Chapter 7
Environmental Education as/for Environmental Consciousness Raising: Insights from an Ontario Outdoor Education Centre

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Abstract Drawing on insights gained from a study of educators working together at an outdoor education centre in Ontario, Canada, this chapter aims to advance the idea that raising environmental consciousness involves connecting people to, fostering care for and building agency for their environments. Educating for the environment requires incorporating alternative education theories and providing people with personal, multidimensional experiences in the world, which are ultimately transformative. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of these ideas for environmental educators and outdoor education facilities.

7.1 Setting the Scene

While environmental education (EE) has a longstanding history in Canada (Passmore 1972), a paper published at the turn of the millennium by Constance Russell et al. (2000) suggested that EE was by and large an inconspicuous or restrained endeavour. Since then, however, spurred by the general acceptance of human-caused environmental change, and in accord with many countries (e.g. Australia, Japan, United Kingdom and United States of America), EE has gained substantial interest across Canada.

Although EE has been an element of Ontario schooling (in different forms and degrees) over the last few decades, it was brought to the forefront of educational concerns in 2007 by the Ontario Working Group for Environmental Education's

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report “Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future: Environmental Education in Ontario Schools” (commonly referred to as the Bondar Report). This report unequivocally acknowledged environmental degradation “as a matter of increasingly urgent concern around the world” and described schools as having “a vital role to play in preparing our young people to take their place as informed, engaged and empowered citizens who will be pivotal in shaping the future of our communities, our province, our country, and our global environment” (p. 1). It urged immediate action to expand environmental education efforts and recommended the formation of partnerships among formal and informal sectors (e.g. schools, school boards, university research groups, environmental organizations and outdoor education centres), justifying these as necessary to providing environmental learning opportunities for all students. In the years since the release of this landmark report, several sectors within the province have responded to encourage EE in various ways. For example, Ontario’s Ministry of Education created the document “Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow” to serve as a policy framework for infusing EE into the province’s schools (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009). It has also made efforts to translate these policies into practice by integrating EE into official curriculum guidelines for kindergarten to high school teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education 2011). Additionally, a number of non-formal educational organizations have strengthened their programmes and sought to establish stronger links with the formal education sector to provide diverse EE opportunities for students. For example, government ministries including Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada have developed web-based educational resources that are freely accessible to educators and students, while private organisations such as Earth Rangers, Evergreen and EcoSchools provide EE programmes, mentorship programmes and learning resources for K–12 schools. A comprehensive list of these EE opportunities and efforts can be found in the document “Ready, Set, Green” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2007).

Yet, despite this flurry of activities, it is unclear how successful efforts have been in bringing about environmental teaching and learning. The few existing studies designed to explore the impact of EE in Ontario classrooms (e.g. Pedretti and Nazir 2014) suggest that a number of challenges – philosophical, cultural and practical – still hamper its successful pedagogical practice. Among other things, these studies note that teachers still find the following particularly troublesome to their EE efforts: understanding the relationship of EE to the rest of the curriculum, lack of pedagogical knowledge about enacting certain aspects of EE (especially action/activism) and limited opportunities for meaningful student interactions with the natural world. These findings indicate a problem that many scholars of EE have written about (e.g. Kahn 2008), that is, the need for forms of EE that take into account the complexities of classrooms, learners and environmental issues. In this chapter, we explore the consideration of EE as/for environmental consciousness raising and specifically through our work with EE at one outdoor education facility in Ontario, Canada.

7.2 Turning Ecological Ethics in Life Practice: Four Theories

Environmental consciousness raising is a term that has been used for some time now in EE forums (e.g. Krause 1993). While in the past it had been equated with knowledge and/or awareness of environmental issues (e.g. Santopietro 1995) or the performance of prescribed environmentally friendly behaviours such as recycling (Schlegelmilch et al. 1996), a review of more recent literature indicates that this is changing (e.g. Stevenson et al. 2013). Inherent to these newer conceptions is the understanding of humans as complex, existential beings of intentional consciousness and the concept of education as a process of change, which can only be brought about by multiple, personally tailored experiences. With this in mind, Arjen Wals and Justin Dillon (2013), for example, suggest that new constructions of EE should focus on transforming people from their existing ways of being to ways that support the long-term sustainable well-being of the Earth in all its fullness. Heesoon Bai and Serenna Romanycia (2013) capture this spirit of environmental consciousness raising when they say that EE is really about "turning ecological ethics into life practice" (p. 105) or, in other words, making ecological principles into habits of mind, body, spirit and heart. Supporters of this latter understanding of EE also point out that many mainstream programmes tend to focus on the cognitive, rational development of people, and to some extent emotional development, while other multidimensional aspects, that is, the physical and spiritual aspects of human consciousness, are largely ignored. Bronwyn Davies (2013) alludes to the significant embodied physicality of learning that traditional approaches to EE often ignore, while David Greenwood (2013) suggests that a significant aspect of raising environmental consciousness requires providing people with contextual embodied experiences, or simply put, deep mind-body-heart experiences. Bai and Romanycia (2013) further provide examples of how physical–spiritual exercises like mindfulness, yoga and meditation can work to bring people to environmental enlightenment.

Additionally, literature in the field of curriculum studies reveals a number of theories that are in sympathy with education for environmental consciousness raising as introduced above. In this section, we offer four of these theories for further consideration – holistic education, ethics of care, transformative learning and experiential learning with the belief that they will help the reader to gain a deeper understanding of what environmental consciousness raising means.

7.2.1 Educating for the Whole Person

Holism is the idea that the world is a seamless, dynamic, interconnected whole of which we humans are a part (Miller 2007). Holism accepts that humans are multidimensional beings with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects, and that knowledge while complex is ultimately integrated into a seamless whole as well. The main goal of holistic education is to bring students, who often see themselves

as fragmented, to a balanced, connected and inclusive relationship with the whole by educating the whole person. Many scholars have connected holistic education to EE. For example, John Miller (2007) describes nature as dynamic and connected and explains that an aspect of holistic education is to bring students to an awareness of nature's wholeness and their place in it.

7.2.2 Developing an Ethic of Compassionate Care

In 1977, Carol Gilligan disrupted the field of ethics by making the observation that emotion and intuition, rather than rational reasoning, is a foundation from which many people make ethical decisions. Gilligan (1977) defined ethics of care as deciding what is best for one's immediate relational group based on feelings of attachment and the need to maintain relationships. Nel Noddings (2002), one of the main scholars who have applied Gilligan's work to education, describes care-based education as relational, that is, making the themes of attachment, interdependence, the connected self and responsiveness to others central to the educative process. The focus is on educating the emotions – teaching students to be competent carers and sensitive cared – so that they can conceptualize problems in a more compassionate way and genuinely seek to find out what is best for all in a particular situation. It is important to note that ethics of care go beyond building rationally justifiable affection or concern and in so doing offer a different axiological base upon which people can build different relationships with environments, entities and non-human others. Applied to EE, several scholars (e.g. Martin 2007) suggest that students should be encouraged to recognize the Earth as a living entity who sustains human life and in turn respond to form a relational bond with her, as one would with a loved Other.

7.2.3 Experiential Learning

Theories of experiential learning emphasize the personal and active processes of coming to know. According to David Kolb (1984), experiential learning consists of four processes: concrete experience with phenomena, observation and reflection, forming of new knowledge and the application and testing of new concepts in new situations. While all four processes are important, for many advocates, the focus of experiential learning is on concrete, personal experience with phenomena (e.g. Breunig 2008). Over the years, distinguishing educative experience from superficial experience has been a major thrust. In this regard, Clifford Knapp (1992) suggests educative experiences should involve meaningful, challenging interactions with phenomena in real-world settings, while Peter Higgins and Robbie Nicol (2011) state that experience must involve multidimensional engagement of the mind, emotions and senses. Experiential learning has found expression in EE most clearly in the about-in-for model of EE (Lucas 1979). This model suggests that direct contact/

experience with surroundings is essential to students' environmental learning by bringing about appreciation for nature and providing concrete experiences of doing environmentally friendly actions.

7.2.4 Transformative Learning

Supporters of transformative learning insist that more than passing along facts, true learning should bring about deep changes that move people to new and positive ways of being. For example, Edmund O'Sullivan (2003) states, "Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world" (p. 237). Applied to EE, this understanding of transformative learning suggests that pedagogy for environmental learning should focus on bringing about learner transformation rather than passing along facts and skills.

While theories of holistic education, ethics of care, experiential learning and transformative learning differ in their individual details, they share certain underlying premises. They all suggest that human nature is complex, existential and intentional and that environmental educators need to take these characteristics of the human condition into account in their conception and practice of EE. In our study of outdoor educators' work with EE, we found these theories particularly salient in interpreting educators' understandings and activities with respect to EE and in coming to the conclusion that they are working from an attitude of EE as environmental consciousness raising (as introduced earlier in this chapter).

7.3 The Uneasy Relationship Between Outdoor and Environmental Education

This study of EE occurred within the context of an outdoor education centre (OEC). For many, the kinship between outdoor education and environmental education is obvious. Russell et al. (2000) describe outdoor/nature-based programmes as one of "the diversity of narratives" (p. 207) through which EE is practiced in Canada. Lucie Sauvé (2005) another well-established Canadian environmental scholar states:

> Outdoor education is one of the most effective means of learning about/within the natural world and imparting an understanding of nature's inherent right to exist by and for itself–humankind's place in nature being definable only in context of this ethos. (p. 14)

Andrea Foster and Grant Linney (2007), speaking on behalf of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO), assert:

> Early sequenced and repeated experiences in the outdoors [help students] develop a kinship with nature that can evolve into an informed, proactive, and lifelong stewardship of our natural environment. (p. 53)

Yet, despite such positive popular endorsement, a thorough review of the scholarly literature suggests that the relationship between outdoor education and EE is not as straightforward as some imply. Indeed, there are scholars who doubt the compatibility between the two fields. Chris Loynes (2002) and Annette Gough (2007), for example, argue that much of what occurs in mainstream outdoor education is outdoor skill development, physical fitness and interpersonal development, and that the activities associated with these promote environmentally detrimental rather than environmentally positive relationships with nature. Furthermore, according to Loynes (2002), in mainstream outdoor education "nature is understood as an assault course, gymnasium or puzzle to be resolved and controlled. It is a resource to be commodified instead of a home to which to relate" (p. 3). According to Alison Lugg and Dierdre Slattery (2003), in many mainstream outdoor education contexts, EE is limited to minimum impact behaviour and aesthetic appreciation of outdoor settings.

As much as these criticisms concerning the compatibility between outdoor and EE may be true for some contexts, they are at variance with our understanding and experience of environmental and outdoor education. Outdoor education programmes in Canada have long been associated with EE (Russell et al. 2000). Further, in a previous research study we conducted (Pedretti and Nazir 2014), Canadian educators expressed a strong belief that there is a significant overlap between outdoor and environmental education and expressed a longing for the provision of more outdoor opportunities to engage students in environmental learning. In a bid to further understand the relationship between outdoor and environmental education in the Canadian context, we conducted this study of outdoor educators' work with EE at Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre (pseudonym). We believe the analysis and results of this study will be of interest to environmental and outdoor educators anywhere, both theoretically and practically.

7.4 Doing Environmental Education at Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre

Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre is located in a large city in Ontario, Canada. It is owned and operated by a major provincial school board. The facility, which has been used for outdoor educational purposes for over 50 years, consists of 55 ha of natural green space encompassing meadow, forest, marsh and river habitats. Faraway Dale is a day centre (as opposed to a residential centre) and serves the urban and suburban student population within its vicinity. It accommodates over 1,700 elementary-aged students from 150 schools on visits throughout the school year. Faraway Dale has been mandated by its parent organization to provide EE as part of its educational efforts. However, other than minimal guidelines, it has been

left to educators at the facility to interpret what this means and develop appropriate pedagogy to fulfil this mandate. In response, over 50 modified/self-generated programmes (e.g. Earth Repair Projects, Hiking in Nature, Measuring Biodiversity, Exploring Textures in Nature, Physical Patterns in the Changing World, Snowshoeing, Collaborating with Nature and Habitats and Communities) are offered at Faraway Dale. The overarching principle governing programmes is that they should provide cohesive, impactful sequences of outdoor activities to meet the centre's mandated purposes, including EE.

We chose to study the nature of EE at Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre by examining the lived experiences of nine educators who had each worked there at the time for at least 10 years. We refer to the four men and five women who participated in the study with the following pseudonyms: Bruce, Danny, Keith, Trevor, Carol, Kelly, Nesha, Arlene and Ellen. Data collection took place over a period of 5 months during which we visited the centre regularly on daylong visits at least twice every week. Four data collecting strategies were used on these visits: two semi-structured interviews with participants, field notes of outdoor education sessions, participant journals, and collection of relevant artefacts (e.g. documents, pictures, and memorabilia); at the end of data collection, we had over 500 pages of documented data. Next, we applied established qualitative data analysis procedures suitable for analysing human experience (e.g. Polkinghorne 1989) to illuminate the nature of EE at the centre. Environmental education as/for environmental consciousness raising emerged as an overarching theme of this analysis. Participants' experiences provide deeper understandings of what this concept is and how it can be translated into pedagogical practice.

7.4.1 Educators' Insights About Raising Environmental Consciousness

At the beginning of the research process, we asked educators at Faraway Dale the following question: "What is Environmental Education?" Their responses suggest that they were working from an understanding of EE as environmental consciousness raising, with an emphasis on turning ecological ethics into practice or action:

> [EE] is when your actions support what you say… that you walk your talk. It means I am bringing in my mug, not a cup that I am going to throw away every day. (Nesha, Interview 1)

> …to me it's [EE is] about internal changes. It's not about don't pick and pull the branches because we are watching you. It's about... because you feel a connection for the tree. And then it doesn't matter where [students] are. They're not going to do it because they care and see the harm they might cause. (Arlene, Interview 1)

Talk about "walking your talk" and not harming nature because "someone is watching you" indicates that for these educators, EE is about transforming people intrinsically and nurturing more relational interactions among people and nature rather

than simply bringing about prescribed, extrinsically motivated actions. Additionally, comments such as "feeling a connection" demonstrate educators' commitment to environmental consciousness raising as opposed to simply passing along the rational canons of knowledge about the living world.

As the research process continued, Faraway Dale educators' theoretical and practical understandings of EE as consciousness raising became clearer to us. These took the form of three salient structures: connecting people to the environment, fostering compassionate care for the environment, and building agency for living low consumption life styles. Below, we expand on each of these structures and illustrate how they are enacted through exemplar pedagogical practices.

7.4.2 Connecting People to the Environment

For these educators, connecting refers to the formation of a personal, tangible, multidimensional bond with nature. Furthermore this bond is positive, natural and comfortable much like the bond that ties a mother to an unborn child. Consider the following comments concerning the meaning of connecting to nature:

> Connection means finding your place. I think it means seeing where you belong. And that's not about looking down and going, "Here I am and there is everything". But standing where you are and going, "This is my world. This is the air I breathe. This is the water I drink." And knowing there is a whole world out there that you can live in, and be, and prosper–and it doesn't involve money and status. It involves touching, and smelling, and looking and feeling in your heart, "This is where I belong". (Keith, Interview 1)

> You can teach about the natural world and how it works, but connecting is more than that. It's that peace and being within yourself that nature provides in a unique way. (Trevor, Interview, 1)

An example of how connecting with nature is encouraged at Faraway Dale is through the Hug-a-Tree activity. This activity takes place during a hike in a forested area. As researchers, we were fortunate to witness it on several field visits with different educators. On these occasions, Hug-a-Tree usually occurred after students had learned how to identify a tree. Students were simply invited to identify a particular tree and give it a hug. While some students were initially sceptical about hugging a tree, on each occasion we saw it, those that ended up doing it seemed pleasantly gladdened having done so. As Trevor offered, "In some ways tree–hugging is a bit silly. But at the same time you're hugging a tree. It's intimate and you're connected to it. You open yourself up to something when you do that" (Trevor, Field Visit 1). For us, the activity highlights these educators' understanding of environmental education as more than a rational cognitive process – in this case the need to physically touch as part of the process of coming to know. Pondered more deeply, educators' comments and the pedagogical example suggest that connecting is really about nurturing a holistic relationship with the world, which requires

multidimensional, authentic experience in the world as suggested by holistic education and experiential educational theories discussed earlier in the chapter.

7.4.3 Encouraging Compassionate Care

Based on Faraway Dale's outdoor educators' practices, experiences and responses, it seems that they believe that part of their job is to encourage the development of compassionate carers and sensitive cared for:

> I think it's important for [the students] to understand how to care for nature and the Earth as they would for a family member. (Carol, Interview 1)

> Faraway Dale is a place for students to encounter nature face–to–face, brain–to–brain and heart–to–heart so they can connect and build a caring relationship with her. (Arlene, Journal)

Further, their understanding of care is highly reflective of Noddings' (2002) ideas of care-based education outlined earlier. Care is encouraged amongst students and provided to students by educators. Applied to EE, educators encourage visiting students to recognize nature as a living Other that sustains human life and to respond sensitively and positively to form a caring relationship with her. Moreover, students are not expected to rationalize why they should care but rather to do so naturally from a place of emotional depth.

Educators at Faraway Dale infuse the notion of care across programmes in several ways. At the beginning of each educational session students are explicitly introduced to care as an appropriate stance to adopt toward human and non-human others while at the centre. Educators also encourage care by modelling it themselves. With students they are sensitive, gentle and responsive. Out in the environment, they are careful not to step on saplings and tree roots, stick to pathways so as to be as undisruptive as possible, remove bits of garbage they find in the forest and handle wild animals only if they need to. They also overtly recognize and praise instances when students demonstrate care. Across the research process, we came to realize that the notion of compassionate care may be one of the fundamental ideas about the overall nature of education that educators in this context hold. Keith made this clear in explaining his educational philosophy: "We all need to feel like we're something and that we are cared for" (Keith, Interview 1).

7.4.4 Building Agency

The third structure of environmental consciousness raising that emerged from our work with educators at Faraway Dale was building agency for the environment. For these educators, building agency was crucial and involved providing concrete

experiences of interacting with the environment in ways that are more benign. According to one of the participants:

> Most environmental programs are naked of the fact of how to act for the Earth. Don't do this and don't do that rather than turning it around to show what we should be doing. (Carol, Interview 1)

Faraway Dale educators always include one agency building activity as part of the programme with every visiting group to the centre. One such activity was the Earth Repair Project (ERP), which allows students to participate in a concrete way to ameliorate human caused damage on the facility's grounds. An ERP can take many forms, for example, restoring pathways, planting butterfly or medicinal gardens, controlling invasive species, and afforestation. During data collection, we observed restoring pathways through woodchipping on several occasions. For this activity, students are brought to an eroded pathway. Here, they observe degradation of the pathway. The method of resurfacing the path with a layer of woodchips is demonstrated. Students are then provided with simple equipment (e.g. buckets, shovels and a pile of woodchips) and tasked with resurfacing a given length of pathway. Next, they are invited to experience the resurfaced pathway and share their thoughts and feelings (both positive and negative) about the activity. According to educators at Faraway Dale these concrete, interactive experiences scaffold students in their movement from wanting and thinking about acting for the environment, to feeling empowered to do so, if they are so inclined. In Danny's words:

> Having them [the students] do woodchipping on a path helps them to feel that they are part of something greater, something beyond themselves. And it teaches them to look for instances where they can help to take care of the Earth around them. (Danny, Fieldnotes from Field Visit 2)

These ideas resonate with those described in experiential and transformative learning theories. The hope is that visitors are experiencing more authentic forms of EE (Kahn 2008) and are slowly beginning to alter their ways of being in the world (O'Sullivan 2003).

7.5 Looking Forward

It is often lamented in Ontario (e.g. Pedretti and Nazir 2014) and elsewhere (e.g. Rickinson 2001) that despite much effort the efficacy of existing EE programmes is dubious. Over the years, partly in response to this problem, the nature and practice of EE have been questioned. Many have asked what it means to be environmentally educated and have come up with various responses. While recent formulations of EE tend to focus on getting people to think deeply and critically about environmental concepts and issues (e.g. Kahn 2008), others have suggested that these, along with other forms of EE, stem from an incomplete view of people as primarily cognitive-rational or mainly thinking entities (e.g. Davies 2013). Where other dimensions such as emotion and physical action are included in the educative process, they are often

treated as subservient to thinking. Indeed, a popular underpinning framework for many forms of EE is the know-concern-act model which assumes that knowing about the environment in a technical/rational way will lead to an appropriate feeling of concern for it, which will in turn act as a motivator for positive environmental actions (e.g. Hungerford et al. 1983). In agreement with those who see these assumptions as problematic, we support a formulation of EE that takes into account the complex aspects of human nature, particularly the notion that humans are beings made up of mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects and that all of these must explicitly be taken into account in any EE endeavour. We suggest that EE as/for environmental consciousness raising as we have described at the beginning of this chapter embraces these ideas. Further by linking the ideas of environmental scholars to relevant curriculum theories (i.e. holistic education, ethics of care, experiential learning and transformative learning) we have endeavoured to strengthen the theoretical base for viewing EE as/for environmental consciousness raising.

Further, we suggest that the work of outdoor educators at Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre advances our understanding of what this type of environmental consciousness raising means in practice. It does so in two ways: (1) by unpacking the term into the structures of connecting, care and agency and (2) by providing concrete examples of pedagogical activities for accomplishing these structures. Connecting, care and agency inherently take into account the complex nature of humans and the interpretation of education as a process of transformation which seeks to bring about deep changes in consciousness (O'Sullivan 2003). More than cognitive-rational knowing, connecting implies the formation of a personal, tangible bond with nature. More than concern, care for environments arises out of an ethic of compassion and originates from a place of emotion and spirit. Rather than prescribing actions for the environment, agency is about empowering students by building the motivation and skills to act or not act in ways they personally choose. In an outdoor context, accomplishing these structures translates into pedagogical practices that provide personal, contextually relevant, multidimensional experiences (i.e. involving mind, body, emotions and spirit) in the real world.

Conceptualizing EE as a process of this type of environmental consciousness raising has implications for different audiences. For many environmental educators and researchers, it will require a shift in ideology with respect to the nature of the human being and the educative process. To facilitate this shift, what may be most needed is personal experience of learning that not only emphasizes the cognitive rational aspect but also honours learning through the body, emotions and spirit, similar to what we have described as common practice at Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre. In other words, educators may need to experience alternative educational processes and be transformed themselves before they can begin to fully understand the nature of environmental consciousness raising and pedagogies that support it.

For outdoor education workers and its supporters, this notion of EE as/for environmental consciousness raising also opens an exciting avenue. It establishes more concretely the link between outdoor and environmental education by demonstrating how education in the outdoors is necessary to environmental learning by providing powerful educative and transformative experiences. It provides outdoor educators

with structures and theories they can work with as they continue to develop their own EE programmes. This is important especially in a time when the question of relevance is an issue that existing outdoor education centres are increasingly being asked to respond to. One strong response that such facilities can make is that they are essential for providing students with the kinds of personal, multidimensional experiences with the natural world required to build connections, care and agency for the environment and ultimately raising students' environmental consciousness.

Questions

Discussion questions that could help instructors and students to engage in meaningful conversation about the ideas presented in this chapter.

1. In "setting the scene", what underlying problem(s) do the authors acknowledge as their impetus for writing the chapter? Do these problem(s) resonate in your situation and if so, how?
2. What are the salient features of "environmental consciousness raising" according to the authors?
3. How does the reported study of Faraway Dale Outdoor Education Centre deepen your understanding of environmental education as/for consciousness raising?
4. How might an environmental educator in a non-outdoor setting include the notion of consciousness raising into her/his pedagogical practice?

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