

multispecies love stories:

assessing emotional connection within ecosystems through a co-created exhibition



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....in the end, **we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand,** and we will understand only what we are taught.

- Baba Dioum, Senegalese Director of Water & Forestry, 1968



[How would you change the world if you could?]

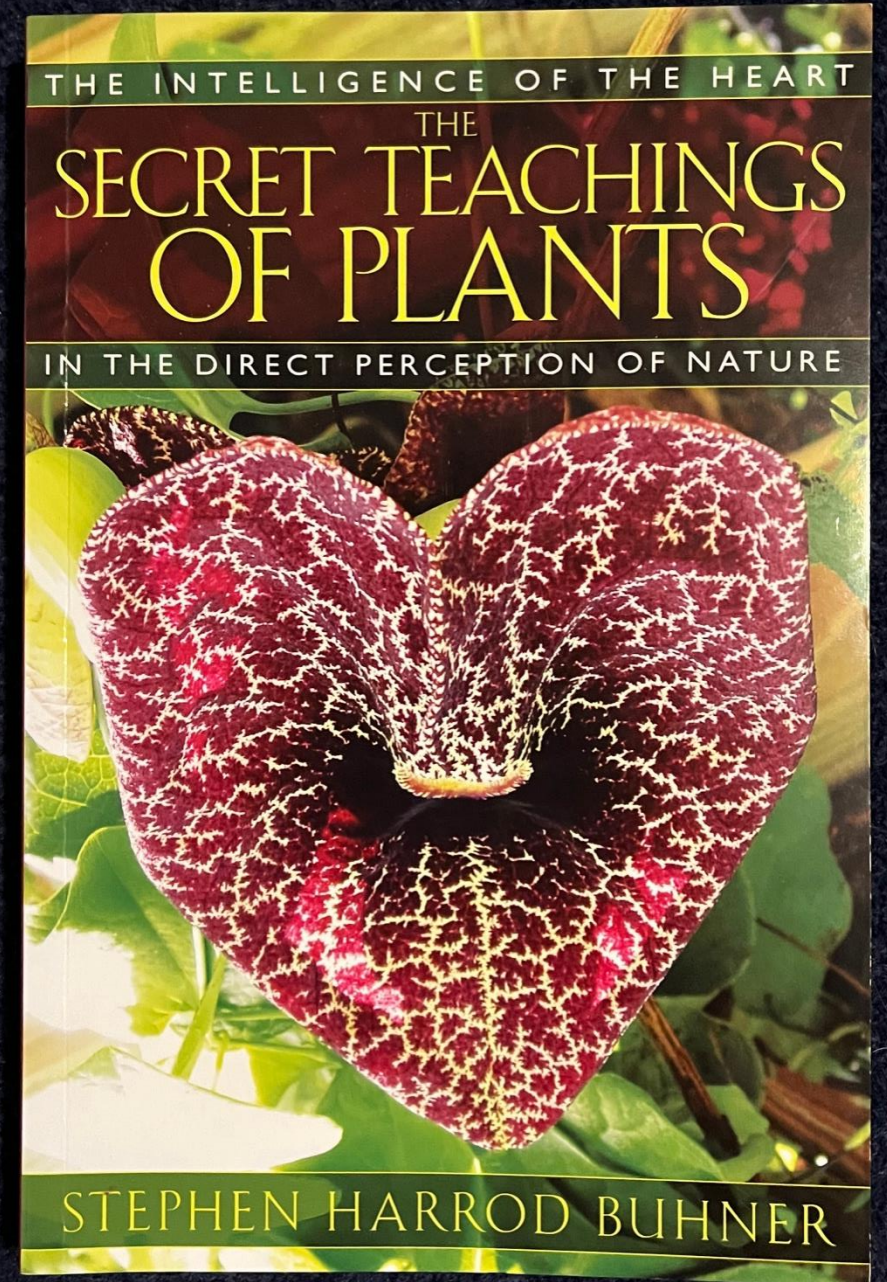
‘I would take a thread and a needle and **I’d interweave love into our society.** I think the absence of love in our society is absolutely palpable.”

- Prof. Jason Arday, 2023

”Unfortunately, because
**we are trained out of using our hearts
as perceptual, thinking organs**
during our lengthy school years,

in later life,
if we try to begin using this ability,
it is often a humbling, awkward
experience.

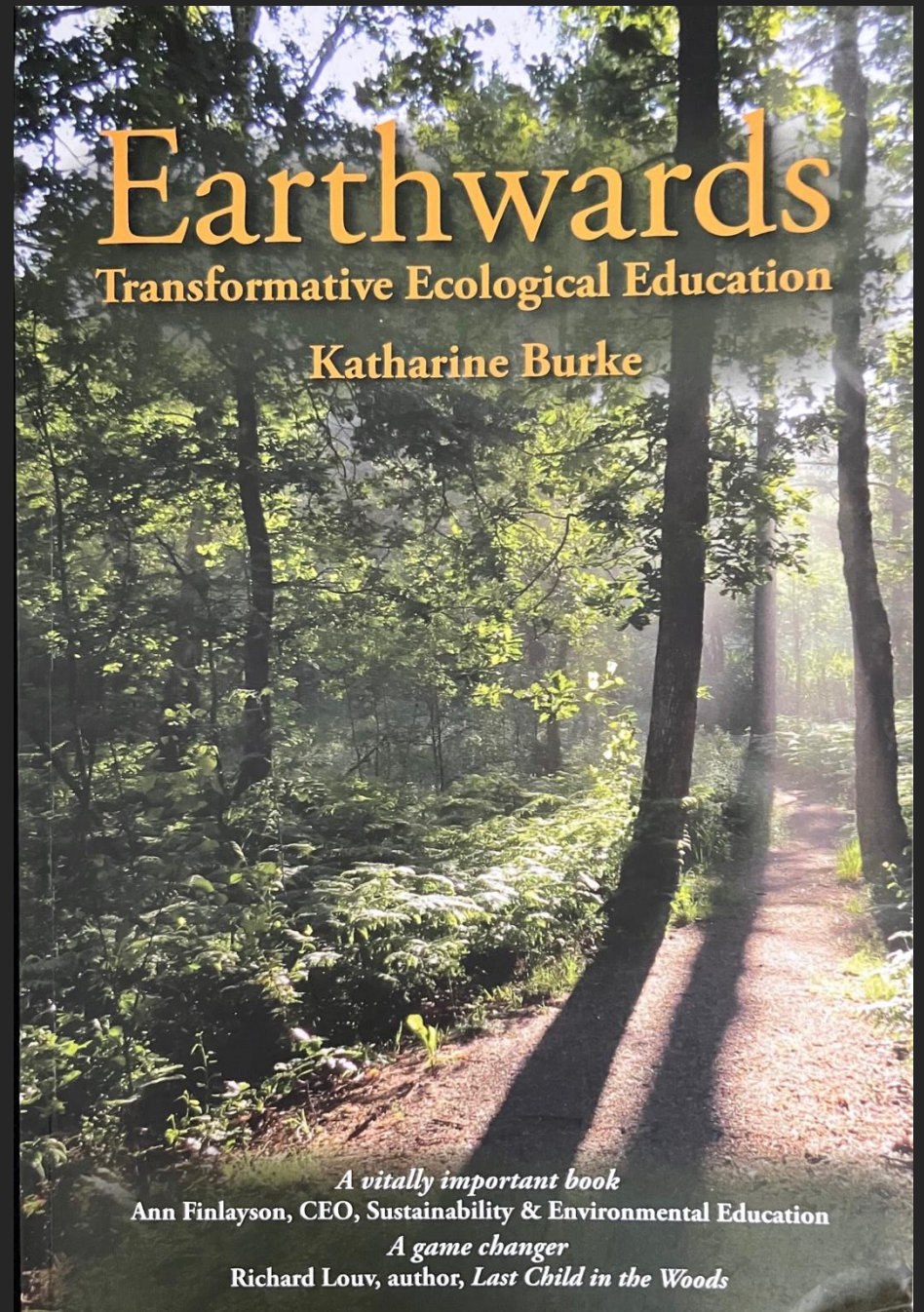
Buhner 2004, p. 121



Ecological education is different from environmental education or sustainability.

Ecological learning is the study of *relationships, entanglements, feedbacks, mutuality and reciprocity* in natural living systems.

Burke 2024, p. 9



...attempts at connection are fruitless unless we can move beyond the abstract concept of 'nature' and **focus on nurturing specific relationships** with other-than-human beings...



...these relationships are empty
and superficial unless they're rooted
in a **common language of symbols** –

...embodied and lived out
through **folk songs, spoken tales,
rites of passage, and seasonal ceremonies.**

Ash Brockwell, *Conversations with Artemisia*, 2026





*We can't learn from teacher plants
without knowing their lore.*

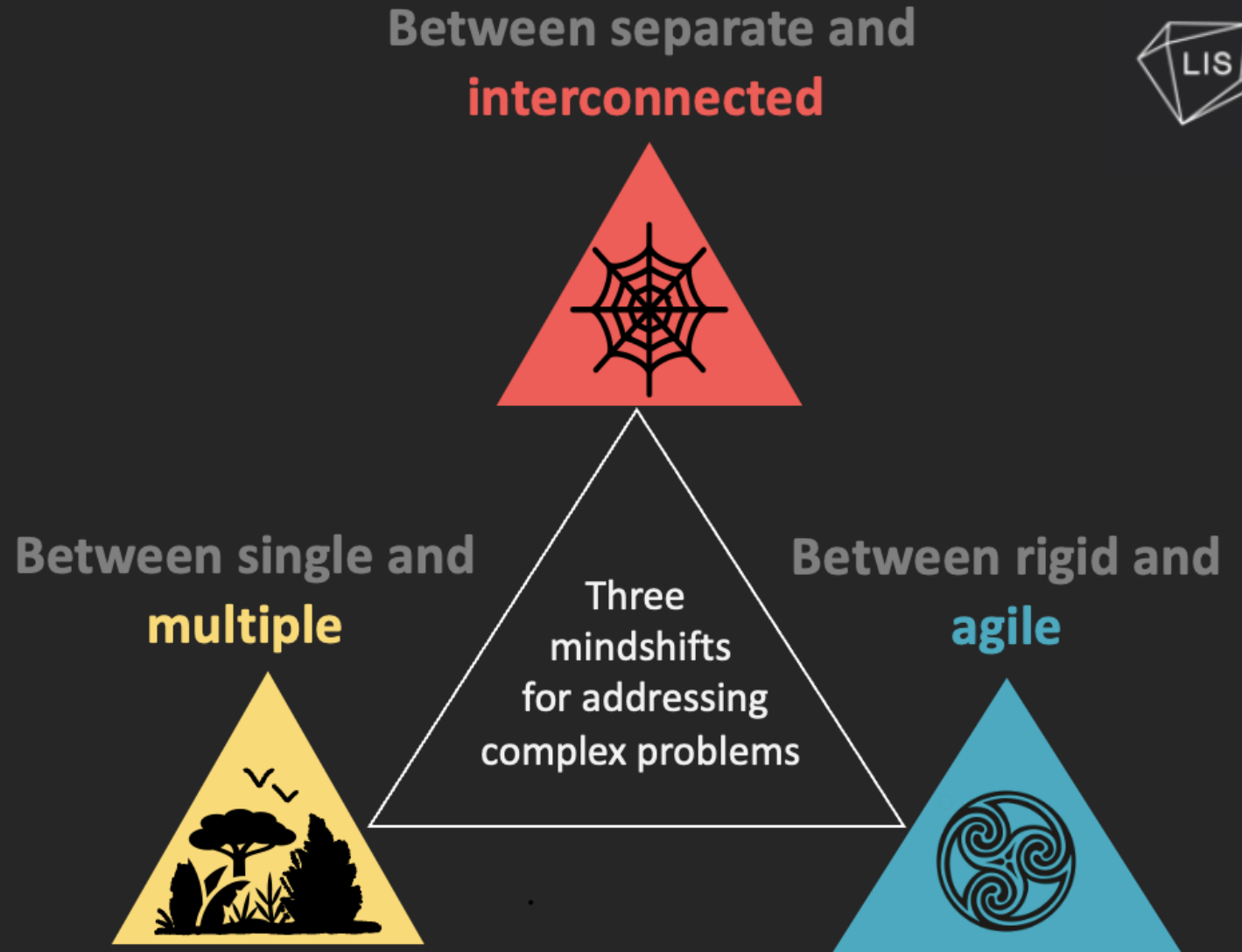
Ash Brockwell, *Conversations with Artemisia*, 2026

Three Mindshifts

framework inspired by:

- 'Sustainability Plus'
- Systems thinking
- Decolonial education

(LIS Problem-Based Learning Strategy)



'Mindshifts x Complex Problems' by Ash Brockwell, 2023. [CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)

Triple spiral image by [Craftsmanspace.com](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)





A Mindshifts Module?

- 'Encountering Ecosystems through Mixed Methods Research and Practice'
 - Level 5-6 (second- and third-year undergraduate) module
 - Bachelor of Arts and Sciences (BASc) degree in Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods
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Pedagogies

- **Quantitative methods** from ecology and ethnoecology
 - **Qualitative methods** from ethnoecology, political ecology, environmental anthropology, and art
 - **Kincentric ecology** protocols and practices , mythic narratives, and folk songs
 - **Integration** through creative work
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Evolution (2024-26):

Foregrounding
myth, folk
song, ritual,
and ceremony,
as mediators
between the
human world
and other ways
of being

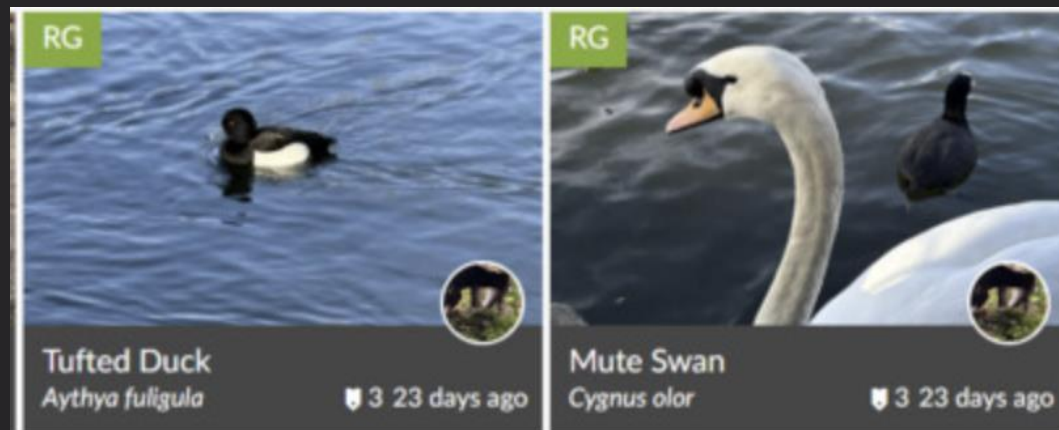


Marking criteria (excerpt)



Conceptual knowledge	- Provide at least two contrasting definitions, or compare two concepts - Relate your chosen concept to your creative practice, referring to both process and product
Communication skills	- Create an artefact that helps your audience to connect meaningfully with your chosen habitat or species on an emotional level
Application of methods	- Provide rich detail or demonstrate extra care - Reflect on your choice of methods and how successfully you used them - Follow scientific conventions where applicable

Assessment Part 1: Application of Methods



<http://sixbirdwatchers.omeka.net>

Assessment Part 2: Creative Product



Assessment Part 3: Catalogue text (1000 words)



...for me the space was coherent ,legible,
complete, it existed entirely within my
sensory world.

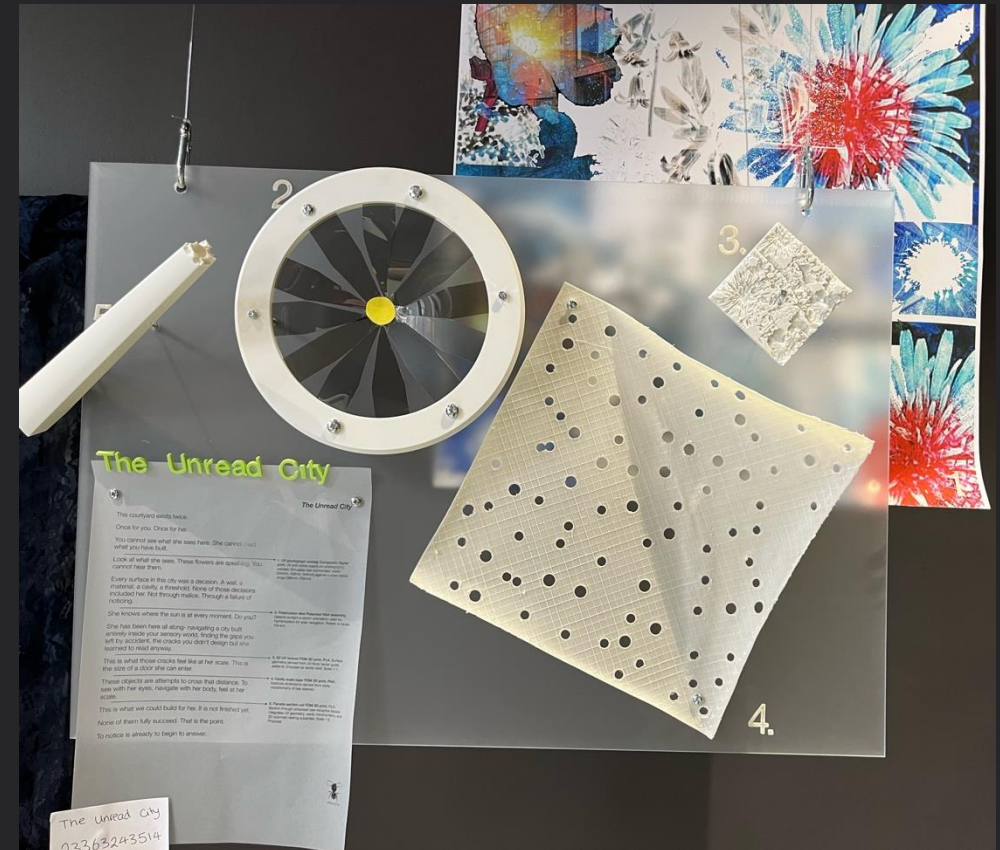
Within [the red mason bee's sensory world]
I knew it was unread.

This is not a natural absence.
It is a designed one.

Every surface here was a decision.
None included her.

To notice this, is already to begin to answer.'

Anna Doucha, 2026



In an *I-It* relationship,
the world appears as a collection of objects
to be used, analysed, or possessed.

In contrast, an *I-Thou* encounter occurs
when beings are met as presences
rather than objects.

*What does it mean to encounter a flower as a
subject in their own world, rather than as an
object within mine?*

Rosie McKelvie, 2026



...my painting does not depict man-made structures but rather acts to **represent the goldfinch in its own holy right**.

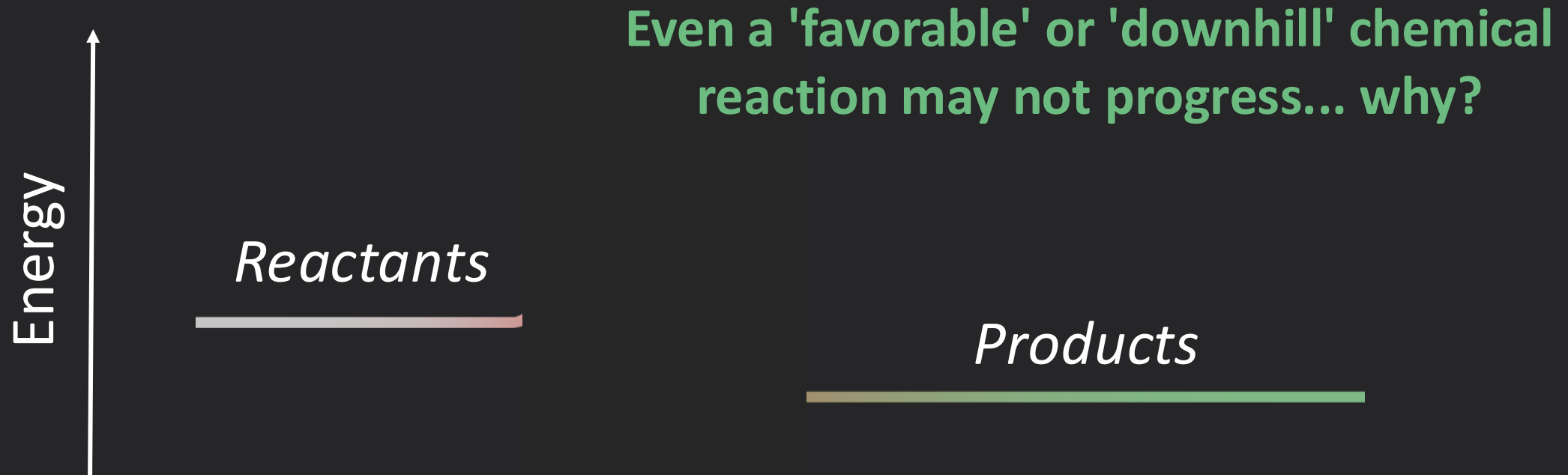
In doing so I attempt to represent a living being in a living world; not a living being in a human world.

The outer of the triptych doors displays a soundscape as captured in my Merlin recordings, with the goldfinch bird song depicted visually.

I have **developed a kinship** with Goldfinch, one **characterised by awe**, through listening and learning to recognise their distinct song...

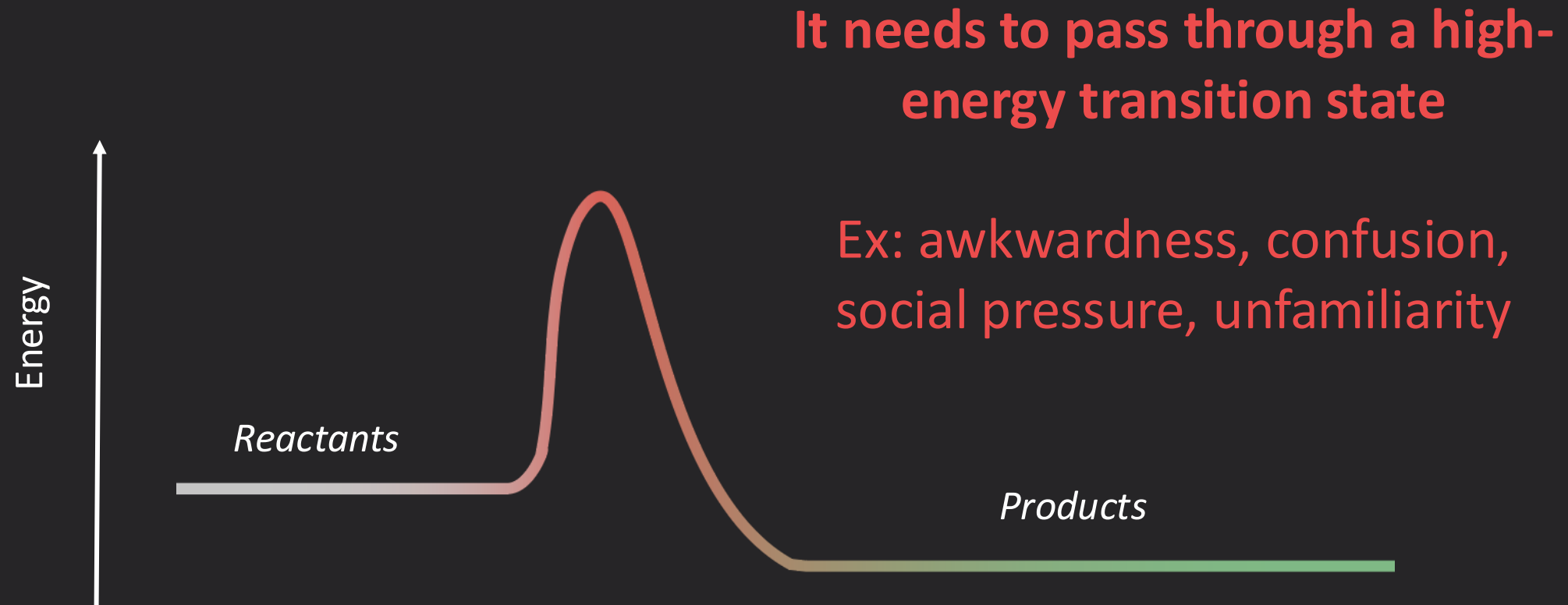


A metaphor from chemistry

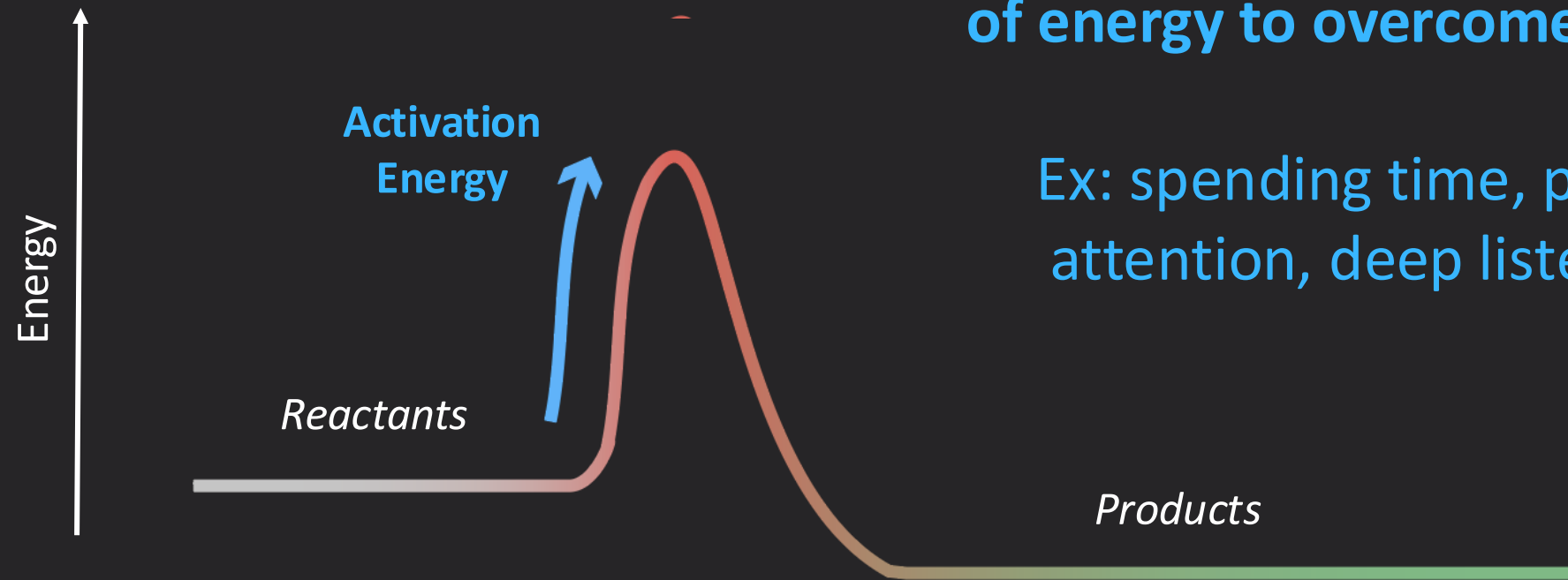




Energy barrier



Activation energy



Activation Energy: Needed input of energy to overcome barrier

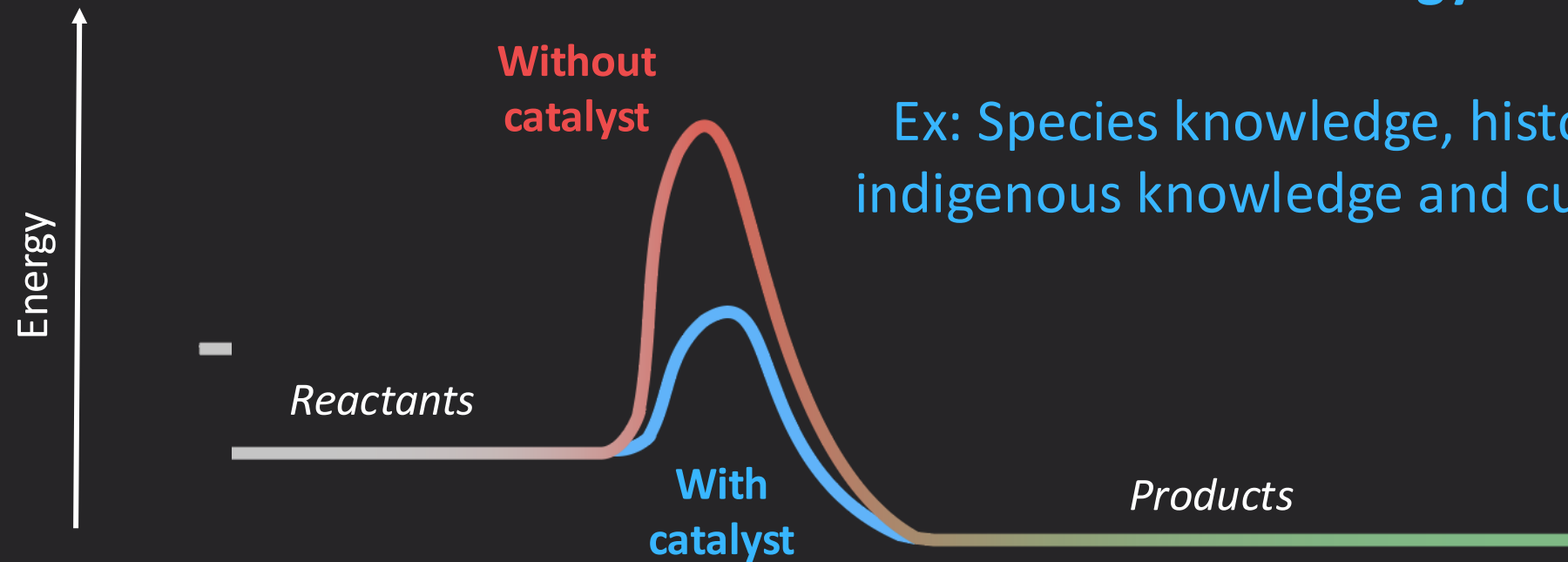
Ex: spending time, paying attention, deep listening

Catalysts for connection



Catalyst: Alternate reaction pathway that lowers energy barrier

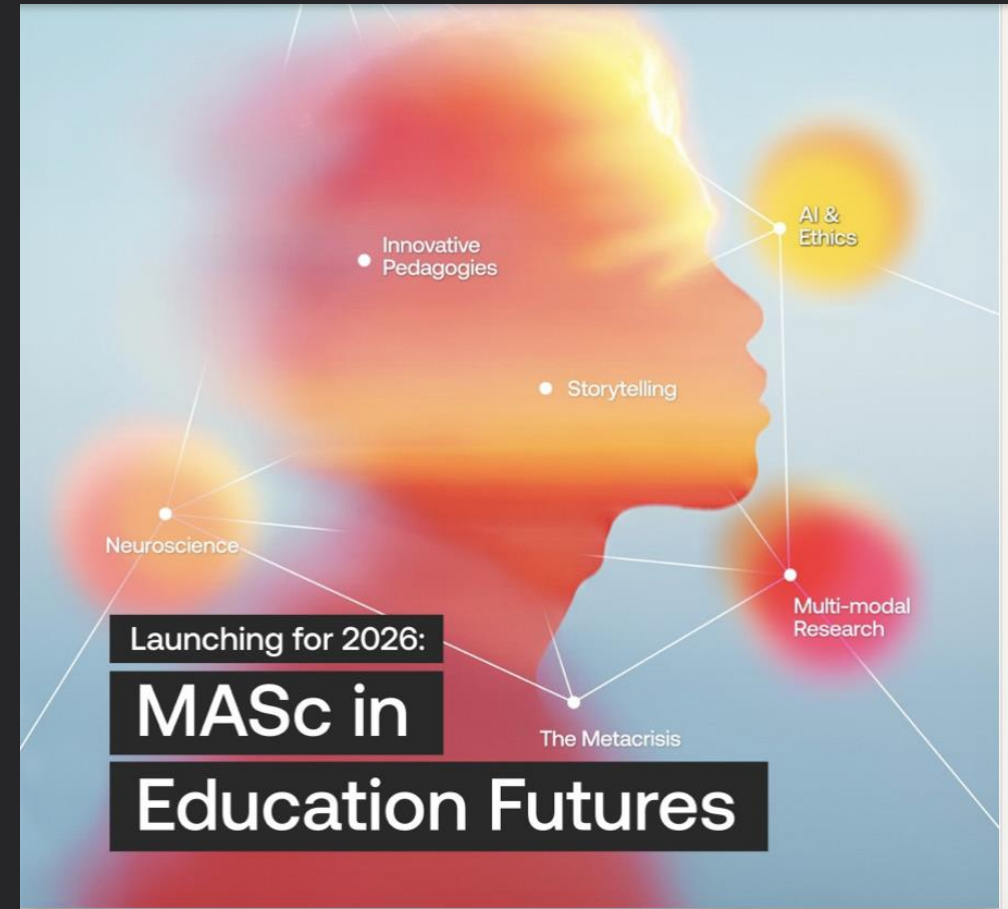
Ex: Species knowledge, historical context, indigenous knowledge and cultural practices





Next steps

- A degree for educators, education leaders, policymakers and L&D professionals who want to understand education as a living system
 - Navigating uncertainty and complexity
 - Metacrisis and collapse narratives
 - 'Connecting the dots': integrating diverse perspectives
 - Decolonial, kincentric and relational pedagogies
 - Design informed by futures literacy
 - Research methods training
 - Individual 'capstone' project



In conclusion...

- Formal education can hold space for relational and decolonial ecologies alongside conventional 'scientific' ecology
- Interdisciplinary integration through creative practice can be a powerful way to facilitate mindshifts
- Diverse epistemologies, myths and folk songs are central
- Multidimensional assessment captures practical, presentational, experiential, and propositional ways of knowing

