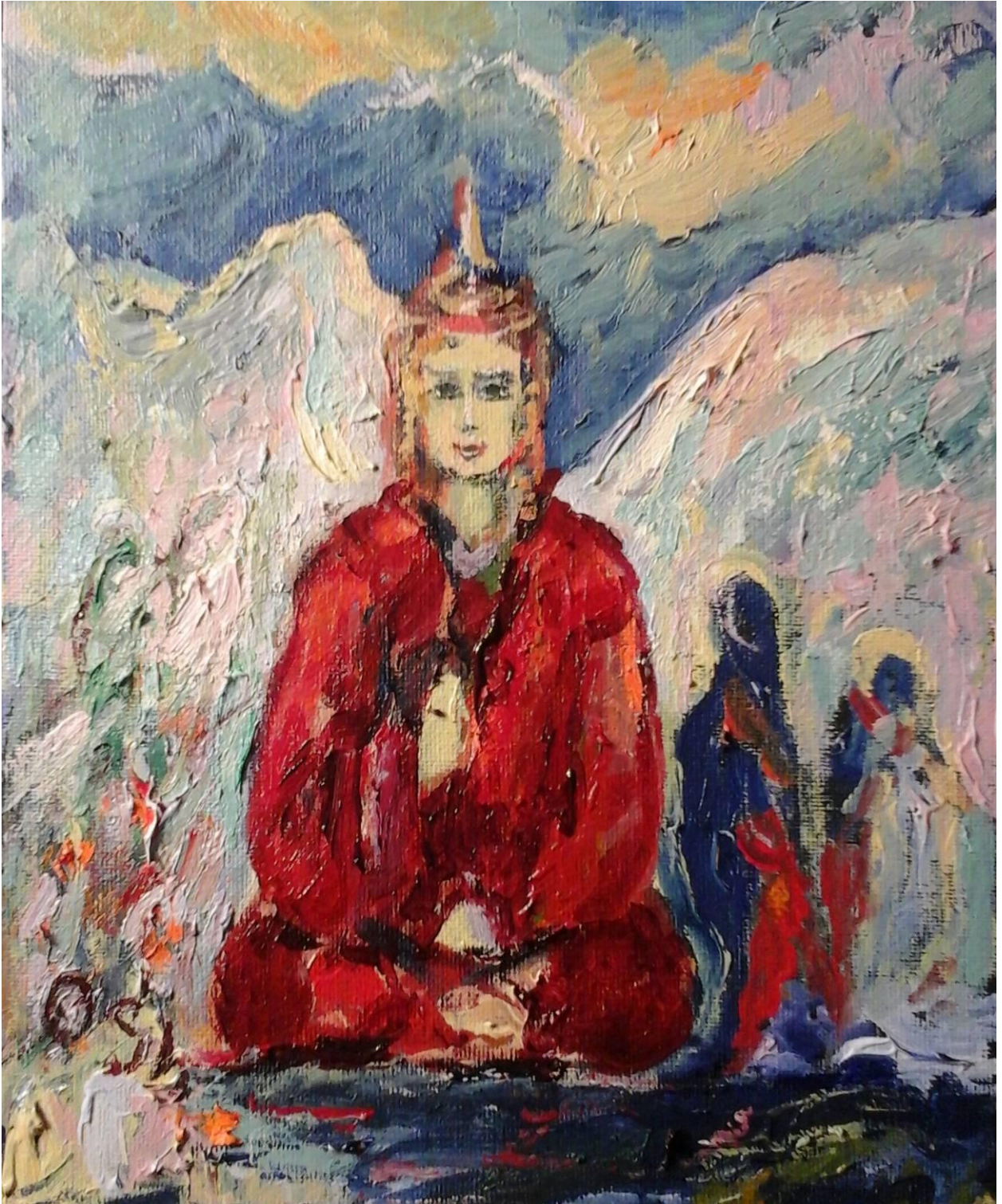


Figure 6.1. The Buddha in the Tibetan Himalayas. Oil on canvas. November 2016.

This dissertation has been an arts-based journey in time and space, place and self, cultures and histories. The research purpose was to give voice to the local people's experiences as well as to learn from these situated voices about learning before the advent of colonial schooling. Through this journey, I have come to know the historical significance of children's ways of learning in the Tibetan Buddhist context of everyday life. The historical significance is in the situated context that allows us as educators, researchers, and artists to learn about learning from the lived experiences of the Tibetan people. In so doing, we may support them in our/their ongoing efforts to preserve and sustain the local cultural heritage of wisdom. The oral histories reveal that the children could really feel and experience happiness and freedom in their lives. These critical experiences form the ontological foundation of the local self-sustainability as the profound sense of connection with the communities, both human and non-human. Natural learning experiences have led toward the local educational sustainability because the children could consciously and, therefore, intentionally develop these connections with their worlds. Educational sustainability was an ontological context of learning that has been woven by the intergenerational practices of subsistence and other forms of local knowledge. Basically, natural learning as sustainability has led children to form their ideas about the future not as an abstract temporal concept, but as a situated present of their intentional engagement with other people and the living places. In this expanded historical view, my recommendations are directed to pre-service teachers in order to inspire them to think about and with this unique historical context of learning as sustainability for the purposes of building solidarity with the Tibetan people, and, in so doing, developing the global intercultural pedagogies of happiness and freedom.

The recommendations follow the findings in a map-like framework that resembles a rhizome. Let me remind the readers that a rhizome is a way of thinking about findings and

recommendations, conclusions and beginnings; there are no direct lines of prescriptions and instrumental applications. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote that a rhizome “is a subterranean stem [that is] absolutely different from roots and radicles” (p. 6). This stem spreads in diverse directions; the rhizome can be connected with any other conceptual terrain and “circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Hence, the recommendations can be utilized not only by pre-service teachers; they can become creative entries for cultural workers, artists, philosophers, policy-makers, politicians, and the general public. These entries invite the readers to form their personal connections with this research in an expanded consciousness of a place-based and unschooled educational sustainability as well as to engage with their Buddha dharma in the past, present, and future.

Recommendation 1: Awareness of Child Learning and Metacognition

Pre-service teachers should learn about their own ways of natural learning without compulsory schools, as well as learn from the different cultural and historical experiences of children’s pathways of natural learning without schools. A/r/tography is one of the most culturally appropriate methodologies and pedagogies in this process because it leads towards reflective and respectful connections across cultural differences that foster one’s personal engagement with and a new awareness of the context of children’s agency, freedom, and happiness.

Even though this study is a particular place-based approach to the historical understanding of children’s ways of learning without an attempt to generalize to other cultures, the findings can help future teachers to develop their pedagogies of educational sustainability with a focus on natural learning, cultural place, and local knowledge. In this view, the concept of teaching should not be perceived and conceptualized as a mechanical or an instrumental

procedure because it becomes an intercultural process of learning from and with others. The term “intercultural” is always a plural concept because it evolves from within one’s personal engagement with cultural differences. This engagement is a critical process through which individuals can reflect on their beliefs and assumptions; as well as to contemplate “how they do or do not serve mutual flourishing and sustainability” (Bai et al., 2015, p. 3). Teaching doesn’t exist without this personal engagement with one’s natural ways of learning and knowing, unknowing and unlearning (Leggo, 2005). In a broader sense, education is an intercultural work that is about a teacher’s pursuit of learning from and honouring “diverse histories, cultures, and traditions” (Bai et al., 2015). This pursuit often leads toward one’s identity transformation as a teacher, artist, researcher, and human being. Further, the intercultural process is not only about looking for other cultures, but also about ‘looking in,’ or the development of awareness of the ways in which what is seen in any ‘other’ is influenced by mostly tacit social concepts, ideologies, and practices” (Bai et al., 2015, p. 8). In order to learn how to teach, one also needs to learn how children (from various cultural backgrounds) learn naturally when they don’t have to go to school. In so doing, one may be able to develop a better intercultural awareness and become receptive and respectful of cultural differences. Further, natural learning usually makes children happy and culturally competent (Chapter 5).

Through this research, I have also learned about myself as an artist and a teacher and my personal ways of natural learning. I learned that I learn about teaching and learning through poetic writing and art-making. During this process, I fully engage in the very act of creation and become immersed in the poesis. The poetic immersion doesn’t have any instrumental purpose or outcome to be met or to be achieved; it is rather an organic, spontaneous, and relational endeavour. I read about the past and the seemingly unrelated cultural experiences. I pause. I

reflect. I write poems to transcribe meaning and I write poems to make sense of the transcriptions, translations, and reflections. In all these processes, I don't know what I am writing about and I don't claim to know this. Valery also observed,

The true poet does not know the exact meaning of what he [sic] has just had the good luck to write. A moment later he is a mere reader. He has written non-sense: something that must not *present* but *receive* [emphasis in original] a meaning. (as cited in Evans, 2016, p. 42)

Poesis emerges from within the third space, whereby "an elegance of flow between intellect, feeling, and practice" (Irwin, 2004, p. 29) takes place as the art-making unfolds and evolves on canvas and on paper. I tend to experience the unknown cultural meanings through this ethical space of meditative interactions with the past. My ethical space is shaped by the situated place of culturally responsive ways of knowing pedagogies (Berryman et al., 2013). The situated place of culture is sacred because it reflects diverse human experiences in a myriad of poetic encounters with differences and similarities. According to Dillard (2008), "Every experience in our lives is sacred" (p. 290). I approach the very meaning of cultural synthesis from within this place of sacred meanings and situated histories of poetic and visual ways of learning.

Freire (1998/2005) explained that one's cultural synthesis is a conceptual act that occurs through a reflective writing process that is inseparable from one's act of thinking. He wrote,

While I think I consciously and expressly remain aware of the possibility of writing and that, in the same manner, while writing I continue to think and rethink what I had already thought before. ... I continue to reflect while writing, thus engaging more deeply. (pp. 2-3)

In this rhizomatic process, a/r/tography becomes an intercultural *pedagogy* of transformation, and, ultimately, freedom. A/r/tography is the most suitable pedagogy for pre-

service teachers to develop their intercultural understanding of children's ways of natural learning because a/r/tography is focused on the deep reflective engagements and understandings, as opposed to a passive transmission of factual information and representations (Springgay, 2008). Through my a/r/tography, I have learned that children's ways of learning can be better understood by allowing children to be free and to explore their interests and talents. This ontological freedom doesn't have one set of meanings because it takes place in an open space of mutual care, respect, trust, compassion, and love (Ricci, 2012). Freire (1998) explained that teaching "requires the capacity to fight for freedom, without which the teaching task becomes meaningless" (p. 6). The oral histories show that freedom is an existential and experiential learning process that allows children to know and construct their living place of childhood through their self-initiated activities.

This process involves broadening of consciousness that is often characterized by the children's creative exploration of diverse cultural meanings of their daily life (Chapter 5). Through these explorations, children may consciously experience cultural meanings and become meaning makers (i.e., agents of culture). They find hands-on applications of their self-generated or observed ideas in the immediate surroundings. The creative agency of children's freedom helps them to become happy because they can understand their interests and follow their choices. I believe that pre-service teachers (worldwide) should learn about the ontological and epistemological value of freedom as the intrinsic foundation of all learning experiences, including their own. Freedom and happiness are the creative forces of human consciousness (Chapter 5). Hence, teachers should nurture the happiness of their students and of themselves in creating (and allowing their children to create) diverse cultural structures of freedom. The Dalai

Lama once said that all human beings seek happiness, and happiness is the “very motion of our lives” (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 15).

This a/r/tographic way of learning about children’s learning experiences without schools, ultimately, leads future teachers to sustain their compassion and loving–kindness toward their students. Further, learning about children’s natural learning experiences helps teachers to cultivate their *will to love* (hooks, 2000, 2003). The will to love is at the very heart of teaching that embodies the practice of freedom in the intercultural context of people’s everyday life because “it enables us to confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection. It teaches us how to create a community” (hooks, 2003, p. xv). This community is organic and multicultural; it is defined by children (i.e., learners) without any enforced dependency on socially imposed definitions and instructions, meanings and structures. The notion of community embraces more than human beings, such as animals, plants, mountains, lakes, rivers, spirits, and land. The will to learn and the will to love are intimately intertwined; these willful ways of learning and being lead children towards a life-long recognition and respect of others, themselves, nature, and the mysterious universe (Ricci, 2012; Ricci & Pritscher, 2015). Antoine de Saint-Exupery said that “if you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather, let them long for the endless immensity of the sea” (as cited in Ricci & Pritscher, 2015, p. 122). Likewise, a/r/tography of natural learning may allow pre-service teachers to long for the immensity and infinity of the human freedom, compassion, and happiness.

Perhaps a question about natural learning is always an open question because it simultaneously touches the mysterious terms “nature” and “learning.” It is an imaginary activity that uplifts the spirit and emotions, because teachers and children can become equal co-

participants and co-learners of and with the world. The experience of mystery takes place every day; it “is a common human experience” (Ricci & Pritscher, 2015, p. 135). Berry (1988) eloquently wrote about a natural learning way,

The primary educator . . . would be the natural world itself. The integral earth community would be a self-educating community within the context of a self-educating universe.

Education at the human level would be the conscious sensitizing of humans to profound communication made by the universe about us, by the sun, the moon, and the stars, the clouds, the rain, the contours of the earth and all its living forms. All music and poetry of the universe would flow into the student, the revelatory presence of the divine. (p. 64)

The oral histories show that the local way of natural learning had been a peaceful way of being in the world. A peaceful state of mind emerges when people attend to the integral earth community and become aware of the surrounding beauty (Berry, 1988). Peaceful consciousness is the awareness of the revelatory presence of life (Krishnamurti, 1953). Ricci and Pritscher (2015) found that the very ground of understanding is the awareness of the moment. Willing learning emerges from within the natural bedrock of consciousness; it “arises as ordered and ‘not yet ordered’ aspects of consciousness when one’s present experience is given attention” (p. 128). There are no strategies for the development of natural learning. It is a state of unknowing that broadens the consciousness of the world and one’s being within it. Ricci and Pritscher (2015) explain,

We learn to notice by noticing. We learn to be open to noticing by being open to noticing.

As many agree, we learn by doing. This may have the effect of being reasonably uncertain about one’s understanding. This uncertainty helps one understand and accept that not everything can be understood or clearly stated. (p. 144)

When teachers learn about the historical significance of natural learning and, consequently, learn to learn naturally, they may gain an insight about the unknown mystery and their intrinsic will to love. It is, specifically, important for pre-service teachers because they can form their consciousness of freedom without any institutionalized dogma of imposed rules. To be and to become a teacher means to “be still, to remember to breathe, to hear and see and know with the heart” (Leggo, 2005, p. 185). This expanded consciousness of learning is oriented toward a constant pursuit of happiness for others, the self, and the world.

Foremost, this consciousness has a stance of being that invites teachers to become non-experts in the field of education. It is important for pre-service teachers to develop this living awareness, so that they can attend to and render the unknown mystery of nature in children’s experiences of love toward the world. To me, the concept of the unknown is about a radical posture of an open love for the world in its complexities and uncertainties. According to Vasudevan (2011), the unknown is “the deep curiosity for which the answers are not scripted, expected, or presumed” (p. 17). I believe it is important for teachers to become non-experts because they can respect their students’ learning spaces and places without imposing their beliefs, values, worldviews, and assumptions onto them.

In this perspective, teachers don’t perpetuate the systemic social mirrors of oppression and colonization. These mirrors include the colonial assumptions of the banking model of education such as “the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; the teacher chooses and enforces his [*sic*] choice, and the students comply” (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 73). Hence, teachers can learn to sustain inspirational and creative spaces of the unknown in which learners can become fully themselves (Barnett, 2007). This pedagogical process is an active problem-posing stance without any logical

certainty and pre-determined ministry-based outcome; this stance is an act of solidarity with the muse of the mysterious and *the inspiration itself* (Barnett, 2007). Perhaps, it is the act of the Buddha dharma in recognizing one's intrinsic will of love and compassion as well as in respecting this will in learners and in the living world. The oral histories teach us that these willful learning experiences were spontaneous because the children could organically find and make them, following their will to love, to live, and to be. These spaces are oriented toward "the pursuit of full humanity . . . in fellowship and solidarity" (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 85) with the collective (local/global) movement for freedom and happiness, peace and subsistence that is unfolding in and through education.

Recommendation 2: Place-Based Learning

Pre-service teachers, concerned with educational sustainability, should learn about children's ways of natural learning in and from a particular place-based historical and cultural context in order to respect and preserve the local knowledge and its bioregions, as well as to respect children's (i.e., learners') creative agency of being with the world.

This stance is congruent with the overall stance of my paradigm, in and through which "we can learn from some past centuries, in order to chart a course for future cultures that will shake us loose from the alienated thralldom of the Enlightenment" (Murphy, 1995, p. 147). I have been shaken by the recognition of place *as* education (i.e., chronotope) where the children could consciously choose what they wanted to be and to become in a broader cultural-spiritual context of compassion for their families, communities, and sentient beings. This is the culture of compassion that views people as the responsible creators of meanings and relationships. Further, these relationships and meanings are always dynamic and emergent because they are not separated from the living places of the world and their diverse [bioregional] experience. The oral

histories teach that a bioregion is a cultural place that keeps and sustains the local knowledge and learning experiences through the community-based daily practices of subsistence, folklore, and spirituality.

Generally, bioregion may be defined as “a cultural geographic area defined by common natural features, such as watersheds, landforms, local ecosystems and biotic shifts, indicator species, and human history” (Fawcett, 2005, p. 276). Bioregions often overlap and trespass the national boundaries. For example, a bioregion of the Himalaya encompasses Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, India, and Tibet (Roerich, 1929/1990). It is difficult to delineate a bioregion and to map it out because bioregions are the products of people’s imagination and inhabitation (Bishop, 1989). I think a bioregion is a critical pedagogical place that is always experiential and embodied. The meaning of bioregions emerges within and through “the experience of being human in connection with the others and with the world of nature” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 6). Hence, natural learning in a place-based bioregional context allows teachers to reconnect with the ontological meaning of educational sustainability as the shared responsibility to restore the compassionate environment of sentient beings and its/our Buddha dharma.

For example, teachers who are concerned with the bioregional educational sustainability in Tibet and China should develop their intercultural a/r/tographies with a focus on the Tibetan precolonial experiences of learning in order to preserve the cultural heritage of the Tibetan people and a broader cultural place of Tibet. In particular, they should study the Tibet Oral Histories or conduct their own oral histories that may help them to gain a situated insight about the intrinsic value of a childhood happy place as the individual and collective chronotope of the local knowledge. Teachers should explore these chronotopes because they are the lived historical experiences and intergenerational memories of children and their families (Chapter 5). The local

places keep memories and historical meanings together that are “tied and untied” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250) through the personal narratives and oral histories, conversations and dialogues. Hence, learning about natural learning is a situated encounter between the self and the bioregional local knowledge of diverse communities. Teachers should learn about the bioregional chronotopes of their students, as well as to unearth their own chronotopes of place-based learning experiences in their childhood and in the current life world.

The oral histories show that the Tibetan children were able to freely form and shape their precolonial chronotopes of childhood without any enforcement and oppression. At the centre of these chronotopes was their creative agency in the context of freedom in the physical movement outdoors (in spaces/places) and in their choice of meaning making activities (e.g., physical activities, imaginary activities, games, work). Further, the chronotope of childhood was not a separate institutional realm from the rest of adult life. When teachers learn about children’s ways of learning in the context of these dynamic chronotopes, they may learn to respect children as capable and equal citizens of their bioregions, countries, and the global place of this planet. Holt (1974) wrote,

We can begin to treat children, even the youngest and smallest, wherever we may find them, as we would want to treat them in the society we are trying to make. ... We must treat him [*sic*] with a certain formality and reserve until we find out how he would like to be treated. We must respect not just his physical but his emotional life space until he shows us how far into that space he is ready to welcome us. (pp. 277-278)

Hence, children’s ways of natural learning form their emotional chronotope of life. Teachers need to learn to respect childhood not as an institutionalized space of lessons and studies, but as the ontological space–time of child’s agency, freedom and happiness, being and

becoming. These chronotopes are the ontological chronotopes in education (Matusov, 2015b). I would like to remind my readers that a chronotope is a “time space [that is about] the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). The oral histories teach us that this literature is not only about the printed press, but also about the oral legends, stories, and other forms of popular culture. For many children, their cultural expressions were their games and activities. Perhaps these chronotopes of connections and relationships with their childhood places help them to develop their unique cultural visions and spiritual expressions that may or may not include the printed literature. Children’s literary expressions (e.g., songs, stories, legends, dialogues, games) are intimately connected with their local knowledge of various bioregional places that are the entry gates into their inner world of meaning, ideas, value, memory, and history.

This inner world is the Buddha nature of compassion that dwells in the peaceful heart and in the playful mind. The inner world is the life world of the intrinsic knowledge that emerges with the awareness of a place-conscious sense of connectedness with the living world. According to an unknown Buddhist poet, Issa (18th century), the inner world of the self and the inner world of natural phenomena are intimately connected,

Buddha–Dharma

Shining

In leaf dew

(as cited in Donegan, 1990, p. 197).

Further, The Buddha told his students to observe the inner world of the earth, so that they could develop a peaceful mind (i.e., untroubled) and an open heart (i.e., compassionate). For example, the Buddha in *Sutta Nipata* said,

Know ye the grasses and the trees. Then know ye the worms, and the moths, and the different sorts of ants. ... Know ye also the the four-footed animals small and great, the serpents, the fish which range in the water, the birds that are borne along on wings and move through the air. (as cited in Gottlieb, 2004, p. 131)

These chronotopes are the experiential and ontological hubs through which children-learners and teacher-learners construct their mental models of the world and their self within it. Ontology, in this view, is not about being *in* the world but about being *with* the world (Freire, 1985). The difference is crucial because people in the world often feel themselves as passive consumers and spectators, and people with the world perceive themselves as the active subjects and creators of the world (Freire, 1968/1973a). The ontology of *being with* is the ontology of freedom. For teachers, this process is a dialectical transformation of their abstracted ideological space of expertise into the concrete and experiential place of being with their learners' life worlds. The concept of ontology doesn't have a definition per se, as it is always a transformational process of being with. Ontology is a shared event of coexistence and co-being. Sandomirskaja said once that "all existence is primarily coexistence, all appearing is co-appearing, all origins are co-origins" (as cited in Schuback & Nancy, 2013, p. 7). The oral histories also reveal this point of co-existence that reflects the Buddhist ontology of the Dharma. Further, we see that the ontological chronotopes of learning without schools have been experienced as the ontologies of happy childhood.

Teachers should become eager to learn from their learners about their favourite places of being with the world; the places that embody the world in themselves, and connect with other spaces (known/unknown, imaginary/real) just like Freire's childhood backyard (1997). He wrote,

My childhood backyard has been unveiling itself to many other spaces—spaces that are not necessarily other yards. Spaces where this man of today sees the child of

yesterday in himself and learns to see better what he had seen before. To see again what had already been seen before implies seeing angles that were not perceived before. (p. 39)

These places are memorable and meaningful because children experience a really happy time *there*. Matusov (2015b) found that the “ontological aspects of chronotope may include diverse time, space, axiology, relational, discursive and participatory frames and scales like gendered, racialized, nationalized, classicized discourses among students and the teacher transcending immediate classroom surroundings” (p. 69). In this dynamic context, learning and teaching processes are not about the classroom environment but about the real world historical experiences of really happy times.

Furthermore, the local place-conscious concept of natural learning seems to be inseparable from the Tibetan Buddhist concept of dharma as the intrinsic realization of the compassionate well-being of all people and beings. One of the contemporary ways to develop this intercultural way of teaching/learning in postcolonial Tibet is to find intrinsic connections between the precolonial Tibetan Buddhist spiritual ideals and the Chinese cultural ideals in the bioregional context of children’s ways of natural learning. According to the Chinese philosophy, learning with nature is one’s ability to recognize a mountain “as a great teacher—not only because it manifests the cosmology of sincerity and restless hunger with such immediacy and drama, but also because it stands apart, at once elusive and magisterial” (Hinton, 2012, p. 16). Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese sage, wrote about the mysterious Tao that may be realized when one respects a place of one’s dwelling and its histories. He wrote, “Respect where you dwell. Love your life and livelihood” (as cited in Gottlieb, 2004, p. 76). However, one cannot teach the Tao or talk about the Tao. Pritscher (2013) reminds us that “Lao Tzu said, the way that can be said is not the way” (p. 90). Likewise, the dharma cannot be taught but observed, realized, practiced, and embodied. These ancient philosophies of wisdom allow us as teachers to learn about the intrinsic value of

freedom in people's lives; this is the very ontological freedom of dwelling and being with the world. Pritscher (2013) further explained that "when we are free, we have more of a chance of being compassionate and kind" (p. 91). This compassion is the natural virtue of all human and more than human beings that learners and teachers experience when they explore and, even, construct, various ontological chronotopes of their education.

I believe that the local pre-service teachers in Tibet should learn from and about the convergent and divergent cultural differences between these worldviews in order to develop their intercultural place-consciousness of educational sustainability, as well as to respect their learners' creative agency and chronotope of childhood. Some of these particular ways of learning may include: (a) collaborative arts-based projects that involve oral histories, whereby learners and teachers can either create their own oral histories by engaging the elders or learn from the pre-existing Tibet Oral Histories; (b) recognition of children's freedom in choosing their daily learning activities; (c) creating an open classroom community that has free access to the outdoor environment, including the natural environment; (d) allowing children to design their games and self-directed activities without any adult involvement in this process and, possibly, without any adult supervision (yet with adults on site, who may be engaged in their own art-making processes without any interference in children's self-directed activities); (e) creating children's access to the traditional forms of learning such as farm-based subsistence and animal husbandry; and (f) "children should sing the songs of Tibet, which has sad and romantic words" (I23, p. 16).

Recommendation 3: Intercultural Awareness

In a broader perspective, pre-service teachers should also develop an intercultural awareness of the historical injustices toward the Tibetan people and their precolonial ways of learning. In so doing, teachers may support the goal of the Tibetan people to preserve the culture and history of Tibet. Learning from these histories may also allow pre-service teachers to

develop a critical consciousness of place-based education that is inclusive of the global educational sustainability. In so doing, pre-service teachers may better understand some of the provincial policy directions toward environmental education, such as *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* (MOE, 2009). This document states that “environmental [also known as sustainability] education requires students and others in the education community to examine issues within the context of both the local and the global environmental situation” (p. 10). The Tibetan historical situation allows teachers to understand the importance of place-based learning experiences without the colonial compulsory schools because these experiences help to develop children’s life-long sense of cultural subsistence and, ultimately, environmental place-consciousness.

Further, teachers may question the seemingly neutral term “environment” that has been constructed through the social, political, economic, and cultural discourses (Evernden, 1992). Perhaps the Tibetan oral histories may help teachers to understand how environment is always a lived place with its historical memories and childhood experiences, personal feelings and thoughts of individuals and communities. In questioning their taken-for-granted assumptions of the environment, teachers may also critically think about the dominant term “nature” in their learning and teaching practices. The Dalai Lama (1992) said that “in order to survive you need other companions; without other human beings there is simply no possibility to survive; that is nature's law that is nature” (para. 9). The Tibetan concept of nature is, ultimately, expressed in the concept of compassionate dharma and interbeing (i.e., well-being of all). The dominant Eurocentric idea of nature is not about compassion but consumption. This concept of nature is one of many other instrumental tools that drives the machinery of the banking system of compulsory and colonial schooling mechanism (Freire, 1968/1973a). Marcuse (1964) explained that this objective ideology of nature “develops under the *technological a priori* [emphasis in

original] which projects nature as potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organization” (p. 153). The objective model of nature cannot serve any sustainability models in education because it is devoid of any concept of creative agency and social relationships. In this model, learners need to consume the imposed order of control and instrumental organization in order to perpetuate the systemic banking ideas and colonial ideologies of compulsion and consumption. Teachers need to unearth and uncover this ideology of nature in their pedagogies in order to become sustainable teachers in the classroom and in the world.

Learning from the Tibetan communities and other indigenous communities worldwide may help one to challenge the worldview of consumption and to recognize an alternative paradigm of nature as the place of compassion, freedom, and happiness. Ultimately, teachers should recognize nature as a miracle (Evernden, 1988) of wonder and curiosity that leads learners to perceive and to sense the more than the human realities of the present moment. Natural learning is the process that may also allow teachers to become attentive to these moments of presence and to experience the agency of free thought and unrestricted consciousness. Perhaps, this agency extends not only to human beings but also to more than human beings in their experiences of life. Hence, the place-conscious concept of educational sustainability is not about some instrumental add-on features to the existing programs but about an inner revelation and realization of the intrinsic values of compassion that permeate the whole self and the whole being on this planet. Natural learning experiences and oral histories of the Tibetan elders may help teachers to achieve and experience this pathway of education *as* sustainability (Mulà & Tilbury, 2009; Sterling, 2010).

Let me remind the readers of my starting premise of a cultural lens (Mulà & Tilbury, 2009) in educational sustainability that, at the beginning of the research, was about the focus on

cultural diversity that was about “confronting different values, worldviews, knowledge and beliefs; challenging people’s assumptions and bringing possibilities for new and creative ways of living” (Mulà & Tilbury, 2009, p. 2). Now, I think that the key to educational sustainability is in the very process of learning itself without any pre-conceived agenda. Learning as sustainability orients a learner (i.e., a teacher, artist, researcher) toward a self-reflective stance that allows her to experience inner transformations and pedagogical growth. Sterling (2010) says that there are three basic premises of educational sustainability (i.e., sustainable education): (a) education about sustainability; (b) education for sustainability; and (c) education as sustainability. The first two premises are, basically, the reflections of an instrumental view on nature and education; and the last premise embodies the intrinsic values of education and the natural world. Sterling (2010) explains that the instrumental view is about education “as a means to an end. ... [It] is an agent by which the development of more sustainable lifestyles can be achieved” (p. 513). In this view, learning serves the overall model of compulsory development that is often conceived as a linear transmission of objective information from an expert to a non-expert.

The literature indicates that this view is rooted in a capitalist and colonialist determinism with its set of preconceived outcomes and rigid assumptions about the natural world (i.e., object) and learning (i.e., information transfer and curricula outcomes) (Black, 2010; Bowers, 2013; Kahn, 2010). In contrast, the intrinsic view on education as sustainability is about the *inner life* (i.e., Buddha nature) of a learner/teacher that doesn’t necessarily follow any set of socially imposed outcomes, political objectives, or economic determinants. Sterling (2010) explains that this view is about the “importance of contextualised knowledge, and . . . of nurturing the qualities of the autonomous, critically reflective learner who is able to make informed decisions” (p. 514). The Tibetan oral histories and archives teach us that educational sustainability is about

learning as sustainability, through which learners gain their autonomy and agency in a self-reflective and compassionate context of being with the world. I believe that pre-service teachers can learn about the historical significance of learning as sustainability from the oral histories and, in so doing, develop their intercultural pedagogies as sustainability with a conscious thought for the future agency and autonomy of their learners at all ages.

In addition, natural learning forms the intrinsic paradigm of education as sustainability within a broader intercultural context of global educational citizenship (GEC). According to UNESCO (2014), a discourse of GEC is intertwined with a discourse of sustainable education; and both have multiple meanings and conceptual debates. Yet both of them also aim to promote and enhance the local and global well-being of people and places through education. Specifically, well-being is a place-based context of mutual interconnections and interdependencies that weave together people and the planet in diverse ways. In particular, “it is also a way of understanding, acting and relating oneself to others and the environment in space and in time, based on universal values, through respect for diversity and pluralism (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14). These intricate connections are visible when one begins to engage with various cultural and historical contexts of learning that may provide a critical space of reflection on and relations with the self and the environment in space and in time.

However, GEC is a critical discourse that needs to be situated and unpacked further with a focus on the context of self-directed children’s learning experiences, agency, and their local places of learning. The central focus of this GEC is agency because it is fundamentally about the public values of shared planetary citizenship (Schugurensky, 2010). This discourse in connection with the critical paradigm of education as sustainability focuses on the idea that “educational experiences should empower young individuals through their learning of global issues,

neoliberalism, and hegemonic structures” (Carr et al., 2014, p. 6). I believe that a place-based approach should help learners to establish their personal and transformational connections with some of the global issues. One of the ways of establishing these connections may be through the engagement with the Tibet Oral History Project or with other oral histories worldwide. In so doing, teachers can learn from the situated voices of people and their communities. The situated lens is intercultural because it attends to the immediacy of dialogue that is centred on the personal experiences in a myriad of their feelings and attitudes (Hesser-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Further, it taps into the silenced realms of personal meanings that are often neglected in the dominant educational discourses of objective outcomes and pre-determined curricula. Oral histories often seek to give voices to the marginalized communities and to render their situated views on the global issues and the personal matters of their lives (Leavy, 2011). Hesser-Biber and Leavy (2011) say that an oral history approach benefits the researcher and her participants in a mutual engagement with the difficult issues and questions; this “process can be a rewarding and empowering experience” (p. 133). In the context of learning as sustainability, the Tibet Oral History is a truly rewarding experience because it nurtures the inner feeling of compassion and solidarity with the elders and children. This feeling is like a fiery inspiration and indignation that may lead learners and teachers to create their spaces of natural learning in the context of the Buddha dharma.

Future Research

Based on the research findings and interpretations, I map out two main suggestions for a future research of a place-conscious educational sustainability. These suggestions include: (a) a pedagogical analysis of a learner’s creative agency as a form and process of an ecological agency

as well as (b) an in-depth study of a Tibetan Buddhist child-centred pedagogy of fearless dialogue. The readers will find these suggestions below.

Suggestion 1. Learner’s creative agency as an ecological agency. Creative agency should be studied as a part of a complex phenomenon of the Tibetan Buddhist concept of an ecological agency in the context of learning as sustainability and with a focus on children’s place-based experiences of learning without compulsory schooling. I believe that future research should focus on the concept of ecological agency in the Tibetan Buddhist communities worldwide in order to learn more about the *dharma pedagogy as educational sustainability* (i.e., education as sustainability) of compassion and freedom. I believe that explicit attention to a learning process may help to shed light on an eco-spiritual relation between children’s agency and the well-being of the environment. At present, the oral histories don’t specifically discuss this relation in the context of their learning experiences per se. Yet this research shows that children’s creative agency may be perceived as the ecological agency of learning and knowing, whereby an ecological agency “means neither autonomy nor determinism, but *volitional interdependence*” [emphasis in original] (Murphy, 1995, p. 151). I suggest focusing on the concepts of volition and will in understanding how children creatively express (e.g., through art, poetry, language, games, physical activities) their volition naturally in their daily learning practices and activities without any adult regulations or direct supervision; and why these creative cultural representations are important to their sense of childhood place and an overall well-being of their bioregional environment. This research may be situated either in the present Tibet under the colonial regimes of China or in Tibetan communities in exile. The focus on children’s learning experiences may help to sustain and preserve the cultural and ecological heritage of the Tibetan people and the land of Tibet.

Suggestion 2. Tibetan Buddhist child-centred pedagogy of fearless dialogue. One of the elders, Samdhong Rinpoche, spoke about his learning experiences in the context of a local monastery, Gaden Dechenling. His teacher was one of the best teachers in Tibet at the time; he was “the chief disciple of the past Samdhong [i.e., high religious title], the 4th Samdhong” (2013, p. 4). His way of teaching was unconventional because he was not strict but kind. His talent was about a child-centred education in which he “looked to [the] interest [of children]” (p. 4). The teacher never followed his priorities and ideas, as he always followed children’s interests and curiosities. Because of this child-centred teaching approach, the child was never bored and could succeed in his higher studies afterwards. Specifically, the child-centred learning was focused on the child’s imagination. The elder recalled that the teacher was able to capture his imagination,

What is my imagination, what my interest is, and what is my curiosity. My curiosity is sometimes very ordinary or stupid things, but he never discouraged. He always encouraged to go further, to ask question and even the silly questions he tried to answer, and even to make it further enquiries. (2013, p. 4)

This dialogue was based on the total absence of fear from mistakes and silly answers. The elder recalled that his teacher “knew the language of a child” (p. 5). This language was mainly about curiosity and imagination, spontaneity and wonder without any dogmas and sectarian instructions of memorization. The teacher’s name is Most Venerable Ngawang Jinpa. The oral history doesn’t delve further into this pedagogy. Yet, I think all future teachers may be interested in learning more about this particular teacher and his Tibetan Buddhist dialogic approach to a child-centred learning process and its historical significance. Perhaps a detailed study is needed to approach the same elder and ask him to share his memories of learning with Most Venerable

Ngawang Jinpa. This particular study will advance knowledge in the critical pedagogy of place, unschooling, and postcolonial dialogue (e.g., dialogic child-centred learning).

In order to open the path of this future study and to commemorate the memory of the Most Venerable Ngawang Jinpa as well as the memory of all local learners and teachers in precolonial Tibet, I would like to end this dissertation with a poem entitled *My Gen-La*. *Gen-La* in Tibetan stands for “a respectful term for teacher” (2013, p. 1). I have composed this poem with the help of the elder’s oral history. Specifically, I felt truly moved by the brief account about the Most Venerable teacher because his pedagogy deeply resonates with my pedagogies in the classroom with teacher candidates. This poem is a respectful gratitude to the teacher and to all elders of the Tibet Oral History Project who have inspired me to grow as an educator, artist, and researcher with the open heart of compassion for all children on this sustainable planet in the pursuit of our collective happiness. Let this poem be the poetic conclusion of an emerging intercultural pedagogy as sustainability that has been shaped by the oral histories, poetic interpretations, archives, visual art, and the literature. Before I present the poem, I would like to tentatively define this intercultural pedagogy of cultural synthesis as the poetics of *unknowing*. Mohanty’s (1986) definition clarifies my stance without enclosure,

Pedagogy, particularly in the realm of culture, needs then to face the fundamental challenge to escape both the transmission of coded knowledge and the coded transmission of knowledge. ... Learning is dialogic, but not in the traditional Socratic sense. It involves a necessary implication in the radical alterity of the unknown in the desire(s) not to know, in the process of this unresolvable dialectic. (p. 155)

The future research should specifically begin with this unresolvable dialectic and move forth in pursuit of the Tibetan Buddhist dialogue with(in) the historical contexts of learning that

were deliberately against the coded knowledge and coded transmission of knowledge. This dialogic learning feels like the heart-felt process of sustainable education (Sterling, 2010) that is centred on children's imagination, will, and curiosity in a complete absence of fear. This evolving centre, in turn, sustains children's long-term academic success and cultivates their well-being (i.e., happiness, freedom, and compassion) across the lifespan.

Before I share the final poem with the readers, I would like to provide a concluding research summary. At the beginning of the research, I asked three guiding questions about the local children's ways of learning in rural Tibet before the advent of colonial schooling. The questions have led me to learn from the oral histories and archives through the a/r/tographic poetic and visual meditations. These meditations have given me a creative space of contemplation and reflection on the nature of learning and its highly complex ontologies of natural learning. The questions have provided an expanded interpretation of natural learning with a focus on the key generative themes such as creative agency, free time, physical activities, self-directed play, place-based experiences, intergenerational dialogues, and a broader concept of freedom as the cultural subsistence.

The importance of understanding children's creative agency helps to recognize and respect children's natural process of self-discovery and construction of subjectivity through their self-directed and community-based cultural practices. In fact, the concept of creative agency allows all learners to willfully (Ricci, 2012) author their experiences and to become active meaning makers. Moreover, the concept of free time allows educators to respect children's sense of natural time without the socially imposed deadlines because the experience of free time becomes a life-long memorable feeling of childhood happiness and ontological freedom. Free time was often felt and experienced as timelessness. The concept of self-directed play is important because children can imagine, discover, construct, and embody diverse social ideas as

well as actively create meaning out of the immediate surroundings and the natural environment. Self-directed playfulness is a highly complex process that also involves abstract communication with the invisible world of spiritual teachers and deities of place. Further, self-directed playful activities tend to be gender equal and gender creative. Natural learning is also a place-based experience where children can explore and, therefore, connect with the natural environments of their homeland. Moreover, natural learning is an intergenerational process through which children can learn from their grandparents, parents, relatives, and ancestors with respect to their wisdom and lived experiences. Through natural learning, children can experience and practice their ontological freedom as well as sustain freedom in the context of their cultural subsistence in the household and in a broader community.

The question about natural learning is the existential and ontological question about our, as a human, way of being and becoming sustainable on this beautiful planet with respect, compassion, kindness, care, and love toward all sentient beings with hope for our collective attainment of life-long happiness. This historical context of the local children's experience allows us as educators, interested in and aspiring for sustainability, to recognize the importance of children's ways of learning as sustainability and acknowledge history as a possibility. Freire said,

It is in the history as *possibility* that subjectivity, in a dialectic-contradictory relationship with objectivity takes on the role of subject rather than simply object of world transformation. The future, then, stops being inexorable and becomes what it is historically: *problematic* [emphasis in original]. (as cited in Freire, Macedo, & Freire, 2016, p. 49)

In this history, we may see, perceive, and recognize children as the agents, and therefore,

authors of education. In a broader historical perspective, learning from the local Tibetan people helps us to support them and each other in their/our collective pursuit of happiness, self-determination, and cultural preservation. On this note, I would like to share this poem to commemorate all teachers of the past, including the local elders and children of Tibet who had never been schooled, as well as to inspire teachers with hope for the future, in which we are all “beings in the process of *becoming* [emphasis in original]—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (Freire, 1968/1973a, p. 72). This is an unfinished poem that concludes this research with an open and unfinished thought toward “the possible dream of a change of the world” (Freire, 1994, p. 57) in which all children have a possibility to create and re-create their diverse childhood places of educational sustainability and, therefore, to experience their life-long happiness and ontological freedom. The poem is entitled Gen-La:

Gen-La, my teacher, different from all traditions,
 Most venerated scholar and practitioner
 He didn't teach me with his own ideas and cognition
 He let me choose my interests with intuition
 He let me feel, imagine, be without fear
 Gen-La, I learned from him
 About Dharma, thinking, being
 And never was I dull, I always felt supported
 By his wisdom, I felt the freedom from within
 Gen-La, he cared for my free imagination,
 My genuine interest in all, my wonder.
 Sometimes I thought of ordinary narrations

He never let my thought divert from curious attention
He pondered further, helped me ask profound questions
Gen-La, my brilliant Gen-La,
He taught me courage, wisdom, knowledge
Open minded thinking, conscious choice, awe

OM MANI PADME HUM

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