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place-based philosophical education: reconstructing 'place', reconstructing ethics

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abstract
Education as identity formation in Western-style liberal-democracies relies, in part, on neutrality as a justification for the reproduction of collective individual identity, including societal, cultural, institutional and political identities, many aspects of which are problematic in terms of the reproduction of environmentally harmful attitudes, beliefs and actions. Taking a position on an issue necessitates letting go of certain forms of neutrality, as does effectively teaching environmental education. We contend that to claim a stance of neutrality is to claim a position beyond criticism. In the classroom this can also be an epistemically damaging position to hold. To further explore the problem of neutrality in the classroom, and to offer a potential solution, we will look to the philosophical community of inquiry pedagogy, and advocate for the addition of place-based education; a form of experiential education that promotes learning in local communities in which the school is situated, each with its own history, culture, economy and environment. However, how we understand 'place' is fundamental to understanding the potential of place-based education in giving students a 'sense of place'—how they perceive a place, which includes place attachment and place meaning. To this end, we look to Indigenous understandings of Place and social reconstruction learning to inform place-based pedagogies. Doing so, we hold, opens a pathway to ethical education.

keywords: environmental philosophy; ecofeminism; placed-base education; philosophy with children; critical indigenous pedagogy.

educación filosófica situada: reconstruir el "lugar", reconstruir la ética

resumen
La educación como formación de la identidad en las democracias liberales de estilo occidental se basa, en parte, en la neutralidad como justificación para la reproducción de la identidad individual colectiva, incluidas las identidades sociales, culturales, institucionales y políticas, muchos de cuyos aspectos son problemáticos en cuanto a la reproducción de actitudes, creencias y acciones perjudiciales para el medio ambiente. Tomar una posición sobre un tema requiere dejar de lado ciertas formas de neutralidad, al igual que la enseñanza efectiva de la educación ambiental. Sostenemos que reclamar una postura de neutralidad es reclamar una posición más allá de la crítica. En el aula, esta postura también

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puede ser epistemológicamente perjudicial. Para profundizar en el problema de la neutralidad en el aula, y ofrecer una posible solución, nos dirigiremos a la pedagogía de la comunidad de indagación filosófica, y abogaremos por la incorporación de una educación situada; una forma de educación experimental que promueve el aprendizaje en las comunidades locales en las que se encuentra la escuela, cada una con su propia historia, cultura, economía y medio ambiente. Sin embargo, la forma en que entendemos el "lugar" es fundamental para comprender el potencial de la educación situada para dar a los estudiantes un "sentido del lugar", es decir, la forma en que perciben un lugar, que incluye el apego al lugar y el significado del lugar. Con este fin, nos fijamos en la comprensión indígena del lugar y en el aprendizaje de la reconstrucción social para dar forma a las pedagogías situadas, basadas en el lugar. De este modo, sostenemos que se abre un camino hacia la educación ética.

palabras clave: filosofía ambiental; ecofeminismo; educación basada en el lugar; filosofía con niños; pedagogía indígena crítica.

educação filosófica baseada no lugar: reconstruindo o "lugar", reconstruindo a ética

A educação como formação da identidade nas democracias liberais de estilo ocidental baseia-se, em parte, na neutralidade como uma justificativa para a reprodução da identidade individual coletiva, incluindo identidades sociais, culturais, institucionais e políticas, muitos aspectos dos quais são problemáticos em termos de reprodução de atitudes, crenças e ações ambientalmente prejudiciais para o meio ambiente. Para se posicionar sobre uma questão, é necessário abrir mão de certas formas de neutralidade, assim como efetivamente ensinar educação ambiental. Afirmamos que reivindicar uma posição de neutralidade é reivindicar uma posição além da crítica. Na sala de aula, essa também pode ser uma posição epistemologicamente prejudicial de se ocupar. Para explorar ainda mais o problema da neutralidade na sala de aula e para oferecer uma possível solução, olharemos para a pedagogía da comunidade filosófica de investigação filosófica e defenderemos a incorporação da uma educação situada; uma forma de educação experimental que promove a aprendizagem nas comunidades locais em que a escola está inserida, cada uma com sua própria história, cultura, economia e meio ambiente. No entanto, como entendemos o "lugar" é fundamental para compreender o potencial da educação baseada no lugar em dar aos estudantes um "sentido de lugar" - como eles percebem um lugar, que inclui apego ao lugar e significado de lugar. Para este fim, olhamos para as compreensões indígenas do lugar e da aprendizagem da reconstrução social para dar forma as pedagogias baseadas no lugar. Desse modo, acreditamos, que se abre um caminho para a educação ética.

palavras-chave: filosofia ambiental; ecofeminismo; educação baseada em localização; filosofia com crianças; pedagogia indígena crítica.

place-based philosophical education: reconstructing 'place', reconstructing ethics

introduction

Philosophy is one of the oldest intellectual traditions, from which many other areas of disciplinary inquiry have emerged, yet its representation in schools is woeful. So too is the understanding surrounding its educational potential (Burgh & Thornton, 2019a). However, a growing body of studies on Philosophy for Children (P4C) is slowly changing perceptions of philosophy's potential. These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of the community of inquiry pedagogy, indicating marked cognitive and social benefits (see e.g., Millett & Tapper, 2011; Garcia-Moriyon, Robello and Colom, 2005; Trickey & Topping, 2004, 2006, 2007; Topping & Trickey, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). We aim to show that philosophy has further potential as a framework for environmental education or sustainability education. However, we argue that it needs to be educationally situated as place-based education as a radical move toward cultural renewal to deal with the socio-ecological crises.

Education is a form of cultural renewal, but as Val Plumwood (2002) observes, no culture that has set 'in motion massive processes of biospheric degradation which it has normalised, and which it cannot respond to or correct can hope to survive for very long' (p. 1). To address climate change and other pressing environment issues, we argue that a cultural overhaul is needed, including an overhaul of education. A new framework for education that is not premised on the 'business as usual' approach to education as the perpetuation of existing social, cultural, and political structures is required. What Thomas Colwell (1970) calls 'keeping school' traps education within the same environmentally destructive paradigm that has contributed to our present environmental predicament. Keeping education attune to the demands of the market, towards the development of a workforce wholly unprepared for climate change, represents a failure to adequately prepare the next generation—intellectually, emotionally, and physically—for an increasingly uncertain future. Neutrality is often to be found in arguments for keeping school.

Education as identity formation in Western-style democracies (i.e., liberal-democratic nation-states) relies in part on neutrality as a justification for the reproduction of collective individual identity including societal, cultural, institutional and political identities, many aspects of which are problematic in terms of the reproduction of environmentally harmful attitudes, beliefs and actions. Taking a position on an issue necessitates letting go of certain forms of neutrality, as does effectively teaching environmental education. We contend that to claim a stance of neutrality is, more often than not, to claim a position beyond criticism. In the classroom this can also be an epistemically damaging position to hold, especially to those who suffer from, what Plumwood (1995) calls, 'the twin offspring of the same processes of development': impoverishment and environmental degradation (p. 139).

To further explore the problem of neutrality in the classroom, and to offer a potential solution, we will look to the philosophical community of inquiry pedagogy, and advocate for the addition of place-based education; a form of experiential education (or pedagogy of experiential learning) that promotes learning in local communities in which the school is situated, each with its own history, culture, economy and environment. However, as we shall see, how we imagine 'place' in place-based education is of vital ethical importance. Nature or the environment is not simply that which lies outside of ourselves; a stage to act out our existence. The line between humans and 'nature' is fuzzy at best, and a harmful delusion at worst, but no matter where we draw it, it is always an ethical one demarcating what and who is and is not valued.

To gain a greater understanding of place, we begin our inquiry by offering a brief history of the dominant logic that has shaped and continues to shape the way Empire relates to, understands, and theorises place. We argue that the relationship between Empire and place is premised on a morality of self-interest which ushers in a survivalist ethos. Such an ethic is not robust enough to address either environmental or social challenges (Routley, 1998). To address such challenges requires an expansion of our ethical circles beyond the liberal conception of the individual as the fundamental component of value, an atomistic individual around

which an ethic of self-interest or egoism draws its line of concern. It is a line too often policed in classrooms around the globe, through an insistence on educational neutrality. Neutrality is a myth; a way of dismissing, among other things, those who would seek to extend the purview of ethics. Aboriginal custodial ethics extends ethical standing far beyond that of the atomistic individual. The custodial ethic emerges out of place and is also a structuring force, which for tens of thousands of years resulted in stable and flourishing societies.

We argue that place-based education has the potential to overcome educational neutrality; however, we also account for criticisms of epistemic bias in its claim to pedagogy and curriculum neutrality, specifically its continuation of the nature/human dualism. Thereafter, we introduce Jennifer Bleazby's (2004, 2013) 'social reconstruction learning' which allows students to connect with communities to reconstruct their learning experiences. Bleazby's framework integrates Philosophy for Children, ecofeminism and the philosophy of John Dewey including his views on experiential education. In doing so, we argue that social reconstruction learning, as the basis for place-based education, has the potential to overcome the nature/human dualism, with the addition of an Indigenous ethical understanding of place. To this end, we look to custodial ethics as a necessary component of place-based pedagogies, which, in conjunction with social reconstruction learning as an exemplar of educational philosophy (philosophy functioning educationally), provides an effective and ethical learning environment and a step towards reconstructing Empire.

reconstructing place

How we understand 'place' is fundamental to understanding the potential of place-based education in giving students a 'sense of place'—how they perceive a place, which includes place attachment, place meaning, and place-responsiveness (see Kudryavtsev, Stedman & Krasny, 2012; Renshaw & Tooth, 2018). Following Critical Indigenous Pedagogy,[4] 'a reflexive discourse constantly in search of an

[4] According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), Critical Indigenous Pedagogy acknowledges 'that all inquiry is both political and moral. It uses methods critically for explicit social justice purposes. It values the transformative power of indigenous, subjugated knowledges. It values the pedagogical

open-ended, subversive, multivoiced epistemology' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6), this paper rests on the axiom that 'the human social world is embedded in and part of the natural world, with all its complexities, relations and repetitions' (Cole & Somerville, 2020, p. 1). In other words, humans, and all human activities, are part of nature and not hyper-separated from other natural phenomena (Plumwood, 2001), like the atomistic conception of the liberal individual. Not only are we not independent of nature, insofar as we belong to the natural, physical, or material world, but the human body is itself an ecosystem.[5] We, therefore, concur with Freya Mathews that the distinction between the 'artefactual and the natural' is problematic

> on the grounds that, since human beings, as biological organisms, surely belong to nature, and since making things comes to us as naturally as eating and drinking do, our handiwork itself has as much a claim to be considered part of nature as the handiwork of spiders, insects and marine life does. (Matthews, 2004, n.p.)

From this perspective, we cannot separate environmentalism from struggles for social justice (Mathews, 2008, p. 319). We are not atomistic individuals, in the sense that classical liberalism or other similar or related conceptions of personhood assume.

These views, along with the self-interested ethics that usually accompanies them, predominantly inform the dominant Western understanding of 'human nature', which is built into the institutional practices of Western-style democracies including education. Such an understanding of human nature issues in a stark separation between humans and nature as '[t]he place where we are is the place where nature is not' (Cronon, 1995, p. 80). The definition of human is operational upon that which it is not, namely nature. Our conception of 'environment',

practices that produce these knowledges (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 15), and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering. It embraces the commitment by indigenous scholars to decolonize Western methodologies, to criticize and demystify the ways in which Western science and the modern academy have been part of the colonial apparatus' (p. 2).

[5] Nature can be independent of humans as there was a time when humans did not exist, and this time could well come again. However, nothing, including humans, can exist outside of nature. It is then, much simpler to posit humans as a part of, rather than separate to, nature. To do this, we do not have to collapse all differences between humans and nature, in fact, the axiom is so simple that we would not need to state it at all where it not for the strong tradition within philosophy that has, since before the time of Socrates, attempted to split the two. Environmental philosophy has emerged, in large part, to counter this tradition.

therefore, rejects the nature/human dualism and nature as 'other' narrative that are products of Western cultural history, which Plumwood (1993) calls 'the foundational delusion of the West' and 'a dangerous doctrine, strongly implicated in the environmental crisis' (p. 42). It is a doctrine that brings into existence a survivalist ethos; a concept we explore in the next section.

Plumwood (1993) and others have argued that Western philosophy developed a set of interconnected dualisms which divide the epistemic from the ontic, for example, mind from body, human from nature, theory from practice, order from disorder, man from woman. As a result, traditionally, epistemology is valued over and above ontology. In education, this formula of valuation has been extensively traced by Bleazby; from Plato, an early architect of dualist thinking, through to the way we value subjects (Bleazby, 2015), the way education devalues the imagination, emotions and practical experiences, in favour of a universal conception of 'reason' (Bleazby, 2012) and separates the classroom from the larger contexts within which it is situated, i.e., society, industry and the environment – the split between theory and practice (Bleazby, 2013).

Plato effectively split the realm of the Forms – ideal, perfect knowledge – from earth, which he took to be a corrupt version of the Forms. This split, or hyper-separation, came to define universal Truth (capital 'T') in opposition to place, and much work has been done by subsequent philosophers to cement this view of Truth into the foundations of Empire, just as many others, like Plumwood, have decried its dangers. We use the word 'cement' purposefully for the connotations it carries. Empires are built upon rigid foundations; foundations that do not move or change, that are impervious to reinvention, recreation or reimagination. Empires colonise. In other words, they create a 'built environment' to which all others must adapt or perish (Thornton, Graham & Burgh, 2019, p. 244). Ideas, thoughts, and theories create built environments, i.e., epistemology shapes ontology. According to Plumwood (2002), Empire conceives of the colonised as 'disorderly' and dictates that 'the assimilating project of the coloniser is to remake the colonised and their space in the image of the coloniser's own self-space, their own culture or land, which is represented as the paradigm of reason, beauty and order' (p. 14).

The result of such constructions and constrictions is the dual creation of institutions divorced from Land[6] and shadow places; 'places that provide our material and ecological support, most of which, in a global market, are likely to elude our knowledge and *responsibility*. This is not an ecological form of consciousness' (Plumwood, 2008, n.p. *italics* added). Shadow places cast a shadow over ethical responsibility and obligation, obscuring our knowledge of the places upon which our existence depends, driving impoverishment and environmental degradation (Plumwood, 1995, p. 139). When we view ourselves through the lens of dualisms, as hyper-separated from place, we perpetuate the existence of shadow places and the environmental injustice they spawn. 'As hyper-individuals, we owe nothing to nobody, not to our mothers, let alone to any nebulous earth community' (Plumwood, 2001, p. 91). Attuning our attention to place, then, becomes an ethical matter and a necessary first step to realising our obligations to place. Imaginings of place 'must aim to replace the consumer-driven narratives of place that mark our lives by different ones that make our ecological relationships visible and accountable' (Plumwood, 2008, n.p.).

two ethical orientations: freedom and rights, obligation to land

'The central crisis, as defined by Native Canadian, Hawaiian, Māori, and American Indian pedagogy, is spiritual, "rooted in the increasingly virulent relationship between human beings and the rest of nature" (Grande, 2000, p. 354)' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 17). From an Aboriginal perspective, separation from nature was the beginnings of a commodification of nature: 'spirit or the sacred has been reified by Westerners as "money": Western behaviour, as we have observed it over the last two hundred years, is consistent with that of a community for whom money is sacred' (Graham 1999, p. 8). With the sacralising of money, the relational is reduced to the economic, that which money can buy, and 'everything has a price'; therefore, with enough money nothing is off-limits, and nothing is sacred. Neoliberal laissez-faire economics illustrates this well—potentially everything is

[6] The term Land (capital L) denotes biodiversity, biosphere, nature, the natural world, environment, earth, wildlife, geographical and geological forms, ecosystem, landscape, flora, and fauna.

reduced to economic value and, thus, of instrumental value only. In this way the sacralising of money co-exists with an ethic that values only individualism; the right of the individual to freedom and self-realisation, which entails the fundamental right to life, liberty, and property.

As the very nature of the liberal individual is that of an individual human being abstracted from social context and nature, such an ethic does not provide a basis for obligation only a right to exercise freedom. Following this line of thought, a strange and terrible freedom is obtained; a freedom from ethical limits, precariously restrained only by a self-regulating society of individuals—essentially a minimalist politic of self-interest, in which individuals compete for resources to survive. This can be described as a survivalist ethos,

> a form of self-orientation where the self is placed at a distance from others because all environments—natural, human, and social—are seen as potentially hostile; so, the self has to arm itself psychically and physically to keep 'safe'. Social and technological developments ensue, and then praxis follows which includes the normalisation of competitiveness. (Graham, 2021, p. 8)

In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill (1859) articulates a core tenet of liberalism—and, by extension, traditional Western values that underpin liberal-democratic political and social institutions. He focusses on the principle of equal consideration of interests; that individuals are free to do as they please provided their actions do not *harm* others (i.e., impinge upon the freedom of other individuals). Thus, Mill's conception of liberty, in which individuals are self-interested, equal, and rational, has self-regarding and other-regarding morality as two sides of the same coin. Thereby, political intervention is limited regarding self-interest, or as Mill put it: 'That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others' (p. 223). However, harm, in the traditional liberal sense, means harm only to other humans, hence Richard Sylvan (2009) deems the harm principle to be founded on 'human chauvinism', a prejudicial preference for the human species above all others.

The lack of ethical consideration given to nature means that nature then becomes open to 'instrumental use' as defined and regulated by systems other than ethics; primarily legal, economic, and political. Spirituality and the sacred,

accordingly, is restricted to religion, usually monotheistic religions that create a Platonic split between earth and spirit. Western religion has traditionally viewed

> the spirituality of place as something to be overcome or drawn into its larger scheme which figures *the value of place accordingly, in the largely instrumental terms* of leading us to a higher, non-earthly place. Historical Christianity, as John Passmore remarks, often saw pagan place and nature reverence as its main enemy, and set itself the task of destroying pagan shrines or absorbing them into its own framework of transcendence. (Plumwood, 2001, p. 219, *italics* added)

As did and does Empire. In many cultures around the world, spirit conjures up thoughts of the supernatural, which is neither earth nor human, but greater than or superior to both.

However, in many other cultures, including Aboriginal culture, spirit emerges from earth and is a part of nature. Accordingly, organisms and the earth are sacred, valued, relational; based on relationships of respect and understanding learnt over enormous spans of time. The sacred calls forth limitations on acts and, in doing so, extends ethics to nature. Aboriginal ethics are ethics of a particular kind, not strictly deontological rule-based ethics, nor strictly consequentialist, outcome-based tools used to determine the rightness of an act, although they often contain elements of both. In Western philosophical terms, Aboriginal ethics resembles an ethic of flourishing, but one which extends far beyond the Aristotelian sense of 'human flourishing' as life with other people, to include ecological others. Even though Aristotle had greater faith in the earth than Plato, he still delivers us a very human-centred notion of flourishing:

> Aristotle's metaphysic does not develop in a holistic or systemic direction, but stops short at an emphatic form of individualism – a pluralism of discrete biological individuals. The concrete relations in which these individuals stand to one another are entirely external to their identity, and in principle such individuals could be rearranged or reshuffled at will. There is no anticipation here of the concept of ecology, or of the indivisibility of systems. (Mathews, 1991, p. 109)

Contra Aristotle, Aboriginal ethics is holistic and relational. *Land* is the great teacher, the first value. Land is sacred and the beginning of ethics, as it is the beginning of all things; that which confers responsibility. Value comes from the Land, just as we, the valuers come from the Land. Put another way, Land, to use an

Aristotelian term, is *first principle* (i.e., a foundational proposition or assumption that cannot be deduced from other propositions or assumptions); 'the Land is the Law' (Graham, 2013, p. 2). However, in liberal political theory 'law' refers to the *rule of law*, which is one of the core principles of liberal constitutionalism, aimed at protecting the fundamental rights of individuals, including the security of persons, property (i.e., ownership and contract), and human rights. Laws are supposed to guide the ethical conduct of the individual regarding these fundamental rights, which implies preventing harm to other individuals and their interests (i.e., the application of Mill's harm principle). Conversely, the Aboriginal approach is to locate Law as first principle, as the sacralised and foundational, relationalist principle of the Land as the source of the Law.

Land has created everything including humans. This is seen by many cultures as an instinctually maternal process (e.g., 'Mother Nature') and inherently spiritual: 'Land is a moral entity with both physical and spiritual attributes manifest in myriad life forms' (Graham, 2013, p. 2). From this, 'spiritual significance and meaning arises, and more obligations develop with particularised responsibilities according to place/locality' (Graham, 2013, p. 5). Ethics, then, is not based solely on character, received commands, rules, universal principles or consequences (although it can certainly take many of these into account), it 'grows in a natural organic way with the deepening of feeling coalesced with stewardship practices' (Graham, 2013, p. 5). These senses or feelings are reified into socially constructed systems of governance. Through understanding the value of Land and self we become civilised, and in this way *'[e]thics becomes habituated and made valuable, rather than idealised'* (Graham, 2013, p. 2). According to this view, civilisation cannot be separated from ethics, nor can ethics be reduced to rules, consequences, or the market. Such paths lead to the widespread instability we are facing today, and both stem from and reinforce a survivalist ethos.

In a Heraclitean universe of flux,[7] instability is a part of the process of the world, a part of living that must be faced and understood for both practical and

[7] In the pre-Socratic days of philosophy, Parmenides (539-469 BCE) dreamt of a visit to a goddess who described to him the nature of the universe; a nature fundamentally fixed, finished, and static. Around the same time, Heraclitus (540-475 BCE) expounded his understanding of the universe as one

ethical reasons. On the practical side, understanding the process of flux, of being and becoming, can facilitate flourishing. However, it is necessary to understand in a way that is relational and accounts for the flourishing of other organisms, including ensuring the other's continued existence. Such understanding allows for the emergence of a custodial ethic; an obligation to *care for country*, and a necessary condition for the creation of a stable and flourishing society.

In Australian Aboriginal culture, ethics, beginning with Land, is a structuring force that 'lays the foundations for the organising principle that governs the social and political structures, decision-making and conflict management systems developed over an immense period of time, forming the basis of our concept of Sovereignty' (Graham, 2013, p. 1). Balance and stability are achieved through protocols based on the custodial ethic, i.e., non-hierarchical, non-dominating, and respectful, which developed in relationship to Land and others over tens of thousands of years. Stability, in the political sense, does not need to be viewed in opposition to flux as an understanding of flux in itself helps create stability. Protocols were developed through careful observation and detailed communication, aimed at the preservation and reproduction of knowledge tied to the preservation and reproduction of Land. Communication took and continues to take many forms, for example, teaching, conferences, storytelling, painting, dancing and songlines, the combination of which

> function both to impress their meanings cunningly and irresistibly in the memory, and to bind together botanical, experiential, practical and philosophical knowledge, community identity and spiritual practice in a rich and satisfying integration of what we [non-Indigenous people] usually place in opposing groups of life and theory [dualisms]. (Plumwood, 2012, p. 27)

These 'opposing groups' form the basis of a Western reductionist worldview. According to Aboriginal ethics, flourishing is not thought of in terms of the atomistic individual but in terms of the group, which is 'not to say that the group is

of constant flux, change and becoming. From humble beginnings great things grow, and the division between the ideas of Heraclitus and Parmenides spread like wildfire throughout the Western philosophical canon. Although the Greeks themselves disagreed about the ontological opposites of Becoming (Heraclitus) and Being (Parmenides), they may have started to appreciate some form of resolution between the two notions, if they had known about the Dreaming and Aboriginal ideas concerning the Law.

more important than the individual, nor is it a competition between the group/others and the individual, but rather that the group is the originator of Being; that Being comes from and is shared by and with others' (Graham, 2013, p. 4) including environments. Places, like humans, are autonomous and in 'terms of values, the aim of the organising principle is to respect and protect the integrity of Regional Clan/group and individual values and rights' (Graham, 2013, p. 5). The concept of autonomous regard,[8] as an integral component of an Aboriginal ethic, is a way of gazing at each other from a distance. The distance is necessary for respect, for recognition of sovereignty, of limits, and also the existence of the self in the other, because, although distant, the self is not starkly separate from the self of the other. Autonomous regard also extends to non-human others; hence, nature, as human, non-human and land, is not seen as starkly other, and the value it holds is not only monetary or instrumental, but sacralised.

This relationalist system, emerging from Land and collectively applied in social and political ordering, would manifest as something like a 'Law of Obligation' – a fully relational system. The Law of Obligation, then, brings about a collective ethical responsibility

> to look after Land, family and community, which is vital in transcending the persuasion of advantage at the expense of others. This approach is centred in the significance of Place, a particular locality (or localities) of Land within a particular region. 'Land' includes the landscape and all living things within it, humans, spirits, animals, air, sea, rivers, moon, stars, birds, insects, the wind, language, dreams etc; with Place the core interest, conscience and spirit of culture. These collective values are the template for looking after the whole society, that is, part of the organising principle of society. (Graham, 2013, p. 4)

The custodial ethic is the combination of many laws of obligation – reciprocity, sharing, stewardship, looking after relations etc., with the cultivation of people's qualities of mind, character, and behaviour. These obligatory habits become a tradition which collectively becomes a general law underpinned by the sacralising of land – a process of becoming and being.

[8] Not to be mistaken for the liberal notion of autonomy as 'individual autonomy', understood as the capacity to be our own person, to be independent of others—to live according to reasons and motives that are our own and not the result of manipulation from external forces.

Atomic individualism, which manifests in an ethic of individual freedom and human rights, as the basis of Western ethics and politics stemming from liberal theory, means individuals are not bound by claims that are independent of their private interests. This leaves people exposed to a world without the Law of Obligation, open to the threat of collective living without the self-awareness required to live ethical relationships with other, both human and non, and earth. The Law of Obligation prevents or can prevent a collective 'crossing the Rubicon' or 'point of no return' step into the barbarism of nuclear bombing or invading other people's countries.[9] If primitiveness, meaning a kind of end justifies the means rationale, is the path chosen, barbarism is or becomes the variety of methods utilised to gain the wished-for outcome. For example, if a Law of Obligation was in place and adhered to, it is doubtful that Rio Tinto would have blown-up a 46,000-year-old sacred site[10] or that climate change would be worsening unchecked.

teaching values in a changing society: can teachers be neutral?

Our discussion so far, regarding two seemingly different approaches to ethics, which rely on different views of the relationship between humans and their environment, has bearing on education and identity formation in Western-style democracies. Education plays a major role in the transmission of culture, insofar as it cannot be avoided. If teachers adopt a neutral stance rather than taking an active role in the process, they, wittingly. or unwittingly, perpetuate the transmission of dominant beliefs and values, creating epistemically built environments which exclude those cultural ways of knowing, being and doing that do not fit the dominant mould. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that education should be geared towards diversity so that epistemically dominating values do not go unchallenged, but, instead, stimulate discussion on cultural norms, including values, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences. However, confronted by the assertions

[9] Arguably, mechanistic science was such a moment, as Merchant (2012) puts it: 'Technologies and attitudes of domination stemming from the Scientific Revolution have acted as a legitimating framework, enabling humans to threaten nature with deforestation and desertification, chemical pollution, destruction of habitats and species, and ultimately with nuclear fallout, ozone depletion, and global warming' (p. 3).

[10] https://www.abc.net.au/religion/stop-destroying-indigenous-sites-and-lives-morgan-brigg-and-mar/12355284

of some contemporary philosophers who herald the end of philosophy's role as a privileged, truth-telling discourse, some teachers might be uncomfortable with taking such a position, mistakenly viewing the recognition of a diversity of values with promoting moral relativism and, thus, anything goes. Others might be reluctant to challenge students' values in order to respect students, or they may think that teaching any kind of values is a form of indoctrination. In the classroom, this can lead to 'teacher neutrality', the practice of taking no position on issues as a pedagogical strategy.

The notion of neutrality conflicts with claims about knowledge by both absolutists and relativists. Absolutism assumes there to be a fixed, objective reality that can be represented accurately through thoughts, ideas, judgements, statements, assertions, utterances, propositions, or beliefs that correspond to this reality. It assumes that a meta-justification for our evaluative or normative systems can be found. But this requires us to start and end somewhere, namely, with knowledge-seeking humans who are fallible epistemic agents not disembodied, impartial, and objective observers. On the other hand, relativists claim that truth is constructed and relative to particular cultures, times, places, or individuals and, thus, justifications are perspectival and interest relative. To the relativist,

> we are never able to transcend or suppress our own situatedness and interests. Thus, even if there is some ultimate, fixed reality we would not be able to know it as it 'really' is. Rather, all experience and inquiry is conducted through our personal interests, values, and concrete situatedness. Consequently, truth claims reflect the individuals who construct them. (Bleazby, 2011, p. 455)

The problem that arises with relativism in relation to ethics is the inability to judge other people's opinions, beliefs, and actions. In education, epistemic, ethical and value judgements can be intentional or unintentional regarding the selection of what counts as 'appropriate' curriculum materials and classroom strategies for teaching, as the education process includes judgements made by teachers, teacher-educators, policy-makers, curriculum writes, principles, peers, parents and politicians, all of whom bring their pre-existing ethical and moral frameworks to bear. This indicates that neutrality, the practice of taking no position on issues, is untenable. On the one hand, if we adopt the absolutist position, teachers should teach absolute values. On the other hand, if we adopt the relativist position, teachers

cannot escape teaching their own values through the hidden curriculum or allowing those present in the classroom via students, curriculum materials, and institutional structures, to percolate. The act of teaching in itself is an ethical act.

Neutrality as an educational ideal can fall into two broad categories: procedural neutrality and content neutrality. *Procedural neutrality*, also referred to as instrumental neutrality or pedagogical neutrality, is the view that teachers facilitate classroom discussions impartially and refrain from expressing their own views or 'taking sides' on the topics under discussion. *Content neutrality*, which can be curriculum neutrality or more broadly structural neutrality, is the view that curriculum or education policy can be free of ideology or cultural bias toward diversity of cultural positions. Claims of procedural and content neutrality commonly refer to taking a neutral stance or refraining from making judgments on values, but neutrality can apply also to beliefs, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and norms. Neutrality also implies tolerance, not being judgemental, and acting without bias.

Neutrality has a long history outside debates on ethics and classroom practice. For example, the ancient Skeptics suspended judgement about beliefs as they thought there to be no truth or certainty. Another example can be found in the separation of church and state (facilitated by the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution) which was extended to the separation of church and public education (through the 1947 *Everson v. Board of Education* and 1962 *Engel v. Vitale* rulings of the United States Supreme Court). David E. Denton (1963) noted that the shift in education from a religious to a secular, naturalistic base included a shift away from religious-based moral education. This shift was characterised at the classroom level by the transition 'from an emphasis on values to an emphasis on techniques of teaching Skills' (p. 1), as it was thought that skills were value-neutral.

However, Denton contended that the push to create a value neutral, skills-based educational system is lost the moment decisions of content and methodology, of what and how we teach, are made, as 'norms constitute the nature of those decisions' (p. 2). Viewed in this way, skills training did not replace the transmission

of values, it made it implicit, unexamined and unintended; or put another way, the transmission of norms, values and beliefs in the classroom seep in from the social and political environment through classroom teachers, students and curricula. The general result is that values are taught, but not well. As it stands, young people are, as Denton says, inducted into a system of ethical decisions that 'have already been made for them. In addition, the teacher is almost invariably concerned, not only with facts, but with goods and preferences and desires and "shoulds" which eventually reveal the kind of Universe the teacher feels ought to be' (p. 4). The process of instilling values becomes the realm of individual teachers in which their values can be transmitted uncritically and often unwittingly to their students in an attempt to maintain neutrality.

For Paulo Freire (1970), a neutral educational process is not possible. In the Foreword to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull (1970) makes the following observation of Freire's position:

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 34)

Freire's words highlight the relationship between the perpetuation of the dominant logic and an emancipatory pedagogy, and neither are positions of neutrality. In countries in which Empire built the dominant logic, its perpetuation through education is a contributing factor to the following question: 'Will there ever be a use-by date for Empire? Or will Empire simply dominate behind another face?' (Graham, 2014, p. 22).

Unlike other approaches to education, Philosophy for Children places emphasis on fallibilism, self-correction and continuous inquiry and, thus, it holds emancipatory promise, but to fulfil such promise the problem of neutrality must be faced. The community of inquiry as pedagogy, underpins Philosophy for Children; a reconstruction by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp of the Peircean/Buchlerian notion of community of inquiry into an educational practice begun in the 1960's. Lipman (2004) was influenced by Dewey's progressive ideas

on education, which he thought Dewey had 'treated too lightly, even superficially' (p. 3). Together, Lipman and Sharp (1978) developed the community of inquiry as an approach to teaching that transforms the structure of the classroom in fundamental ways; it emphasises community as a method of investigation, a purposive activity of inquiry, experimentation and collaboration driven by intelligent curiosity that arises from a 'sense of genuine doubt that signals a rupture in consciousness' (Gregory & Granger, 2012, p. 6). Philosophy for Children 'aims to foster a wide range of thinking skills; meaningfulness; participatory democracy; and the dispositions needed to effectively participate in communal inquiries, such as reasonableness, open-mindedness, care and respect for others, imaginativeness, and a willingness to self-correct' (Bleazby, 2020).

However, as Bleazby cautions, '[h]aving originally emerged from the Western philosophical canon, P4C's materials and methods must always be used cautiously and critically, remaining open to being transformed or even replaced when they are used within different contexts' (n.p.). In the context of environmental education, we argue that the community of inquiry must be reconstructed into a community of place-based inquiry. This is particularly important in light of Hell Rainville's (2001) critique of Philosophy for Children. Rainville's concern is that Philosophy for Children's 'purportedly neutral approach to philosophical inquiry may unwittingly contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples both in North America and around the world' (p. 67). She observes that: 'I have yet to read a paper in the growing body of Philosophy for Children literature which acknowledges the ways in which our so-called democratic institutions have arisen out of, and continue to perpetuate, the political, economic and ideological repression of Native North Americans' (p. 66). This concern is also echoed by Walter Kohan (2018), who, following Freire's moral condemnation of neutrality, contends that '[e]ducation cannot be apolitical, politically neutral or aseptic' (p. 7). Purporting that education must be neutral, is a way of silencing the Other without admitting a standpoint, hiding behind the mask of neutrality. For these reasons and more, Rainville (2001) argues for 'conscious partiality'.

> 'Conscious Partiality' requires that teachers acknowledge their own (inevitable) biases, as well as the conceptual limitations of their

> chosen material, while paying particular attention to the political contexts in which education takes place. As a result, Philosophy for Children must be willing to incorporate historical detail and socio-cultural awareness into any programs which are meant to be truly liberatory. (p. 67)

Rainville argues that education cannot be ahistorical; that teachers must understand the historical forces that shape the lives of their students, especially those to whom history has been oppressive.

It needs to also be noted that philosophy itself is not epistemically or methodologically neutral. Karin Murris (2016) adds that the traditional 'P4C curriculum is evaluative and prescriptive (in the sense of what counts as philosophy and what needs to be appropriated by the learners) and therefore normative' (p. 67). Further, Chetty (2014) notes that 'the selection of a text will itself steer a discussion, inasmuch that it will make some ideas more likely and others less likely to be explored' (p. 25). Like other disciplines, philosophy and by extension Philosophy for Children is value laden and not separate from cultural discourse. However, philosophy as practice, such as a community of inquiry, 'has the potential for self-critique. To maintain an attitude of fallibilism toward our own biases and prejudices (those things we think not to question) is one of philosophy's greatest strengths. In a community of inquiry this can be applied to facilitate students' understanding of the world's diversity of ideas' (Thornton & Burgh, 2019, p. 235).

Philosophy for Children has the potential to overcome neutrality, but in order for it to be empowering, we argue that two factors need to be considered. First, Matthew Lipman in his adaptation of Dewey, left behind the Deweyan emphasis on experiential education, in which learners engage directly with their environment so that the school becomes a place for the continuous reconstruction of experiences which increases students' abilities to direct and control their lives as democratic citizens, and impacts on the greater community—an intermediary for social reconstruction. Put another way, he left the classroom/community dualism in place, which Dewey wished to avoid by coordinating experiencing and learning to facilitate meaningful connections, thereby achieving curriculum synthesis—education as both a social and intellectual process. Bleazby picks up on Dewey to propose what she calls 'social reconstruction learning', which re-introduces

experiential learning, or service-learning, and works towards the 'dismantling of problematic notions of rationality, selfhood and autonomy, which have worked to legitimise the control, domination and exploitation of the natural environment and of women, girls, indigenous people and many other marginalised groups' (Bleazby, 2020, n.p), thus, collapsing a number of dualisms. We believe this is a move in the right direction. However, the second factor to overcome neutrality is that service learning is a form of place-based education and, thus, to fully integrate social reconstruction learning requires attention to place. In the next section, we argue for the introduction of Indigenous notions of place, to remove any pretence of neutrality of place and, thus, also closing the gap on the human/nature dualism, as well as addressing Rainville's concerns regarding the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples.

philosophy for children and place-based education: introducing indigenous notions of place to develop a 'sense of place'

Place-based education offers a potential solution to the problems of future instability and neutrality in education, but it is not without its own issues. Place-based education is a community-based experiential approach to education that connects learning and communities in order to increase student engagement, as a way to achieve academic outcomes and student understanding of the world around them. Founded on the idea that the student's local community – including the school grounds, neighbourhood, and suburb, town or city, as well as the communities within these places, each with their own history, environment and culture – is one of the primary learning resources for students, place-based education can assist communities in which schools are situated to solve community problems through student involvement facilitated by teachers. Such attempts at situating learning in the surrounding environments of the school community are certainly a step in the right direction and can extend or supplement classroom practice, as well as provide resources for integrating curriculum with pedagogy and assessment. However, while such place-based education programs can help to close

the classroom/community dualism, largely they still leave the human/nature dualism untouched.

The literature on place-based education has grown considerably in recent years, and included in it are a number of critiques, adaptations and alternatives, including: pedagogy of place, critical pedagogy of place, place-based learning, community-based education, education for sustainability, environmental education, service learning and social reconstruction learning (e.g., see Dewey, 1938; Russell & Bell, 1996; Gruenwald, 2003; Knapp, 2005; Bleazby, 2004, 2013; Goralnik, Dobson & Nelson, 2014; Ross, Oppegaard & Willerton, 2019). Some have arisen due to criticisms of purported neutrality of place. As we saw earlier, Western systems based on the human/nature dualism give rise to shadow places, those places that are depended upon but hidden from ethical view and obligation. A critical ethical and ecological awareness of place understands that place 'manifests a way of knowing, and places are often objects of power created to further particular forms of domination based on gender, sexuality, race, age, class, and physical ability' (Cravey & Petit, 2012, p. 102). For example, some place-based education schools, such as the increasingly popular forest schools, have been criticised for being 'rooted in idealized and romanticized notions of nature and childhood' (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017, p. 100). Plumwood (2012) notes how such notions of nature contribute to the human/nature divide and exclude Indigenous understandings of Place.

> Wilderness tends to be understood, however, as something that is separate from land that is used, land that supports us. There is a sundering, a splitting in this outlook that differs from an Indigenous understanding of unity of place. […] wilderness (wildness) was not a special place set apart as sacred in contrast to the profane earth. […] all the earth was sacred and there was no necessary split between use and respect. (p. 31)

What is missing in these approaches to place-based education, and place-based education generally, is a focus on place as the development of a 'sense of place' vital to students' formation of identity (Thornton & Burgh, 2019; Thornton, Graham & Burgh, 2019; Thornton, forthcoming). The community of inquiry as pedagogy, with its emphasis on fallibilism and self-correction, can aid in the development of ecologically minded identities, however, the human/nature divide

must also be overcome. Bleazby (2020), who has written extensively on the collapsing of dualisms in education, notes that 'the theory/practice, mind/body, nature/culture dualisms are not fully deconstructed in traditional Philosophy for Children classrooms, which emphasise philosophical thinking and dialogue but do not usually engage students in transformative interaction with the environment beyond the classroom' (n.p.). In response, Bleazby's (2013) social reconstruction learning reconstructs Philosophy for Children by integrating it with service learning, a Deweyan kind of experiential learning, but she also draws on feminist pragmatism, ecofeminism, and the community of inquiry pedagogy to engage students in 'philosophical inquiries with their local community with the purpose of reconstructing actual social problems, in order to facilitate independent thinking, imaginativeness, emotional intelligence, autonomy, and active and informed citizenship' (p. 3). This is achieved by identifying and analysing social problems 'in order to develop and implement solutions that will meaningfully transform them', which 'requires students to develop complex inquiry-practical skills and caring dispositions' (p. 158). Thus, reconstruction occurs not only in the students, but in the society and individual citizens they assist.

Social reconstruction learning holds potential for the kind of place-based education we propose, as it emphasises Dewey's notion of reconstruction, namely, education as an ongoing re-organisation or reconstruction of experience that increases student's ability to direct and control their lives, rather than acting as: a preparation for something else (e.g., being job ready or a citizen); an unfolding of innate knowledge and abilities (nativist or Platonic view of education); a training of mental faculties; the acquisition of knowledge and skills; or the perpetuation of tradition. However, greater emphasis on place is still needed. For example, service-learning focusses on experiential learning that is rooted in the local community and synthesises the curriculum through student and school staff involvement in solving community problems—for Dewey the emphasis was on social occupations that integrated subject matter (i.e., curriculum knowledge) and experiences with work carried on in social life. In addition, service-learning can also incorporate place-based learning, with attention to the unique history, environment, culture,

economy, literature, or art of a particular place. However, attention needs to also be on the ontological relationship to land in order for social reconstruction learning to become, what Denzin & Lincoln (2008) call, 'a form of praxis and inquiry that [is] emancipatory and empowering' (p. 2); one that is epistemically open, reflective, self-correcting and multivoiced (p. 6). In other words, pedagogy that is place-responsive (Renshaw & Tooth, 2018).

In recent years, Indigenous conceptions of place, which are integral to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, especially the ontological relationship to Land (Graham, 1999, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015), have been increasingly advocated by non-Indigenous scholars and Indigenous scholars alike. The centring of Indigenous concepts of Place in schooling, especially education for sustainability and environmental education, is necessary in order to decolonise mainstream education by interfacing Indigenous and Western epistemologies, values and philosophy in order to mitigate the epistemic injustices and environmental crises brought about by the domination of Western colonial institutions and practices (Thornton, Graham & Burgh, 2019). In this way, place-based education has the potential to not only accommodate Indigenous notions of Land as part of experiential learning, but Indigenous perspectives on relations to land can broaden the understanding of Place in place-based education and reshape it. As discussed above, for Indigenous peoples in Australia, Place is a complex and related concept with ties to Aboriginal ethics and systems of governance that cannot be separated. Place-based philosophical education must *centre* Indigenous notions of Land as part of experiential learning, and, therefore, broaden understandings of Place. But it also points to the need for a fundamental reconstruction of education in order to make it ethical. Breaking down the barriers between, for example, human/nature, outside/inside, nature/school, society/education, is an important part of Place-based education and a way to develop a collective spiritual identity through

> [a]ccommodation within the education system of programs with activities through which this identity [a collective spiritual identity] is grown in children, activities such as groups caring for particular chosen tracts of land, not only via gardening, but tending, having recreational and ceremonial activities there, creating stories about

> and artistic expressions of the relevant sites, protecting them from damage, and maintaining continuity with them throughout the formative years of childhood and on into adulthood. (Graham, 1999)

Moreover, the reconstruction of learning in the classroom must include breaking down means of assimilation which create hyper-separated identities. Although assimilation is most obvious when it comes to Western logic's assimilation of other cultures, Western education is the means by which all in attendance are assimilated into the dominant logic by educators who have themselves been assimilated. 'To cease assimilation, we must create ecologically rational identities by deconstructing our (colonial) own and our (colonial) culture's opposition to both nature and Other, both within and outside the classroom' (Thornton, Graham & Burgh, 2019, p. 247). Recognising the chain of dominant logic is the first step in breaking it. Neutrality is a link in this chain, for, as Freire (1987) put it,

> the dominant ideology makes its presence in the classroom partly felt by trying to convince the teacher that he or she must be neutral in order to respect the student. This kind of neutrality is a false respect for students. On the contrary, the more I say nothing about agreeing or not agreeing out of respect for the others, the more I am leaving the dominant ideology in peace! (p. 174).

There is no impartiality in white-washing or denying history or in creating a false narrative of independence, i.e., creating shadow places actively backgrounds the historical and present contexts in which schools are situated and reinforces existing structures of oppression by rejecting other ways of knowing, being and doing in the world. If colonisation creates shadow places by hiding the links between your existence and the places upon which it is predicated, then taking note of the links that maintain your life, that shape, create and grow you and your community – be it school, family or corporation – is a way of reconstructing not only knowledge, but your own identity and sense of place in the world. To these ends, '[d]eliberate efforts need to be made to seek out and include texts, materials, ideas, and methods from non-Western and marginalised perspectives, like indigenous and Eastern philosophies' (Bleazby, 2020, n.p.).

The place-based education we propose here places new demands on teachers in terms of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Our concern is twofold: teachers need the skills to facilitate philosophical communities of inquiry to: (1) engage in place-based social reconstruction learning, and (2) develop understandings of ontological connections and their own relational identity, especially with land. While it is the topic of a separate paper, involving Indigenous teacher-educators in the design and delivery of such training is a necessary condition for effective pre-service and in-service teacher education. Such involvement would provide opportunities to collaboratively develop greater understanding of different kinds of ontological connections to and experiences of place and what it means to have a *sense of place*.

conclusion

Given the current state of global affairs in which we find ourselves, e.g., COVID-19, climate change, economic instability, and war, education must relinquish aspirations of neutrality for the curriculum, pedagogy, and place. We contend that such aspirations only serve to forward existing dominant logics, usually the very same logics that have paved the way toward many of the crises we now face and have shaped many of Empire's institutions, including education. We hold that rethinking neutrality necessitates rethinking the role of education, which, in turn, necessitates rethinking place and our ethical obligations to it. Rethinking place requires input from outside the dominant systems of rationality which constrain our moral imagination and hamper intellectual freedom (Burgh & Thornton 2019b; Hyde, 2016; Thornton, Graham & Burgh, 2019).

As we have argued, the community of inquiry as pedagogy can facilitate the development of ecologically minded identities by emphasising a 'sense of place' necessary for students' formation of identity. The incorporation of place-based education as place-responsive pedagogies (Renshaw & Tooth, 2018) emphasises that place is not a neutral space but belonging to a historical and cultural context. As such, it can contribute to education for stability by providing an interdisciplinary approach to identity formation that can respond adequately to climate change and

related large-scale issues such as wildfires and COVID-19, through an ontological shift away from the logic of the liberal hyper-separated identity to education towards ecologically aware citizens (Thornton, forthcoming). To do this requires the decolonisation of education. As 'colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land' (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox & Coulthard, 2014, p. ii).

Place-responsive pedagogies, such as critical Indigenous place-based pedagogies, underscore the importance of 'collectively understanding and deconstructing individual and communal narratives of place that influence how we understand our regions and nations' (Lowan-Trudeau, 2017, p. 514). Critical Indigenous place-based pedagogies seek 'to decolonize and reinhabit the storied landscape through "reading" the ways in which Indigenous peoples' places and environment have been injured and exploited' (Johnson, 2012, p. 829). Such a reading casts light on the shadow places traditional classrooms create. Such a grounding provides a notion of place as ontological and necessary to identity formation in education to mitigate place neutrality; the view of place as just a location in which experiential learning occurs. Reconstructing place is a necessary step toward social reconstruction and the formation of social and ecological identities: teachers, students, parents, and the wider communities.

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