

A-B-Craobh (A-B-Tree)

The Gaelic Tree Alphabet as a structure for interdisciplinary learning between forestry and literature

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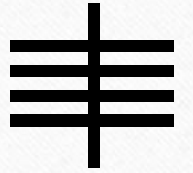
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Key points

- Blending different kinds of knowledge helps people to experience and express wonder – and poetry is particularly useful for this.
- Solo outdoor experiences are valuable for learning.
- Silence really is golden, especially together.
- Our students, especially science students, are hungry for more interdisciplinary learning.
- Rationality + Imagination => Sustainability

Aspen (*Populus tremula*) – Eadhadh (Critheann) – E

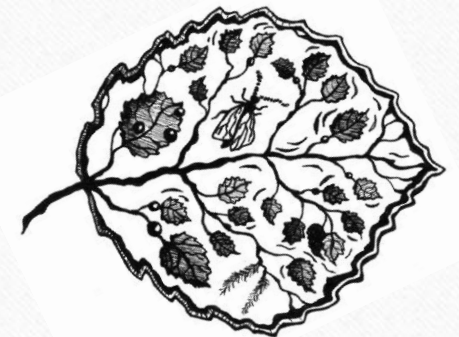


Christ was reputed to have been crucified on aspen, so it trembles in shame.



The largest plant on the planet is an aspen grove, nicknamed Pando, in Utah, USA. It covers 106 acres and weighs 6000 tonnes.



















one gold
aspen coin
woodland currency
for a priceless
moment



The Gaelic Tree Alphabet

An ancient connection between trees and writing



- Birch = Beithe = B = 
- Rowan = Luis = L = 
- Alder = Fearn = F = 
- Ash = Nion = N = 
- Willow = Seallach = S = 
- Hawthorn = Huath = H = 
- Oak = Darach = D = 
- Holly = Tinne = T = 
- Hazel = Coll = C = 
- Bramble = Muin = M = 
- Ivy = Gort = G = 
- Blackthorn = Straiph = P = 
- Elder = Ruis = R = 
- Pine = Ailm = A = 
- Gorse = Onn = O = 
- Heather = Ur = U = 
- Aspen = Eadhadh = E = 
- Yew = Iasg = I = 

A-B-Craobh (A-B-Tree) project

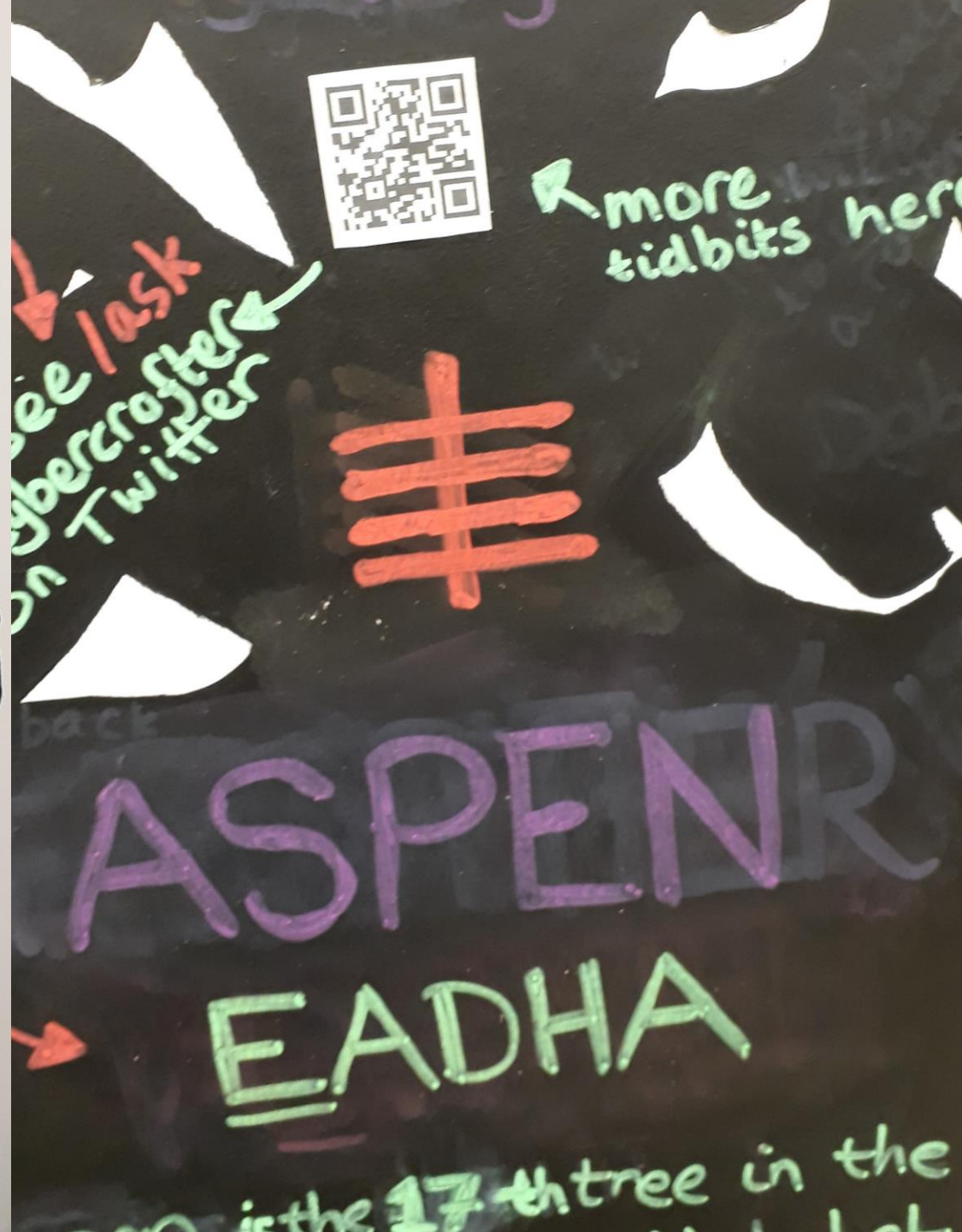
‘the potential of boundary encounters to generate new insights’ (Etienne & Bev Wenger-Trayner)

- 2011 International Year of Forests
- Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens, poet in residence
- *Into the Forest* anthology of poems
- Overton Prize for *A-B-Tree* poetry sequence
- A knowledge base of about a thousand tidbits
- From 2018 – bringing it into UHI



Several small, linked projects

- 2018-19 (Research Scholarship Scheme) – Seeds for Creativity
- 2019 (Scottish Forestry) – Seedlings for Creativity
- 2019-20 (LTA Scholarship) – Seedlings for Learning
- 2020-21 (Scottish Forestry) - Wild Words for Woods
- 2020-21 (unfunded) – Saplings for Learning
- 2022 (LTA Scholarship) – Trees for Interdisciplinary Learning





The
One
Thing
We
Can
Hug



Research Questions

1. What do students learn by writing creatively about trees?
2. What are students' learning experiences when boundaries are blurred between different disciplines and types of knowledge (creative arts/forestry, experiential/propositional)?
3. How can a combination of outdoor and online learning experiences facilitate interdisciplinary learning between literature and forestry?



Theory

- Knowledge is embodied through our senses (Eisner) as creatures (Abrams)
- Learning requires social and emotional presence (Garrison et al)
- Learning happens in landscapes of practice - 'The potential of boundary encounters to generate new insights' (Etienne & Bev Wenger-Trayner)
- Poetry can capture patterns, nuances and feelings (Faulkner, Leggo, Richardson, etc)

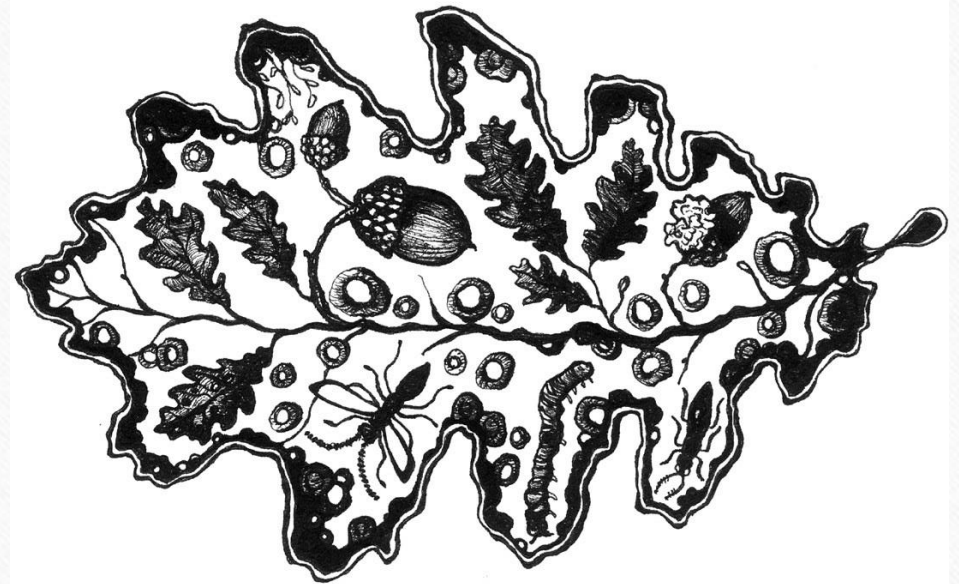
Main Methodology - Poetic Inquiry

- Poems as Participation Prompts
- Poems as Data
- Poetry Writing as Analysis
- Poems for Reflection
- Poems for Dissemination
- (plus a quantitative question and in vivo transcript analysis)



Method

- 5 groups of students (forestry & arts)
- Students had a solo encounter with a tree
- Then we had a group session online
 - sharing about their tree
 - learning about Gaelic tree alphabet
 - reading and writing poems
- Follow-up evaluation survey and interviews
- Analysis used grounded theory and poetry



Findings 1. Wonder

- Blending different kinds of knowledge helps people to experience and express wonder, both
 - 1. wonder as an emotional response
 - 2. wondering as a thoughtful questioning
- Wonder is a kind of curiosity that combines feeling and thinking.
- Poetry is particularly useful for expressing this.

Findings 2. Solitude

Solo Tree Encounter

‘Time for silence,
to think and be creative.’

‘Trees, I find them magical anyway
but actually having a hug with one,
it was different, great, brilliant.’

‘This gave me the opportunity
to just be, you know,
my hippy self.’

‘When there’s a group,
There’s sometimes pressure, isn’t there?
Who’s watching and everything.’

‘I think it was better that way, alone.’

‘Less sort of embarrassing, you know,
because if we were in a group
I would feel like maybe kind of like sort of
eyes rolled at for being a bit of a hippy.’

‘I liked the fact that we could do it
on our own
and come back and talk about it.’

‘It was something we could just
go off and do ourselves
and have that intimate moment
with ourselves
and with nature.’

Findings 3. Silence

Teachers

do you allow students

to think

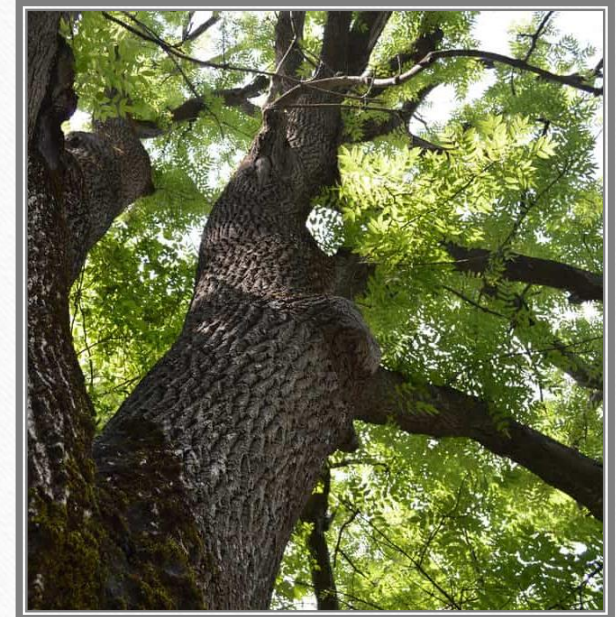
how much time

to sit

in silence?

Findings 4. Students want more interdisciplinarity

- 95% of forestry students who have had a Gaelic and poetry session want more!
 - ‘...because interdisciplinary knowledge is the best way to make informed decisions’
- Arts students are less keen, but still 63% want more trees/science
 - ‘I want more of a mix of arts and science’
- They find it ‘holistic’, ‘inspiring’, ‘interesting combinations’, ‘a better perspective’, ‘engaging’



Solo outdoors/
together online

Key points



Blending different kinds of knowledge helps people to experience and express wonder – poetry is particularly useful for this.

Solo outdoor experiences are valuable for learning. They made students feel ‘happy, grounded, peaceful’, and the task gave them ‘permission’ to spend time with a tree.

Silence really is golden, especially together. Students like time together being silent, just writing. Half the students would prefer the group activity also to be outdoors

Our students, especially science students, are hungry for more interdisciplinary learning.

Rationality + Imagination => Sustainability

Do you want to join in?

- Do you want to join this community of practice? What do you find interesting here? Please give me advice!
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