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Geoffrey Lummis  
*Edith Cowan University*

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# GLOBALISATION: BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP ETHIC FOR AN ECOPEDAGOGY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Geoffrey Lummis

Edith Cowan University

## ABSTRACT

*This paper accommodates teachers with an interest in environmental education and links associated with Society and Environment, Science, and Technology and Enterprise learning areas. The role of globalisation and its impact upon environmental education reform are discussed. The Western Australian Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council 1998) and the potential problems of metalanguage that a teacher faces when considering environmental reform are introduced. Several paradigms are introduced to underscore the complexity faced by initiating what I term ecopedagogy. Finally, four key principles that position a case for an ecopedagogy built upon a partnership ethic are offered. The principles are elaborated as:*

- *Equity as a relationship between human and non-human communities.*
- *Moral consideration for humans and diverse life forms.*
- *Respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity.*
- *Inclusivity of women and men, minorities, and diverse life forms all codified in an ethical framework accommodating accountability.*

*I see these principles as being consistent with those found in the Curriculum Framework.*

## GLOSSARY

The following glossary may be useful for readers who may be interested in environmental education from a generalist teaching position.

**Socio-ecological Education.** It is important to realise that ecology as a

science only gained its current status during the 1930s. Since the 1970s, environmental education has developed into an interdisciplinary field.

**Globalisation.** I suggest that globalisation has marginalised the democratic voice in countries like Australia. Transnational empires often with budgets greater than small nations have a capacity to radically influence money supply and the economic and social stability of major populations. Therefore most governments are extremely conscious of the power of global corporations, thus formulating policy that often accommodates the interests of transnationals rather than fully representing the specific life-world interests of local communities. The interconnections between global economic structures and government policy accommodate the devastation of biodiversity.

**Technocentrism.** The term is founded on the assumption that all problems have a technical solution. Western capitalism invests in the process of converting finite natural structures into diverse technologies and systems to serve a small wealthy and high consuming sector of the Earth's six billion human beings.

**Ecopedagogy.** The prefix *eco* comes from the word *ecology* or *Oekologie* (attributed to Ernst Haeckel in 1869). *Oekologie* is derived from the Greek *oikos* that means *household* and also relates to the modern word *economics*. I use the word *ecology* in an extended sense that includes the scope of social ecology, spiritual ecology and other areas of ecological philosophy, thus reaching beyond the external environment into the human psyche. (*This approach is*

central to most indigenous cultures.) The inclusion of the word *pedagogy* links themes of scholarship, child development, teaching methodology and epistemology. (*I advocate a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.*)

**Sustainability.** This term positions the Earth as a macro-ecosystem or planetary *ecosphere* or *biosphere* (James Lovelock's *Gaia* Hypothesis is built upon this principle). Life has been sustained on Earth for billions of years in what is termed a process of *homeostasis* (Walter Cannon). Biologists Maturana and Varela use the term *autopoiesis* (*autos* "self" and *poiein* "to produce"). *Autopoiesis* describes the phenomenon that sees communities of living entities continually seeking to develop and sustain a particular organisational arrangement and structure to maintain their existence (sustainability). Organisms such as humans are therefore engaged in a process renewing themselves under a wide variety of changing environmental conditions. If human activity exceeds the Earth's capacity to self-produce then leading scientist suggest that in theory our planet could die. I suggest that we need to move towards an ecopedagogy in our schools so that we can support the ancient processes of the ecosphere. (Definitions cited in Lummis 2001)

## INTRODUCTION

A. Gough (1997) suggests that often the line between philosophy and politics in both environmentalism and education is a confused one. In accommodating an ecopedagogy, each teacher's personal view of education and world-view is will be influenced by their personal philosophical and political views. Therefore an ongoing challenge for teachers, is the clarification of their personal values with respect to what they perceive as the environmental crisis, as well as what they understand as the overall outcomes of education in the process of initiating reform.

Teachers, like all of us, live in the consumer fast lane of a *use it and dump it* world-view, one that often leads to us perceiving ourselves as apart from nature. Teachers share the popular assumption that as humans we are superior to other life forms, with the right to dominate and exploit. The same anthropocentric position also maintains the belief that new human technology will always be able to control it, fix it and provide unlimited options to serve unlimited material wants (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1996). This faith in techno-instrumentalism or *technopoly* (Postman 1992) is embedded in the Western Australian Curriculum Framework. I see the dilemma for teachers, as trying to follow selective guiding principles that will support social and ecological reform in the school context, as well as meeting *Technology and Enterprise* outcomes that are sustainable.

In contrast to the paradigm of global technopoly, environmental reformers (Hallen 1988, O'Riordan 1989, Merchant 1996, A. Gough 1997 and Lummis 2001) argue for sustainable development. Sustainability fosters an ecopedagogy, where humans are in *partnership* with nature and not superior to the ecosphere's diverse life forms. Reformers also argue for a science education experience that is more life centred, holistic and based upon systems thinking creating working links with the *Society and Environment* and *Technology and Enterprise* learning areas (holism). Reaching agreement on a set of *core values* and *key principles* for an educational culture that accommodates sustainable development and biodiversity often becomes a problematic task, because of the extreme views in the environmental debate. Such an achievement of agreement in reaching a conviction towards an ecopedagogical approach in itself would be deemed as a major reform. A second obstacle for green reform sees the Curriculum Framework often accommodating the rhetoric of technocentrism. Committed environmental educators are also aware that they often have to negotiate a diminished school

resource budget in a system emerged in conservative educational values.

### **The Problem: The Socio-ecology of Globalisation**

Environmental commentators (Fox 1988, Hallen 1988, WA Ministry of Education 1988, and Lummis 2001) suggest that the Western Australian community is enmeshed in a socio-ecological crisis, as families, teachers, students and the State deal with significant outcomes of global economic forces. Environmental commentators say that we will have to adapt to the unpredictable outcomes of ecological devastation linked to increased material reproduction, world population growth, increased consumption levels and unpredictable international conflicts (such as September 11, 2001). Concerns such as high levels of ultraviolet radiation, shifting climatic patterns, higher energy costs, a demand for sustainable technologies, increased salinity, the loss of old growth forests and indigenous fauna will continue to occupy public attention in Western Australia.

Anglo-American globalisation now impacts significantly upon the life-world of all Western Australians, with our economic well being linked mining and other commodities. The past thirty years have seen a major shift towards, and an increase in influence of corporations upon the political outcomes of so called autonomous democracies such as Australia. Political movements in the North Atlantic business sector, together with some from conservative political parties and minor academic professionals have finally succeeded in breaking Keynesian policy consensus based on the social benefit. Friedman's arguments for restricting momentary supply (monetarism) are now normative in many governments and there is an obvious enmeshment of his ideology in the new economic model, culturally, historically and strategically (Marginson 1992). Globalisation since 1975 has impacted upon the resource allocation for social infrastructure such as education and

the role of the teacher, thus shattering the former Keynesian consensus safety net approach. In Australia this is period is termed by Marginson as the Post-Whitlam years of social reform, (especially in education). Essentially, today's ideology of Friedman's *New Economic Right* assumes the following generalised assumptions about the planet as a global market place. That it is:

- Timeless and borderless.
- Always an *already market* accommodating in social relations that are both competitive and individual.

The problem for teachers is that more than ever their education systems and students are impacted by external global economic events. The new order of *market liberalism* enmeshed with government, has also become a power-knowledge system providing a new a language for politics and the market driven consumer choice model *for a preferred society*. Also *market liberalism* has become a formula to rule superstructures such as fiance, trade agreements, foreign policy, education-technology and especially the environmental debate (*for example establishing the Kyoto protocol*). Globalisation influences policies from environment, health, education, through to investments in *preferred* technologies. Internationally, late-capitalism now has the ability to push and pull democratically elected governments and or others with its control over capital flow, thus moving away from the principles of the *Keynesian Welfare State* (Marginson 1997a and 1997b). Interests of both the welfare of people and therefore as an extension of this, the *rationalisation-consumer-materialism* phenomena (Lummis 2001), we see the marginalisation of educational reform (especially in environmental education).

Globalisation underscores a political reality for all Western Australian teachers interested in environmental education. The power structures occupied by the international market place have implications for our small population and

teaching and learning. For example teachers interested in developing programs that foster ecospherical sustainability need to be aware of critical issues linked to competition for power and specialised knowledge supported by the Curriculum Framework. Teachers should also be aware of the mechanisms by which the State maintains its own interests in selective cultural reproduction (Down 1993). The *Technology and Enterprise* learning area in the Curriculum Framework, reinforce *business-as-usual* for the dominant technocentric paradigm.

With the expansion of global markets, economies like Western Australian are faced with continual uncertainties linked to foreign policy, foreign competition, new technological challenges and the dislocation of the traditional workplace. With the loss of traditionally safe employment, many families will experience periods of reduced employment or unemployment due to restructuring and redundancies (Marginson 1997a and 1997b) and (Soros 1998). Western Australian teachers are too often left to pick up the tensions of uncertainty in schools as well as their own personal job uncertainties. We are all too familiar with the pattern, where the loss of economic independence brings shifts in living standards that will impact upon our family relationships and collectively this flows onto classroom culture. This socio-ecological link to globalisation in many instances is going to be expressed as long term psychological and social dysfunctions that will be reflected in substance abuse, domestic violence, mental-health issues and sensing a loss of community and nothingness (Lummis 2001).

### **Working with the K-12 Western Australian Curriculum Framework**

Ecopedagogy links well into a *constructivist* approach to teaching and learning, taking into account the interrelatedness of the physiological, social and psychological development of students, where students bring to a learning

experience their current explanations, attitudes, and skills (Australian Academy of Science 1994) and (Bybee 1997).

Importantly, the Curriculum Framework also reflects a growing social-ecological awareness, dating back to the mid-1980s by the then State Labor Government of an interconnected social, economic and environmental crisis (Ministry of Education Western Australia 1988). In 1998, the previous State Minister for Education Colin Barnett (now Leader of the State Opposition) offered a very open ended statement for teaching and learning innovation, saying:

Rather than being prescriptive about what must be taught, the Curriculum Framework will be used by schools to develop and implement their teaching and learning programs according to the needs and characteristics of their children. (Curriculum Council 1998, p. 3)

Therefore, within the competing political interests of the Curriculum Framework, is an opportunity for innovative teachers and schools to foster an *ecopedagogical* approach to learning within the value precepts of what could be termed as a *partnership ethic*. In 2002, with a Labor State Government and Green politicians holding influence in the Legislative Council, I see an opportunity for reform. The 1998 rhetoric of the now Liberal Leader of the Opposition, provides a political opportunity for interested teachers to promote the integration of the practical, aesthetic and intellectual potential of students in developing skills and values that accommodate an ecopedagogy. Interestingly, another political opportunity sees the Director of Murdoch *University's Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy* Professor Peter Newman, as an adviser to the Gallop Labor Government.

Although the Curriculum Framework provides a comprehensive platform for the development of an ecopedagogical approach to teaching and learning, implicit in the document are also the competing

values of outside interests. For example, the major investments by successive governments into information technology, reflects traditional interests and power structures found in the global markets and are central to employment. Also teachers interested in ecopedagogy have to be familiar with the political terms of their future promotional opportunities. A teacher who accommodates the development a program that supports corporative interests in the computer sciences and technologies, or preferred State policies, will enhance their promotional opportunities. Another obstacle that a teacher faces is that proposed innovation must deal with the many layers of conservative protocol within the state education department. An individual teacher or school group has to often negotiate complex codes and policies (protocol) that represent existing relationships of established power structures. As Down (1993) clearly explains, it is the major role of any educational process to foster the socialisation of teachers and students to accommodate the state's vested interests.

Any Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council 1998) introduced by a state authority must assume many political threads moving through its structure. Firstly it is important to realise that the Curriculum Framework has emerged out of a period of federal and state cut backs and harsh staffing rationalisations as a consequence of reactions to global perceptions of the Australian economy. Secondly that behind the positive metalanguage, there exist investments of power relationships that can serve vested interests (hegemony), and that these actual impede pedagogical reform. In advocating an *ecopedagogy*, it is important to realise that teachers not only have to challenge existing attitudes and values, but it initially they have to politically understand and negotiate the history of these values and attitudes (*social-political-ecology*).

### **The Curriculum Framework: Structuralism and Poststructuralism**

Teachers often come to appreciate that curriculum documents are process documents that include political choices at both the individual and group level. For example, an ecopedagogical approach to teaching and learning involves a particular political perception by the teacher. Any teacher-researcher can be viewed as an *organism* one that is never objectively separate to the environmental conditions of the particular environment being examined. The teacher is therefore never detached but always involved. Another daunting problem that emerges for teachers initiating an ecopedagogy is one of a metalanguage that is created by the education system, (for example the Curriculum Council 1998). I have found that many teachers see the Curriculum Framework not as a part of an analytical system, but as a set of subject categories (learning areas). The document was created by many specialist people, and it therefore tends to assume that all teachers have an equal and collective grounding on complex and diverse issues. Many generalist-teachers will experience metalanguage traps outside of their expertise. Teachers will be confronted by specialist frames of reference that engage them into interpreting abstract processes and functions linked to the document. The need to interpret the document will challenge the background boundaries of most teachers and this excludes them from exploring the framework fully. Instead of being included in a reform process, the teacher who is attempting to analyse the scope of a particular learning area or its integrative links, negotiates a framework that turns out to be a major investment in decoding complex language and structures.

N. Gough (1987, 1989 & 1994) explains the issue of understanding values and attitudes from a structuralist or post-structuralist approach. A structuralist approach to inquiry is concerned with the identification and description of specific codes and systems that people express as experiences, or sometimes specialised conceptual frameworks and meanings. For example environmental educators work

within coded structures on a day-to-day basis, for example when they consider a range of eco-political or eco-philosophical views or specific core values found in the Curriculum Framework. In contrast, post-structuralism is a form of inquiry that tends to critically examine the different classifications of stories constructed by structuralists such as semioticians, or curriculum writers. Poststructural criticism looks at the extent to which an analysis of a narrative (construction) is enmeshed in the specific processes and mechanisms that an environmental educator may be investigating. Therefore, a post-structuralist environmental educator is critical of the view that anyone can get *outside* a cultural discourse or practice to describe its rules and norms. Therefore, if a environmental educator or green-group is examining the political dynamic within society they are never separate to the process, but will always be politically involved in some way. We are always part of the social-ecology that we are trying to criticise or understand. In summary, *structuralism* tends to:

- Demand a tight framework to develop a rationale, often it is a linear approach to logic, not systems based or associative.
- Reinforces and refines the process of rationality, linearity and its own particular processes of progress and control.
- Try to discover and develop new metanarratives and then seek to tightly control the progress of its own framework through exclusion.

*Post-structuralists* on the other hand tend to be sceptical about the ability to construct tight metanarratives. For example, any curriculum document that tries to control the direction of curriculum outcomes, will at some point, be subject to the above criticism in part, and will also be caught up in its own metalanguage. For example if any one particular orientation towards teaching and learning wishes to structure a tight framework, it may exclude other disciplinary areas because of the barriers it

creates by the evolution of its own particular specialised metalanguage. (*A metalanguage assumes specialist insights and therefore for example, accessing the environmental debate for the generalist teacher will be difficult.*)

#### **Four Domains of Agreement in Environmental Thought**

A. Gough (1997) describes four domains of agreement in environmental thought. Two domains accommodate an environmental managerial system where nothing is left to chance. The other two accommodate an *ethos of eco-centredness*. The *management paradigm* includes:

- *Intervention* (this is where market foresees all and applies science).
- *Accommodation* (institutional assessment and evaluation).

The *ecocentric paradigm* includes:

- *Gaianism* (faith in nature and co-evolution).
- *Communalism* (co-operative communities based on renewable resources and low impact technologies).

All of the above accommodate a specialised environmentalist position, but each differs in the area of emphasis and the method to be engaged. Any curriculum document that includes an approach to environmentalism will most likely confront the workings of both the technocentric and the accommodation paradigms, because schools are accountable to the social reproduction of polity's preferred or existing view. Within a more liberated educational atmosphere I suggest that the *accommodation* model will offer reflective potential for reform because it has a capacity to dialogue with existing interests within the technocentric polity such as state education departments. University faculties/schools of education as well as science education departments, can lobby for managed reform from within, even though the political outcome may be described as a *shallow* approach by radical reformers. Deep ecologists, for example Naess (1989), will welcome any reform initiative, but will also be quick to point

out the links to industry and the issue of dealing with codes and structures of institutions. *Communalism* strikes a chord with the *political left* with its inclusive values and objections to excessive hierarchy in the community. *Communalism* accommodates the broader principles of *justice for all* in a community that values the environment, the mutual worth of men and women, cultural diversity and a liberal decentralised democracy. For mainstream education to move quickly towards the ideals of *communalism* in various conservative localities would normally be considered a major long-term achievement. Western Australian teachers seeking a *Gaia-centric* co-evolutionary approach for *deep reform* will possibly crash head on with the values of the dominant paradigm and therefore this would be a radical approach to reform. Within due process of a modern democracy, diverse reform processes need to be allowed to develop simultaneously. As the global ecological crisis impacts directly upon our quality of life then deeper reforms will find a greater acceptance in pockets of popular culture. We must remember that the environment in Australia has gained significant political status since the early 1980s (Lummis 2001).

A. Gough (1997) cites Eckersley who talks about the spectra of specialised ecophilosophy ranging from the ecocentric *dark greens* to the *light green anthropocentric* environmentalists. Specialised categories once again present the dilemma of a specialist metalanguage to slow down innovation and compound the problem of reform for non-specialist teachers. First, Eckersley introduces the *ecocentric dark green* realm including:

- *Autopoiesis intrinsic value theorists.*
- *Transpersonal ecologists.*
- *Ecofeminists.*

Eckersley also examines the spectra of ecopolitical thought and lists groups such as:

- *Eco-anarchists,* those who advocate the dismantling of all industrialisation.

- *Green socialists,* (many still view this approach as being anthropocentric).
- *Eco-Marxists,* which are seen to be radically more anthropocentric than the green socialists.

The *ecopolitical* groups tend to want to bring about change via the electoral process avoiding confronting the status quo from within public institutions. Those operating within the popular technocentric culture often view this political approach as a form of *green fundamentalism*. Many staunch green reformers would tend to see working for change from within the institutional structures as offering too many trade offs in personal *green ideology* whilst negotiating the hierarchical systems created by hegemony (A. Gough 1997). Educational reform, however, has to operate in the main within the public and private sectors of formal education. Teachers are able to discuss openly the diversity of thought that exists in the debate, but systemic reform and innovation would need to follow due process and the frustration of negotiating policy. Plumwood (1991 & 1993) argues that much of the approaches discussed by O’Riordan (1989) and Eckersley (1992) suffer the problem of perpetuating a dualism that become perceived as obstacles for reform. Examples include:

- Nature versus human reason.
- The concept of *self* versus *otherness*.
- Emotion versus rationality. (*All polarise the debate.*)

Again it is easy to see how the debate becomes too complex for a generalist teacher and school administrator, thus limiting consensus within a school program and therefore selecting appropriate activities for students.

### **Building a Partnership Ethic for an Ecopedagogy**

In an attempt to overcome this problem of dualism and a complexity of ideology, Merchant (1996) provides several principles to frame a *partnership ethic*. In



respect to the obstacles found in the conceptual and practical demarcations that exist in the eco-philosophical and eco-political debate this ethic offers a practical guide. I suggest that reforms have to be achieved by inclusions of diverse approaches to fostering greater sustainable practice and the promotion of deeper insights into the environmental debate. Merchant identifies three ethical frameworks where the problems of the environmental debate can be viewed as a process approach moving towards an ecopedagogy. These include the:

- *Egocentric ethic*, where radical individualism offers a few people many extravagant benefits at the expense of the majority (ecosphere).
- *Homocentric ethic*, which is a form of environmental racism where the human majority is privileged at the expense of the minorities (often indigenous, rural-domestic cultures as well as non-humans) in the pursuit of utility.
- *Ecocentric ethic*, often seen by the mainstream as an extreme form of environmentalism. This ethic accommodates a belief in a raised level of intrinsic value which attempts to privilege the whole. But this approach is often criticised for collapsing the rights of the individual, and in its most extreme kind is described as a form of *holistic fascism*.

A *partnership ethic* attempts to reach a balance between the homocentric social interest ethic and the deeper ecocentric environmental ethic. This balance rejects *radical capitalism* and the *egocentric ethic* where marginalised people and life forms are exploited. The term *partnership* avoids the problem (for some) of genderising the ecosphere as Gaia (a *mother* or *goddess*). The notion of *partnership* does avoid attributing an essential or special relationship between either males or females within the ecosphere. The notion of *partnership* also includes human generated concepts about ethical outcomes in relationship to the planet that is especially self-critical of a range of anthropocentric motives. The link between

*partnership ethic* and an ecopedagogy positions men and women in a mutual relationship with a living planet that is independent of human-created gender stereotypes. Therefore, women are not viewed as being responsible for tidying up the chaos produced by an androcentric hegemony that historically has directed science, technology, capitalism, or exploited the processes of colonialism.

Importantly, the *partnership ethic* is consistent with a post-structuralist ecopedagogy, one that includes the four key principles covering *equity, morality, respect* and *inclusion*. The *partnership ethic* also acknowledges both continuities and differences between humans and diverse life forms as an extension of the concept of relationship. (*A transpersonal ecological approach according to Fox 1988*.) These principles position an ecopedagogical framework for reform, one that seeks *authentic* appreciations of our finite, resources, time and existence (Heidegger 1927 and 1977). These principles carefully re-positions intrinsic value in a particular place, namely the Earth's ecosphere, thus fostering an ethic for a more authentic existence in preference to the excessive rational-global and market-centred position (A. Gough 1997), (Marginson 1997a and 1997b), (Soros 1998) and (Lummis (2001).

## CONCLUSION

Western Australian teachers have a Curriculum Framework that is openly empathetic to the principles of the *partnership ethic*. Schools and teachers have an opportunity to engage in diverse and stimulating *green* syllabus options and activities. From a teaching and learning perspective, the *partnership ethic* is the key to change, even if reform is initially *shallow* rather than *deep*. At the same time external to schools, I anticipate that environmental activism will continue to challenge governments, corporations, institutions and communities by a process of deconstruction. These external political pressures will generate new interest in the

complexities of the socio-ecological debate and thus securing ecopedagogical reform.

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