

A circular wreath of various botanical illustrations surrounds a central white circle. The illustrations include green ferns, a red leaf, a green leaf, a yellow flower, a purple flower, and a green leaf with a red vein. The wreath is set against a light blue background.

Steffanie Scott, ENV

Sparking & Sustaining Joy in Teaching



"I enjoyed the method of sharing when we were in a circle with each other. I found that the classroom environment often felt like an embrace, where we were **actively listening to one another with foundations of trust, respect, and vulnerability**. It was unlike any class experience that I have had before.

Thank you, Steffanie! I am grateful for this experience of being in this course. Being challenged to learn in new and innovative ways has taught me a lot about the local food system, but also about **ways of being in relation with others!**"
—GEOG 460 student, Dec 2023





Outline

- Gratitude
- Burnout → personal exploration, transformation
- Infusing nature connection into my research & teaching
- Circle learning, contemplative practice
- Specifications grading
- Co-teaching

The Spirit that moves through all things

The Ancestors

The Spirits of the four directions

Moon, Sun, and Stars

Wind and Cloud

Birds

Trees

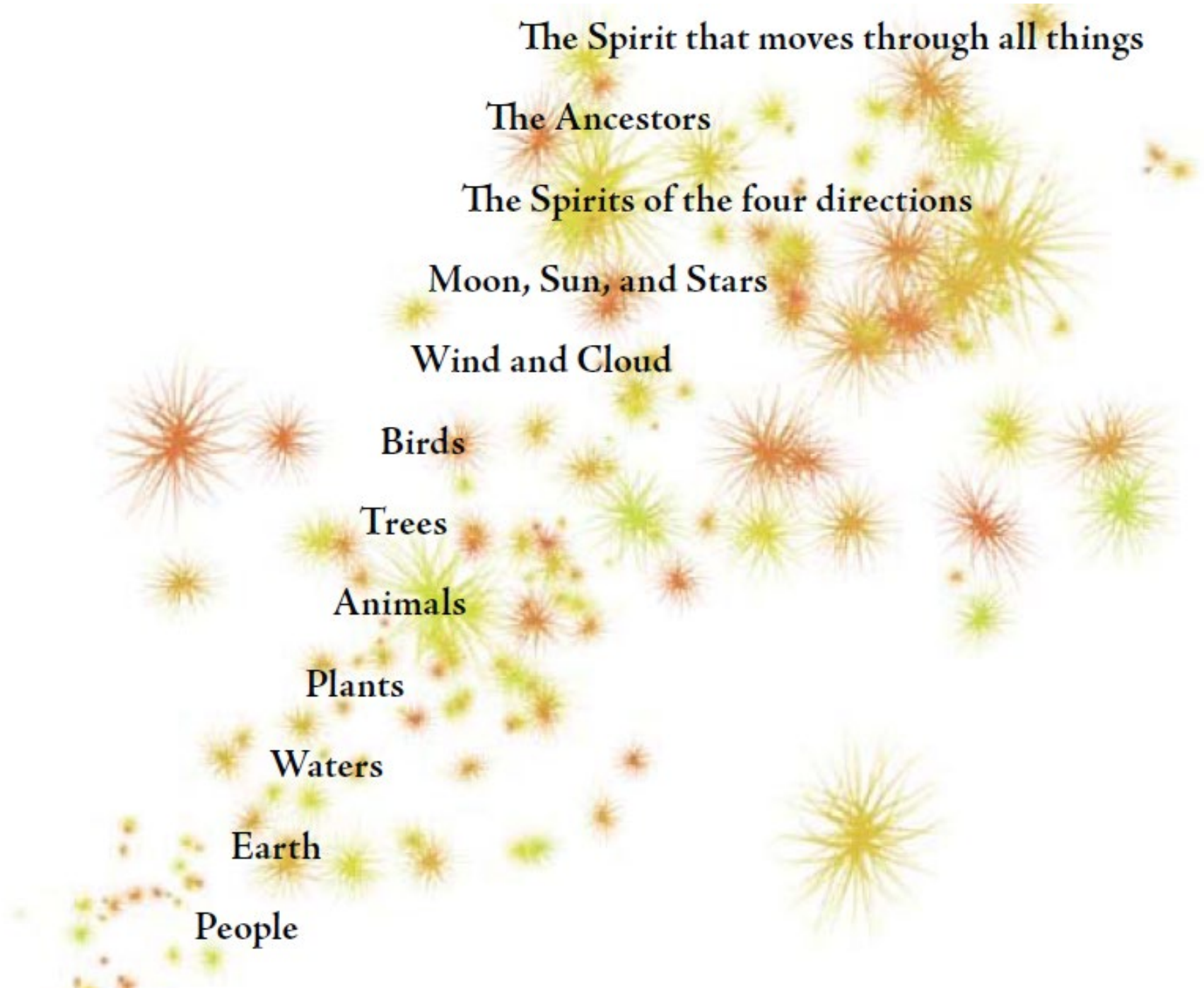
Animals

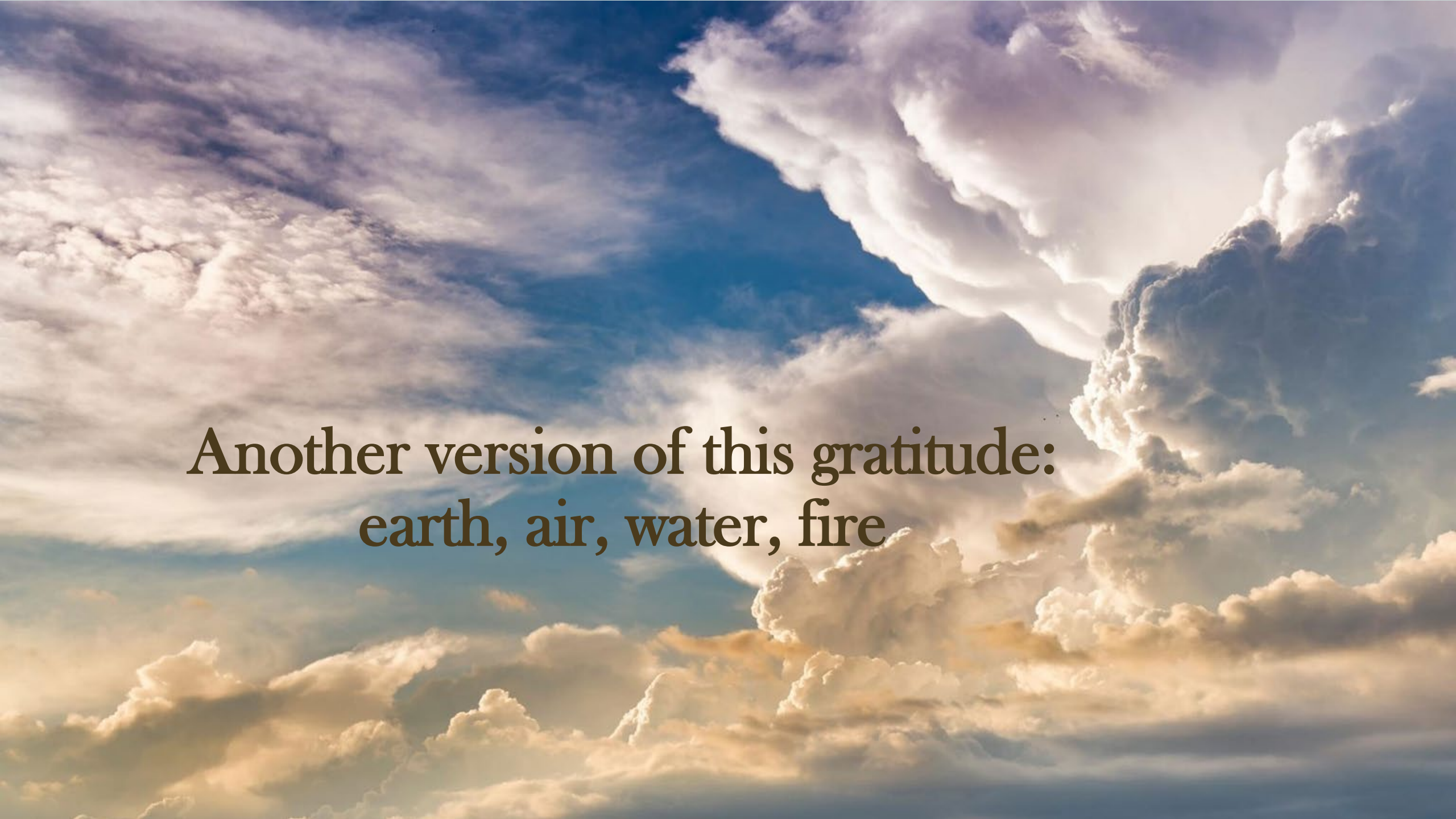
Plants

Waters

Earth

People



A dramatic sky with large, billowing white and yellowish clouds against a deep blue background. The clouds are illuminated from the side, creating strong highlights and deep shadows. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

Another version of this gratitude:
earth, air, water, fire

Contemplative practices for nature connection

~

reverence

~

gratitude

- Sunrise ceremony daily for one year
- Sit spot

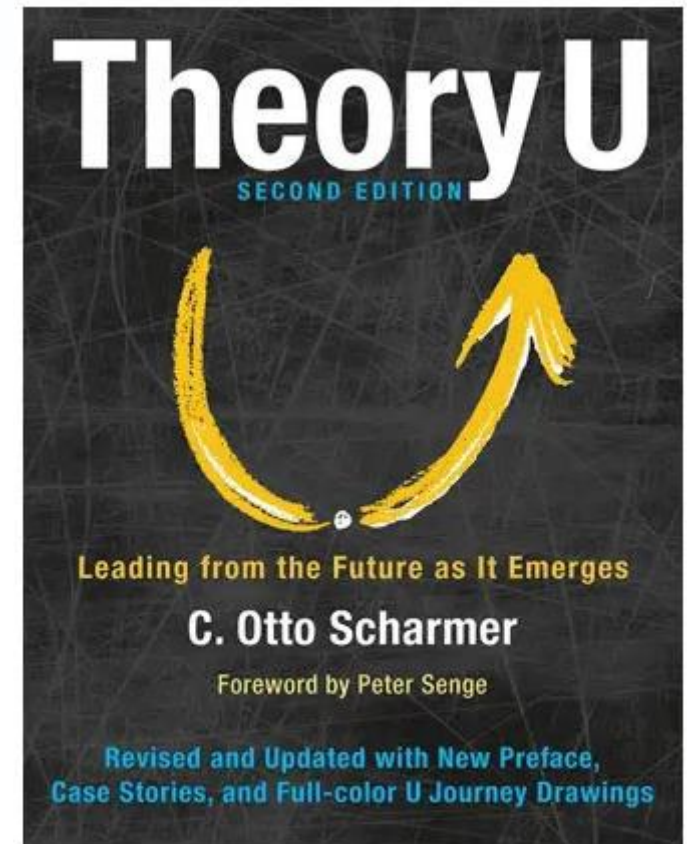


Otto Scharmer (MIT & the Presencing Institute)



The challenges we face can be framed in terms of three major divides:

- *ecological divide*: our separation & disconnect between self and nature
- *social divide*: the disconnect between self and other
- *spiritual divide*: the disconnect between self and self





Culture repair



Burnout: 2017-2019

Responses:

- “Do what you **love** for at least a few minutes every day”
 - Following my curiosity: developing my relationship with the land; ancestral/ Indigenous ways of knowing and being
- What leads to deep transformation and taking action in one’s life? (and students’ lives)
 - Overcoming sense of **separation**
 - Developing ‘**relationality**’ / **connection**



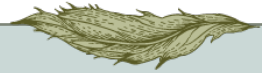


My search to learn about...

- 'who I am'
- 'where I live'
- 'how can I heal my own relationship to place?'

→ Personal & intellectual journey to experience the significance of land/nature connection

Modalities of learning/connecting: What does nature awareness awaken in us?



Foraging plants, growing mushrooms, herbal medicines, permaculture

Sharing circles (circle pedagogy), contemplative practice

Wildlife tracking

Naturalist skills; bushcraft skills

Nature-based crafts



Attributes of Deep Nature Connection (Jon Young)

- **The Quiet Mind** — sense of inner peace and calm
- **Childlike Happiness** — spontaneous joy
- **Vitality** — energy, inner excitement, motivation, curiosity
- **Unconditional Listening**
- **Empathy** — felt sense of connection with beings/elements in nature
- **Helpfulness** — a sense of our unique gifts, talents or passions
- **Fully Alive** — awe and reverence, gratitude
- **Love and Compassion**



In sustainability education, researchers have discussed the need to shift from a mechanical, siloed understanding of human-nature separation to a relational understanding where human beings are profoundly and dynamically connected to all living beings and ecosystems





Cue: LITE grant application,
redeveloping & reimagining my course offerings



Waterloo region food system course – Fall 2022 community consultations, drafting regional food strategy



This semester, I was grappling with concerns and anxieties about my future career and the value add that I would provide towards creating a more equitable and sustainable future, especially when considering the systemic and rooted nature of many of the wicked problems that we are navigating. I found that I was left with so much hope and inspiration after the field trips and they enabled me to recognize the power of incrementalism, community-building, and small-scale action.

—student in GEOG 460 Sustainable Food Systems in Waterloo Region, 2023





“ Discovering and experiencing **connections with each other** and the self-healing powers of the web of life transforms **despair and overwhelm into inspired, collaborative action** ”

Joanna Macy, author; founder of the Work That Reconnects network



Seed contemplation activity

- Students started by connecting to place with wonder and gratitude, using their five senses to hold and plant the seed. They tended to the seed and reflected on the seed as a metaphor for their learning.

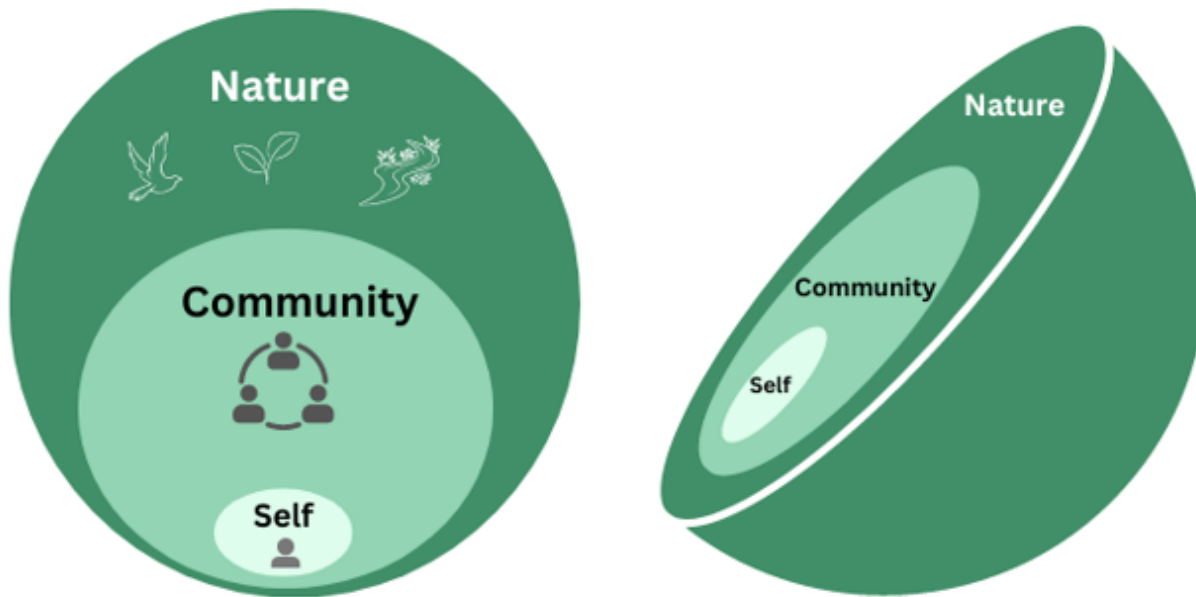


Figure 1: Nested model of relationality to self, to community, and to nature.



Circle pedagogy

- with classes of up to 20
- occasionally with 40



Specifications grading: “competent” / “resubmit”



It increases students' agency in determining their grades through the creation of clear pathways. This reduces students' stress and anxiety over grades, increases motivation

Clear criteria (specifications) for grades reduces the stress and anxiety of instructors by reducing the amount of "hairsplitting" over marks

Instructors allocate more time towards formative (on-going, constructive) feedback, focusing more on improving student learning rather than summative assessment

Re-submission opportunities encourages risk-taking, creativity, and "outside the box" thinking.

Sample assessment scheme

	Grade A Pathway	Grade B Pathway	Grade C Pathway	Grade D Pathway	Re-submissions allowed?
Starting Grade	85%	75%	65%	55%	
Weekly Responses	11 Responses	10 Responses	8 Responses	6 Responses	Yes; three times over the term, due within 3 days of receiving your grade (only one re-submit allowed on any one response)
Assignments	1, 2, and 3 (see bonuses below)	Any two*	Any two*	Any one	Yes; only once before a penalty applies
Final Test	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes; only once before a penalty applies

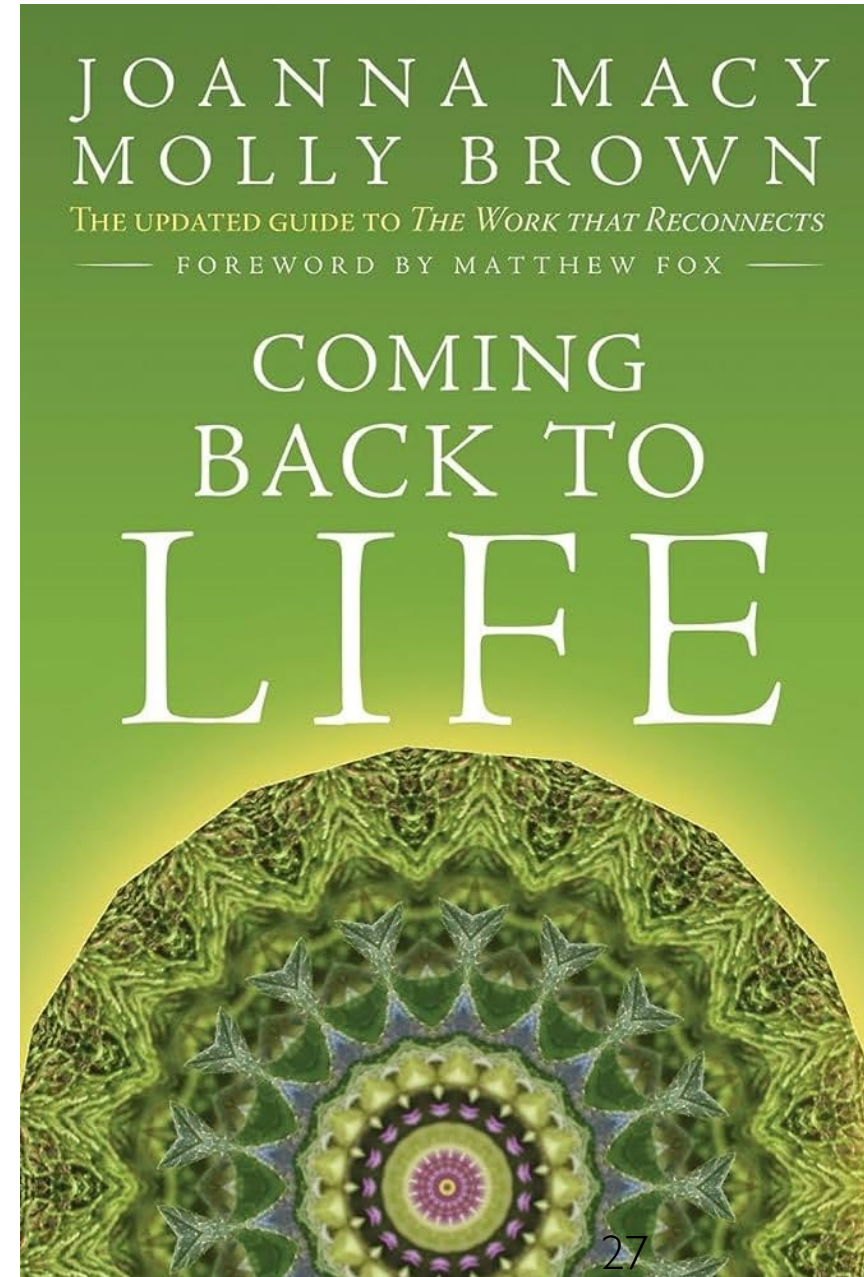
Co-teaching GEOG 700/800

- Great relationship with co-instructor
- Takes pressure off by working collaboratively, playing off our strengths and sharing the workload

Where to next?

- Other practices to overcome burnout and find 'right relationship'...
- Honouring our pain for the world and resourcing ourselves to go forth
- “The heart that breaks open can hold the whole universe.” --Joanna Macy
- “When we fully honour our many losses, we are called back to a life of connection and intimacy, of feeling and wonder.”

--Francis Weller, author of *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*





Summary

- Burnout → personal exploration, transformation:
 - Fostering nature connectedness through head, heart and hand
- Infusing **nature connection** into my teaching (& research)
 - Inspiration from Indigenous ways of knowing, land-based learning
- Gratitude, Learning circles, Contemplative practice
- Specifications grading, Co-teaching





Thank you.
*May you
find joy*

