



Special Issue of Australian Journal of Environmental Education

Relational Ontologies and Multispecies Worlds: Transdisciplinary Possibilities for Environmental Education

Guest Editors

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Call for Manuscripts

Since its formal inception in the conservation movements of the 1960s, the field of environmental education has been well-positioned to grapple with, and attend to, affirmative relationships with the Earth. This is needed now more than ever, in response to unprecedented and wide-spread climate disruptions and the intensifying of droughts and heat domes, evaporating lakes, floods, major storms, melting glaciers and polar caps, ocean acidification, rising sea levels, and species extinction. However, globalised, neoliberal, capitalist, and colonial education systems of the West continue to persist, while reifying notions of anthropocentric bounded individualism amplifying human exceptionalism and supremacism. Agency is still too often conceived as a privilege humans ‘have,’ working to reinforce binary classifications set in hierarchical power relations. Further, amidst the growing climate crisis and threats of species extinction, progress narratives in education continue to emphasise doctrines of achievement, outcomes, and outputs. These narratives often work in opposition to developing relational care ethics with the Earth and its more-than-human inhabitants and ecosystems. As these issues persist, environmental education research is faced with a challenge to enact different ways of knowing/being/thinking/doing/feeling to be able to counter the progress narratives guiding education, and to an extent, parts of sustainability education.



As a response, the field of environmental education is increasingly turning to relational ontologies and multispecies assemblages within posthumanist and new materialist¹ orientations to educational research (e.g., Clarke & Mcphie, 2020ab; Hart & White, 2022; Jukes, 2021; Jukes & Reeves, 2020; Rautio et al., 2021). By disrupting oppositional and dualistic differences imbued with binary classifications, environmental education scholars are (re)configuring anthropocentric agency as co-constituted and co-implicated and (re)conceptualising categories, boundaries, and borders as entangled/differentiated in these times of the Anthropocene (Jukes et al., 2023; Riley & White, 2019; Riley, 2020; Somerville, 2020). Scholars are enacting such modes of inquiry by thinking with materiality and other species within more-than-human worlds (Jukes, 2020; Jukes et al., 2019, 2022ab; Morse, 2021; Stewart, 2018; Tammi & Rautio, 2022; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). Critical environmental education scholars are also de/reconstructing ‘normalising’ habits of thought (Gough, 2016; Gough & Adsit-Morris, 2020); such as possibilities for (re)defining the child with nature through the concept of childhoodnature (Crinall & Somerville, 2020; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020; Malone et al., 2020ab; Myers, 2019; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020) and sociopolitical forces of extractive capitalism and colonial relations with Land/Country/Place² and race that are approached critically through relational and sustainable solidarities and Indigenous onto-epistemologies (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Poelina et al., 2022; Riley, 2021; Riley & Proctor, 2021; Somerville, 2015). Through such processes of inquiry, environmental education scholars are bringing forth a (re)storying of environmental education (Adsit-Morris, 2017; Nxumalo & Ross, 2019; Payne et al., 2018; Rautio, 2013; Rautio et al., 2022).

Expanding upon these scholarly conversations, this Special Issue calls for manuscripts in which authors combine rigorous theorisation with intensive empirical inquiry that is situated in action and liveliness of specific and focused practices within multispecies worldings. Through

¹ We acknowledge Indigenous scholarship has a long history of relational ontologies and ethics of earthly materiality, well before Eurocentric/continental philosophy of new materialism (see: De Line, 2016; Martin, 2017; Todd, 2016; Tuck, 2014; Watts, 2013).

² Land (as a term adopted by Indigenous peoples of North America (Tuck et al., 2014), Country (as a term adopted by Indigenous Australians (Rose, 1996), and Place (as a term commonly adopted in Western perspectives) (Somerville & Green, 2015) are capitalised to indicate a primary relationship, and as something highly contextualised and specific to cultural positionings (Liboiron, 2021; Styres & Zinga, 2013). This is a move to differentiate from colonial imaginaries, in which lowercase land/country/place is generalised, universalised, and seen as a blank slate for cultural inscriptions (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017).



energetic and robust scholarship that begets new and different ways of doing research, this call for manuscripts asks authors to tackle the wicked problems of these ecologically and socially precarious times in developing living practices of inquiry in collaboration with nonhuman modes of existence. We extend this call to invite colleagues to (re)consider relationality with multispecies communities from diverse (micro) politics of location, in which radical difference and indeterminacy within multispecies relations provides the conditions of possibility for a liveable planet for all. These explorations will be in the context of a transdisciplinary and transcultural environmental education that thinks across, between and beyond (disciplinary and cultural) boundaries, borders, and categories. We acknowledge that all educational disciplines may overlap, identify with, or be vehicles for environmental education (such as outdoor education, experiential education, science education, mathematics education, visual arts, humanities and social studies, physical education, drama and performing arts, geography, history, philosophy, early childhood education, technologies, etc.) and want to highlight transdisciplinary forms of environmental education as a way to pluralise and diversify practices.

Manuscripts for this Special Issue may consider enacting the following theoretical positioning through empirical investigations with/in multispecies worlds:

- Disrupting hierarchical anthropocentrism and inequitable power relations
- Enactments of knowing/being/thinking/doing/feeling-with multispecies communities
- Ethical ways of living and learning in shared worlds
- Material/discursive entanglements that generate worldly becoming-withs
- (Micro) Politics of location and the ways socioecological inequalities implicate environmental education
- More-than-human and multispecies assemblages that position learners within distributed agencies
- Practices that build bridges between all forms of knowledge; for example, the Eurocentric cannon of posthumanist and new materialist scholarship and Indigenous Knowledges
- (Re)Considering educational concepts, such as discussing learners and learning as emergent in relational fields



- (Re)Configuring the bounded individual self within mutual constitutions and co-productive capacities
- (Re)Conceptualising of inequitable binary classifications within entangled/differentiated relationships (such as nature-culture and material-discursive continuums)
- Thinking with theory, concepts, landscapes, and diverse multispecies communities
- Transdisciplinary approaches to curriculum that work critically and creatively across the humanities, arts, and sciences
- Ways to confront the precarious ecological and social positions that many diverse human and nonhumans face.

The below reference list also includes some key literature suggestions guiding this work.

Timeline

- **Call for papers:** February 2023
- **Abstract proposals due:** July 17, 2023
- **Manuscripts due:** Dec 1, 2023
- **Publication of Special Issue:** July 2024

If you would like to propose for this call, please email your 300-400 word abstract to kathryn.riley@umanitoba.ca by July 17, 2023. We will then contact you by July 31, 2023.



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