

# The “EcoTardis”: Charting the early stages of a secondary school participatory action research (PAR) project in post-colonial eco-place pedagogies

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## Abstract

In this (purportedly) Anthropocene epoch, are schools meaningfully learning with ‘Earth in mind’? This paper explores the early stages of a participatory action research (PAR) project in an inner-urban Melbourne secondary school generating a postcolonial, place-responsive, ecopedagogy framework. The project, dubbed the “EcoTardis” by the research group, is made up of the author-researcher, two school teachers, the student Environment Team and a pod of students in an elective class. This paper depicts how a small intergenerational research group configures the process of making sense of the state of our planet, in our local places, through transdisciplinary school learning.

The research process takes place over at least one school year to allow time and reflective space for the iterative PAR process of planning, acting-observing, reflecting and planning anew. The project has now morphed into a ‘pilot’ elective subject, initially running for one term, developing our place-responsive ecopedagogy framework within the temporal constrictions of a school timetable. In the process of dreaming this into being, the importance of local Indigenous knowledge and stories has come to the fore, as well as the role of the more-than-human members of the local community as explored through arts-based methodologies, engendering ecoliteracy, ecophilia, ecojustice, and emplacing the notion of ecological consciousness.

Weaving through the lived, embodied, material, messy and profound assemblages in the project thus far, this paper expounds the early insights in transforming education research ecopedagogically.

Key words: Ecopedagogy; Participatory Action Research (PAR); postcolonial place pedagogies; school-based education research; more-than-human/posthuman/compost research

## Introduction: Making Sense and Ecosensibilities

One warm day when I was about 10, I was bushwalking with my family in the scrub around Bittangabee on the SE coast of NSW, where we have camped every summer for 40 years. On this particular day, I heard an odd sound in the bush – a foreign sound that I'd never heard before. I wasn't sure anyone had ever heard it before.

I wondered if it was some kind of machine here in the middle of nowhere; a strange person, or even a mythical beast? It sounded impossible, but others did hear it and soon my Auntie hazarded the guess that it must be a lyrebird.

And it was.

A bird, an extraordinary bird, that we glimpsed only fleetingly before it potted off, camouflaged in the scrub. In some enchanted inversion of biomimicry, this incredible Australian was impersonating a noisy boat that had just a few moments earlier scooted around a headland of the bay.

This is partially where my love of life, of the Earth in all its wonders was cultivated, and in the micro worlds of rock pools and in the drama of ocean waves hitting rock walls. As well as these salt water biomes of SE NSW, it was my home bioregion of freshwater lakes, rivers and reed beds in East Gippsland—Gunaikurnai Country— that indelibly marks the turning of my young childhood curiosity into awareness, love, a sense of responsibility and appreciation of the indelible connections. This captures but a fragment of my growing ecophilic sensibility – learning to love the living Earth by learning how to consciously inhabit my local place in ways that are at least benign if not beneficial and, preferably, beautiful.

This research project embarks on fieldwork equipped with the hypothesis that ecophilia – love and connection with the Earth, through our local places – is perhaps the missing ingredient in school-based ecopedagogy. It is the sense of wonder, of awe in the beauty and enchantment with the wondrous workings of the interwoven living systems, that seems to nurture an ethic of empathetic connectivity, response-ability (Fisher, 2006) and an ecological consciousness of the ineffable *relationships* between all Earth members and matter. Yet, importantly, this research is concerned with a deep 'dark' ecophilia, in contrast to a sheer veneer or Romantic overture to a flimsy, one-sided, humancentric "Nature" desire (for critical discussion on this unseemly propensity see Payne, 2014, p.51).

*Biophilia* was described by biologist EO Wilson as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life" (Wilson, 1984, p. 85). Erich Fromm (1973) earlier described it more poignantly, in the context of this study, as "the passionate love of life and of all that is alive" (Fromm, pp. 365-366). Environmental educator and scholar David W Orr (1994) asserts that "biophilia first takes root" in childhood and requires more meaningful encounters with outside-of-school places and time to play in 'wild', unstructured places during the school day (Orr, 1994, p. 205). Sobel (1996) introduced the variation *ecophilia*, which seems to me to capture the *ecological relationality* of all living and non-living things in the ecosphere, rather than the *biological* boundaries of discrete living things.

In this vein, *ecophilia* becomes one current weaving alongside *ecoliteracy* and *ecojustice* in this project's ecopedagogy framework, which intends to generate a more critical-creative approach to environmental/sustainability education.

My professional experience as a classroom teacher, school sustainability coordinator, community eco-educator, university teacher in Environment and Sustainability Education, and early career researcher in ecopedagogies, signposts my ongoing passion for ecological place learning and living. For me, this impetus has come as much from an ecophilic sensibility as from an ongoing frustration that after 13 years of school, many students emerge without even a rudimentary knowledge of their local places or intimate ecological intelligence.

The motivations propelling this study are multipronged: To participate in research in a local school by engaging with an emergent framework; to add to the literature and empirical data in school ecopedagogies and pedagogies of place as well as the participatory action research literature; and it is also a meta-study in the ever-emergent approaches to doing the whole process of academic research in more permeable, postcritical, postcolonial, posthuman (more-than-human) ways. As such, this research is concerned with “breaking the inevitability of the linear, breaking causality and determinism...Opening up to the fold, to the circular, to the return” (Somerville, 2007b, p. 239) in ways that are cognisant of *all* participants and potential pedagogues in the school's place and through the course of the project.

This project is thus posed in the pluralistic processes of disrupting the privileging of Eurocentric concepts (Whitehouse, Watkin Lui, Sellwood, Barrett, & Chigeza, 2014, p. 66); attempting to offer an alternative to current dominant forms of school education, and contextualising interdisciplinary learning in place-responsive, critical and creative ways while co-assembling new material and metaphysical spaces in our school ecologies.

## LITERATURE BODIES

### *Ecological Ontologies, interdisciplinary learning and praxis*

This study's interpretation of place pedagogies and PAR works with concepts of place, praxis, power and politics through *ecological ontologies*. The importance of the *onto-ecological* turn is partially framed by Thomas Berry (1999) who describes ecology not as a course or a program, but rather as “the foundation of all courses, all programs, and all professions because ecology is a functional cosmology” (Berry, 1999, p. 84). It is this insight that provides the roots for this school based ecological education, because it addresses the problem of ecology as currently absent in schools in a cosmological/ontological sense. As such, this study critically engages with teacher praxis in constructing lived ecopedagogies, place-responsive localised learning and the materiality of student-teacher-researcher participation.

Praxis is the process of enacting theories and philosophies—conceptual frameworks in action. In the context of education in this study, it is enlivening pedagogies by teaching attentively in embodied, creative, connective ways that thus have the potential to facilitate transformative ecological learning. Parker Palmer (1998) lucidly describes a sort of interdisciplinary praxis, asserting that “good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that their students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (Palmer, 1998, p. 11).

Similarly Marcus Bussey provides a “sustainable praxis” (Bussey, 2008, p. 145) that extends from the inner worlds of teachers, to the manifestations of our consciousness into actions. As such, praxis is framed ontologically by Bussey who describes that in order to teach sustainability his praxis must be *lived* sustainability (itself *sustainable*) through a fluid being-doing-teaching within the pragmatic yet intersubjective reality of schools. In Bussey's transformative frame teachers *are* their consciousness, they *enact* their consciousness, and therefore they *teach* their consciousness (Bussey, 2008, p. 140). This may conjure a fixed image of a pedagogue that perhaps cycles to school, is connected to the local community and place, engages in interdisciplinary, arts-based methodologies and is *real*, approachable and egalitarian. Yet in the non-deterministic frame of ecopedagogy, an authentic praxis is not one but many, a “loose, multiple and thoroughly intimate” (Bussey, 2008, p. 139) embodied approach that is personally idiosyncratic and context dependent [see also (Bonnett, 2006; Le Grange, 2004)].

### *What's in a name? Situating Ecological Education*

All education is environmental education...By what is included or excluded we teach students that they are part of or apart from the natural world. David W Orr (1994, p. 52)

This study uses the term and engages conceptually with the paradigm of *ecological* education as it befits the whole systems paradigm at the heart of this research. Ecological education more fully addresses a whole school pedagogical approach rather than being limited by curriculum boundaries — it is not just teaching students *about* ecology (though that is included) but embedding ecological ways of thinking, being and becoming across whole systems in schools. This study posits *how ecological are our ecopedagogies?* Including Orr's (1994) seminal work *Earth in Mind*, there is much adjunct literature that broadens and deepens environmental, sustainability, eco education to whole school systems in conceptually transformative ways (see for example: Bussey, 2008; Dyer, 2007; Green, Somerville, & Potts, 2013; Payne, 2015; Piersol, 2013; Zandvliet, 2013).

Some scholars philosophically prefer the term Environmental Education (EE) over the more contemporary paradigm of sustainability and in particular Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The development frame seems to have been superimposed onto schools across the globe through bodies such as the UN, rather than emerging from pedagogical research (Jucker, 2004; Selby, 2006; Sterling, 2001). The development paradigm is contested ground that is incompatible with local ecological education as 'development' thinking limits learning to implicitly hierarchical constructs that can breed a "managerialist and technicist" (Selby, 2006, p. 355) approach to school learning, rather than one which is transformative and locally embedded (Bowers, 2006 ; Mumford, 1970; Orr, 1994).

Bob Jickling (1992, 1999, 2001) has long argued against reducing environmental education to the political trends of the day. Later partnering with Arjen Wals (Jickling & Wals, 2012; 2008), they collectively "take offence at prescriptive constructions such as 'education *for* sustainable development' that reduce the conceptual space for self-determination, autonomy, and alternative ways of thinking" (Jickling & Wals, 2008, p. 3). In part, it is this call to engage with alternative ways of thinking through local ecopedagogy in schools that propels this study. Along with a number of other scholars in this field (see for example Bowers, 2001; Huckle, 2014; Jucker, 2004; Selby, 2006; Tuck, 2013) they caution against the "homogenizing tendencies" of neoliberal global policy movements concerned with 'performativity' and increasing standardization, and instead offer imaginings of school through more place particular ways that reclaim school-based agency.

Even if we de-coupled 'development' from Efs (the term that is preferred in the literature and curriculum documents in Australia), or opt for Sterling's compelling *sustainable* education (Sterling, 2001), 'sustainability' as an education framework is likewise limited and beset with its own problems in the context of this study. Ec literacy champion Fritjof Capra cautions that the term 'sustainable' has been "so overused, and so often *misused*, that it is important to state clearly how we understand it" (Capra, 2005, p. xiii) but how 'we' understand sustainability in policy (Whitehouse et al., 2014) much

less through school practices in schools across the country, is haphazard and replete with insufficiencies (AESAs, 2014).

Ecopedagogy breaks through the ‘noise’ as it is less dependent on macro political trends. Sterling (2010) asserts that “the notion of an ecological worldview and sensibility arises from the identification of ecology as an ontological metaphor, to contrast with the underlying Newtonian metaphor of mechanism which informs modernist thought” (Sterling, pp. 1-2) (see also Bateson, 1979; Capra, 2005; Meadows, 2001; Sachs, 1999).

Ecopedagogy is much more than sustainability; it is more encompassing, more spirited, more critical and more beautiful, including the heights of cosmology, the breadths of local food production and the depths of liminal connections with the Earth by cultivating lasting, intimate relationships with our local places. It is visionary and inspiring, active and egalitarian, generative and long-lasting (Kahn, 2010a, 2010b; Lucksinger, 2014; Payne, 2015). Paradoxically, it seems that if we merely aim for a ‘sustainable Earth’ we are unlikely to achieve it, as it doesn’t seem to be inspiring or engendering the kind of action, feeling or ethic required to “get there”.

Ecopedagogy has been grasped through the frames of ecoliteracy (Capra, 2005; Orr, 1992; Stone & Barlow, 2005), ecojustice education (C. A. Bowers, 2001; Jucker, 2004; Mueller, 2008, 2009) and ecophilia, (Sobel, 1996), which includes a sense of wonder (Carson, 1965; Dyer, 2007; Piersol, 2013) and ecological imagination (Abram, 1997; Payne, 2010). Ecopedagogy was originally conceived through the emancipatory tradition of South American/Freirian participatory action research, with Ecophilia, Ecoliteracy and Ecojustice are three concepts that will be further developed in the methodology as the ecopedagogy framework that guides this research.

### *Making Places and Place Pedagogies*

The classroom shouldn't be a place of four walls – it should be the great world.

—John Marsden (2004)

*Place* provides the context for the ecopedagogy framework in this study; it is a common thread weaving through ecophilia, ecoliteracy and ecojustice learning. Being in our local places, amongst our nonhuman cousins, ignites our imagination, sense of wonder and a love of Earth that helps generate our relationships and bonds that will hold through our lives. What constitutes ‘place’ and how it is significant for education is the underlying question that has been at the heart of place-based pedagogical research over the last few decades and guides the way I conceptualise the pedagogical potential of our places (Gough, 2008) in this research project.

There are numerous approaches to pedagogies of place. These are variously known as *place-based education* (Gruenewald, 2005; Smith, 2002b, 2011 ; Sobel, 2004), *place-conscious education*

(Gruenewald, 2003b; Somerville, 2010), *critical pedagogy of place* (Gruenewald, 2003a), *place-responsive education* (Cameron, 2005; Gough, 2008), *sense of place* (Kincheloe, McKinley, Lim, & Barton, 2006; Lim & Barton, 2006; Sobel, 1997), *bioregional education* (Hensley, 2011; Howard, 2012), and *educating for the Commons* (Bowers, 2006 ; Bowers, 2009). *Learning Outside the Classroom* (LOTCC) in UK (Tomlinson, 2007) and Outdoor Education are also adjunct to place pedagogies, as well as more generalised EE. This study takes its lead from many of these incarnations, especially critical, place-responsive and place-conscious pedagogies as well the school and community literatures of a sense of place.

Much of Margaret Somerville’s research with schools brings to bear three “essential elements of place pedagogy” (2010, p. 342)—that our relationship to place is constituted in stories and other representations; that place learning is local and embodied; and that deep place learning occurs in a contact zone of contestation, which are those edgy spaces that offer “fertile shadowy possibilities” (Bussey, 2008, p. 139). In Australia we arguably have an intrinsic “contact zone of contestation” – living, learning and being/becoming in the ancient, storied lands of Indigenous Australians that are still contested. “We do not live in an unstoried land”, writes local place scholar Jan Morgan (2013), “the people have stories, and the land has stories and these stories are inextricable, human and ecological, mutually embedded. We have much to learn” (Morgan, 2013, p. 14). It is partially this learning to be in our places in material-metaphysical ways during our school years that might go some way to building stronger relationships between the many peoples of this land and the many other-than-human members of our places. Thus this PAR project participates in the process of deconstructing colonial stories of our places and cogenerating enlivened postcolonial futures.

Somerville proposes that “place can offer an important framework for an integrated educational curriculum” (2010, p. 331) which provides compelling incentive to engage with a school in this research that is open to this interdisciplinary process. The school selected for this project offers a more fluid way of doing secondary school, which includes starting to use their place, particularly the local creek, as a catalyst for action and a site for multi-disciplinary learning. The school is both place-conscious and open to experimenting with a radically reimagined pedagogical approach.

David Orr likewise argues that “the study of place enables us to widen our focus to examine the interrelationships between disciplines and to lengthen our perception of time” (Orr, 1992, p. 129) and the notion of temporality to this study is important. This ecological PAR project will look towards *slowing down* the school day; having more time and space to sit with ideas and projects for longer, cultivating more contemplative, connected learning experiences for all participants.

### *A place for Stories?*

The role stories have in place-responsive pedagogies is contested grounds. McKinley describes place as “a palimpsest – a parchment where successive generations have inscribed and re-inscribed the process of history” (Kincheloe et al., 2006, p. 145). Much like Jan Morgan captured previously, McKinley paints the picture of a multi storied land and offers a metaphor of place *as stories unfolding*. Our local places may become a purposive pedagogical “parchment” on/in which our cultural, ecological and cosmological stories can emerge during the school day thus assembling a postcolonial reinhabitation of our places through an embodied, experiential, decolonized pedagogy (hooks, 1994). In this study, place pedagogies are implicated in the very processes of cogenerating (hi)stories; ways of being/becoming in the Earth that are anchored in a place specific and temporally conscious process, understanding “place and time as continuing on from the past into the here and now” (Nakata, 2010, p. 54).

In this process, dualistic assumptions of human/nature, place/person are exposed and the need to recognise not just the eco-geo-physiological place as being colonized, but the people *as part of* our places being colonized through place domination. If we take the need to decolonize our places seriously, as Gruenewald (2003) urges, alongside the cultural and psycho-spiritual decolonization of indigenous peoples, then we must also decolonize our stories of places in order to reinhabit and regenerate multi-storied and eco-socially beneficial stories of our places as well as (re)inhabiting our places with our decolonized (gentler/not domineering) bodies.

While there has been a “privileging of the intellect in research and pedagogy” (Barrett, 2007) and enplaced, arts-based ways of learning require more serious space in school learning, interdisciplinary ecopedagogy is methodologically plural and engages with intellectual, affective, somatic, emotional, metaphysical ways of knowing, learning and becoming in reciprocal feedback loops. In this vein, Somerville poetically mounts a case for ontological place learning through storied, relational and embodied experiences—

Place is known through the senses, through the body, and the subtle pedagogies of layered storying which every place contains. Writing about place is an ontological act, producing the self at the same time as writing the words...it is like being on the edge of the cliff, always shaping new words to make a bridge into that space (Somerville, 2013b, p. 19).

This at once frames the place pedagogy of this study as a fluid praxis; as part of an emerging critical ecological ontology (Payne, P.G., 1995) and as postcolonial meaning-making. This study does not privilege any one way of knowing and learning in our local places and is thus situated in new materialist (Barad, 2007) ways of engaging with place through the material, in the grounded ‘terrain’ of schools, and the metaphysical, through language, stories and other representations of our local



places (Somerville, 2007a) at particular times.

The critical-conscious process of deterritorializing our local places at schools in order to reterritorialize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Grosz, 2008) in cogenerative ways, is important to this study as it brings to life the sometimes intangible notion of power—the power of stories and stories of power that have perpetuated in this place, in the pedagogies, in the curriculum and the ‘hidden curriculum’ of colonial buildings, colonial values and that is wilfully ignorant of other ways of meaning-making (Whitehouse, 2011; Whitehouse et al., 2014).

This discussion is intended to help crystalize how the school’s local place will be woven through the pedagogies in ecoliteracies, ecophilia and ecojustice learning experiences in embodied, interdisciplinary ways that may become pedagogically (and ontologically) transformative. We each have our own particular stories of particular places at particular times, and these emerging stories play an intimate role in the process of ‘getting to know’ our bioregions, fellow kin (other people and Earth others) *and* ourselves. There is not one way to experience a place; what is ‘common’ to us are the biogeographic-ecological places and yet these places are also multiple and intersubjectively assembled so there is never one static, ‘true’ place. In addition to this, our *relationships* with those places are perpetually nuanced and change over time. This relational reciprocity of places, emerging relationships with our local place and stories of place, will be an ongoing thread through this PAR project – how these specific secondary school students and teachers come to relate to their place; learn in, about, for and with their local place and how this benefits both their learning as well as the other-than-human members of the place, is deeply significant to this PAR project.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Overarching Approach: Participatory Action Research (PAR)*

Both Participatory Action Research and ecojustice are anchored in equity, power, agency and politics (Bowers, 2001; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kemmis, 2013). This project is concurrently oriented in issues of ecojustice—actively seeking a space in the study for the multiple manifestations of Earth/Gaia; it is attentive to issues of human rights and social justice on a macro scale, as well as the equitable relationships and roles of all participants *within* this PAR team and the other members of the school. In this project, social justice will thenceforth be conceived of as contemporaneous within the broader notion of ecojustice, Earth justice or ‘Earth jurisprudence’ which is an emerging philosophy of law and human governance based on the idea that humans are only one part of a wider community of beings and that the welfare of each member of the Earth community is dependent on the welfare of the Earth as a whole (Cullinan, 2011, p. 13).

While this poses some problems for the parameters of a PhD project, it is ecojustice or Earth-justice

(specifically in our *particular bioregional places*) that provides the central “problem” to this project, and more practicably, how a school learns and teaches for, about, and in that space. “It is the greatest irony of human progress”, writes Stephen Kemmis (2013)—

that as humanity has increased its control of nature it has become immeasurably more vulnerable to the power and products of human thought itself...Our social gains have been equivocal: Enlightenment and egalitarianism have failed, thus far, to achieve a rational, just and fulfilling world order (p. 139).

Kemmis here provides a critical and guiding reflection for this study but note the “thus far”; it is the work of this project to act, in a community of practice and along with other research, to fill this void and generate ecologically thriving futures in school education.

### *The Many Approaches to PAR (in a nebulous nutshell)*

Interpretations of PAR vary somewhat from what might be considered ‘pure’ (critical) PAR, to more fluid or adaptive notions. Yet there are certain common characteristics, including an egalitarian intentionality and the iterative nature of the approach. McTaggart (1997) describes PAR as a confluence of participatory research with action research (AR) that embeds the researcher in a participatory act with other researchers. He argues that the addition of *participatory* to AR in a critical, embodied and/or emancipatory context is very important to differentiate it from the ubiquitous notions of ‘action research’ that are now employed “to describe almost every research effort and method under the sun that attempts to inform action in some way” (McTaggart, 1997, p. 1).

This project is closely aligned with Glassman and Erdem’s (2014) interpretation of PAR. They examine the sometimes hierarchical and rigid issues entrenched in the tradition stemming from Action Research (AR). They frame their understanding of an emancipatory/critical PAR as “PAR/VPC” to differentiate it from the other interpretations of participatory or action research. “VPC” refers to the Spanish ‘vivencia’, ‘praxis’ and ‘conscientization’, which loosely translate as ‘research’, ‘action’ and ‘participation’ respectively. However the cultural nuances are more carefully contextualised by Glassman and Erdem who situate this version of PAR in a community-based/adult education movement actively concerned with social transformation in South America at a particular time. For example, ‘research’ in this context is conceptualised as the embedded or multidimensional *lived experience* of those participating in the research. They assert that this tradition of PAR/VPC pre-dates Freire (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 210), yet Freire and fellow researchers developed it much more thoroughly, particularly in their realisation of ‘praxis’ as theory-informing-action/action-informing-theory.

Freirian PAR counters both the notion that consciousness is a ‘static’ configuration of ‘objective reality’ *and* the human-centric, egoist or esoteric notion that the world is a creation of our own personal consciousness. This kind of PAR has much in common with new materialisms (Barad, 2007)

in which critical reflection is already an action – through reflecting critically, we are acting; acting and reflecting, ‘matter and meaning’, are indelibly connected. So PAR might be considered a material-semiotic implosion of a lived/active and ongoing process in which ‘reflection without action is sheer verbalism or armchair revolution and action without reflection is pure activism, or action for action's sake’ (Freire, 1972, p. 41). And thus, praxis is born – living the learning and learning to live. In acting-reflecting or critically being-becoming, each curb in the process illuminates and propels the other until they are indistinguishably entangled in a generative mess of possibility. Through this creative-critical praxis, a postcritical ecological consciousness might emerge, leading to a commitment to establishing long-term justice.

By weaving together this flavour of PAR – steeped in power redistribution, establishing horizontal relationships with both the human participants within the research process and the more-than-human members of the school's local community – and the ecopedagogical acts of learning in the local place in ways that are at the very least *benign* (sustainable), preferably mutually *beneficial* to all actors in any place by learning place particular ecological knowledge, and even *beautiful* by engaging with the local community (its human and more-than-human inhabitants) to cogenerate arts-based ways of cogenerating thriving stories.

According to Reason and Bradbury (2006), while it may seem gallingly obvious that research is about change in schools—and by extension that there is a problem that precipitates the change—schools can be very conservative organisms and loathe to make the serious, structural and systemic changes arguably required for our educational and ecological futures. Schools in Melbourne are beset with multiple governance structures, controls and priorities – the School Council, the Regional education department, the State (central) education department, State and Federal funding, as well as local government laws. There is a tendency to suppress diverse, non-standardized approaches to pedagogy in government schools and thus a state ordained status quo tends to emerge. This project is not interested in a shallow kind of ‘change management’ in school education; it is oriented around transformative changes through localised participation and ecopedagogy; embodying pedagogy, learning and all aspects of school in significantly different and locally constructed ways.

### *The PAR Process*

PAR is a “democratization of research processes” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 209) which presents a way to guide the direction this research project will take – opening up the whole process from the dreaming/design/planning stage to all participants in the project especially the key teacher/coresearcher, focus students, and myself, but also the school leadership (principal staff, lead teachers) the school council, and other members of the community, through to the planning > action > reflection > re-planning stages of the project. The PAR research process is critically crystalized by Glassman and Erdem as “a cycle of continuous exploration and understanding, an ongoing cycle of *action as*

*praxis, research as conscientization, and reflection leading to transformation of praxis*—all within the context of *vivencia* (lived experience)” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 214). This is an explicitly iterative process which also requires ongoing active participant observation by the key participants in each stage of the process. Thus, fieldwork will commence earlier in the project cycle than in other PhD research projects as the participants are key to the whole research process, including the design.

The nature of PAR is emergent, iterative and open, so too is the ecological framework; they are each process-based, fluid and explicitly unpredictable. As such, the traditionally closed, predetermined procedure for ‘conducting’ research, is here unbridled and henceforth all that is certain is the imperative to welcome a space of unknowingness, in a liminal zone of researching in collaboration with a team of co-researchers (teacher and student participants) in a “site of intense possibility as well as uncertainty” (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. viii), embodied intentionally in the assembling of local, place-responsive, interdisciplinary, ecological learning.

What distinguishes PAR from traditional research is to embrace all participants’ expertise, agency and voices, as well as reinterpreting the traditional boundaries of ‘the researcher’ as a facilitator and co-participant in an iterative research process. In this PAR process, knowledge is redefined “as actions in pursuit of social justice” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6) and PAR is “based on action at least as much as reflection” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 210), and yet because of this “its dynamism is hard to capture in a static report” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 210) such as a PhD thesis. This connects with a more emergent, poststructural process of generating data and meaning-making (Somerville, 2007b). By employing Richardson’s writing-as-a-method-of-inquiry (Richardson, 2005), the process of reflecting on and interpreting ‘the data’ in this study will be produced in an ongoing basis throughout the entire process of this PhD not just as a final, “static report”.

The PAR team in this study are assembled in the vein of Cammarota and Fine’s (2008) emphasis that research is a “collective process enriched by the multiple perspectives of several researchers working together” (2008, p. 5). They argue that knowledge generation in PAR is active, not passive and as such the data generated potentially becomes a “launching pad for ideas, actions, plans, and strategies to initiate social change” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6).

In many ways this ecopedagogy project and the methodology are part of the same critical-transformative process and hence PAR fits as the symbiotic approach to this project, as it is also an objective to inform new ways of approaching research in schools. This researcher is motivated by the incentive that “at its best, PAR opens up a space for a critical, multi-generational dialogue about research itself” and one that “looks beyond the rarefied university walls” (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. viii). I likewise heed the cautionary note that “none of this is easy work” yet because of/in spite of this it is utterly exhilarating as PAR invites the researcher to flow in the liminal “in between” spaces (Dimitriadis, 2008). This (almost too neatly) frames PAR *as* ecological, in which

researcher/participants “imaginatively link” personal problems and issues to broader social, political, and economic forces and pressures in a nested system and simultaneously work to transform them (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. viii).

Further PAR is “a relational praxis of knowledge cogeneration and a springboard for social action” (Definney & Ball, in press, p. 2) and thus it becomes ontologically authentic in this research; it becomes not just a methodological approach to ‘conducting research’ but *a way of being in the world* both structurally and personally (Maguire, 2006, p. 61) that flows fluidly and connects seamlessly with my woman-researcher-mother-citizen identity. Thus, this study holds that a “major guiding theme is connectivity” (Rose, 2004) and that—

an ontology of connectivity entails mutual causality: organism and environment modify each other. Relations between organism and environment are recursive...The imperative of learning to think about and with connectivity can be operationalized as an imperative to enlarge the boundaries of thought and the enlarge thinking itself – to enhance our ability to think in dialogue and, perhaps, in empathy with other. (Rose, 2004).

#### *Conceptual Framework: EcoEnchanted Education*

At its core, the purposes of learning in this ecopedagogy are to cultivate ecological intelligences in students, teachers and the school community in interdisciplinary ways, over time. The three themes of Ecophilia, Ecoliteracy and Ecojustice are discussed to varying degrees in EE and adjunct literature, but they are brought together in this study, complimenting and weaving through each other; each filling the potential gaps left by the others. This ecopedagogy framework engages schools in learning to live in our places in this Earth in cogenerative ways that are long lasting and provide clear alternatives to some currently unsustainable trends in schools that engage in managerialism and ignore the urgency of Climate Change (Kagawa & Selby, 2010; Selby & Kagawa, 2010). This guiding framework provides some openings for this project but it is not intended as a one-size-fits-all prescription for implementation in all schools. Thus the loose question driving this study is *How does a school community engage in local, interdisciplinary ecological education (EE) through a longitudinal PAR project?*

And some possible implications of this project are:

- What is the likelihood of ongoing commitment to locally placed, interdisciplinary ecopedagogy at this school and how will this be supported?
- What are future possibilities of this approach – can the learnings from this project inform individual teacher praxis? Pedagogy and curriculum development of the whole school? Potentially other schools?

### *'Thinking Through Country'*

It is the work of all educators to become actively aware and engage with local indigenous cultures for our collective (educational) futures, and for a more honest context of our (hi)stories, but it is duly acknowledged as a road fraught with issues of appropriation, colonial guilt and/or uncertainty. Jan Morgan cogently argues that “Indigenous stories profoundly challenge our Western perception of the world. We have inherited a view of the world as inert, as non-communicative, non-subject, a view diametrically opposed to a world in which humans are not the only speaking subjects, a world that communicates, that calls into dialogue” (Morgan, 2013, p. 20). Subsuming ancient practices, is wrought with (re)colonising in a more subtle yet potentially insidious way, so I echo Haraway’s cautioning of the “serious danger of romanticising and/or appropriating the visions of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions” (Haraway, 1991, p. 191). Further “to ‘see’ from marginalised or subjugated locations is neither easily learned nor unproblematic” (Gough, 2008, p. 73) and yet ‘leaving it alone’ is no longer adequate according to this postcolonial research. Within this study a relational, ecological ontology means getting to know the *peoples* and their many stories of our places; the many *pasts* of the place as well as assembling our own relationships with our local places and “revitalizing” the cultural-ecological commons (Bowers, 2009).

This study intends to respectfully engage with Somerville’s methodological ‘thinking through Country’ (Somerville, 2013a) as a way of breaking through the staid colonial notions of place as inertly one-dimensional, and engaging with local Woiwurrung educators in collectively deepening the school’s praxis of place and ecopedagogy through traditional ecological knowledges as well as postcritical, spiritual, neohumanist (Bussey, 2005, 2008), ontological, cosmological connectivity and more beautiful, slow, gentle experientialism.

This current epoch, tentatively dubbed the Anthropocene, recognises the extent to which humans and human behaviour has impacted the whole Earth and how we are now “facing Gaia” (Latour, 2013). Somerville argues that framing the Anthropocene in a sense of responsibility can act as “a provocation for interdisciplinary conversations” (Somerville, 2014, p. 401) to engage in research in more sustainably interconnected ways. Somerville has worked with many different indigenous communities and individuals in interdisciplinary knowledge-making through diverse, postcolonial and creative research projects that generate new ways of knowing and inhabiting our places at this time (see for example Somerville, 2013b; Somerville, 2014; Somerville & Perkins, 2010; Whitehouse, Watkin Lui, Sellwood, Barrett, & Chigeza, 2014). In this context, interdisciplinarity grasps the entwined and fluid relationship of Indigenous peoples with place, Country, and all aspects of life, living, cultural practices and meaning-making.

### *Site – school Context*

The school participating in this project offers a more fluid and somewhat less siloed way of doing

secondary school. Since reopening in 2004, it has offered a cross-discipline, inquiry-based, team-planning approach to its year 7 and 8 program; it has begun to integrate sustainability approaches across different aspects of the school; it is starting to use their place, particularly the local creek, as a site for multi-disciplinary learning, having forged team teaching relationships between science and art classes in year 9. Critically, this school has developed a curriculum based Feminist studies unit and justice group, through an informal PAR process over the last two years. The connections and significance of this will be further discussed in future articles. All university, government and school based ethics requirements were completed for this project.

### *Assumptions & Limitations*

This research is framed at the planetary level in climate change and the ecological crisis – widespread species extinctions, ongoing deforestation, plastic pollution in every pocket of the globe, agricultural despoliation of waterways and soil, neonicotinoids and extensive bee decline, sprawl, unprecedented glacial/ice melts, oil spills, atmospheric particulate air pollution, animal subjugation as well as vast social inequities and the global refugee crisis including a surge in climate refugees. This study claims that research that dangerously ignores the significance, severity and connections of the ecological crisis with all parts of life and learning, lacks relevance to deepening pedagogical insight at this time.

My researcher bias will be ‘checked’ by all other members of the PAR team, but it is none-the-less still an issue of power as the final thesis will be based on my interpretations and choices of what to include and omit. Involving all the participants in reflections and initial data analysis during the PAR project, as well as revisiting the school and meeting with the team after my initial data analysis and final member-checking, will allow the participants to further cogenerate and verify my ‘accounts’.

Like all research this study has blind spots and, necessarily, blank spots; in participating in ecopedagogy research I recognise the limits of my intersubjective praxis and the reflexive implications of being an actor in this PAR project. As facilitator-researcher I am a part of *that which is researched*, as new knowledge is cogenerated by and through me within a team of co-researchers. This PAR process is thus research as “an embodied performance” Gough (2002, p. 7), as “data are not ‘out there’ waiting to be ‘discovered’, but are actively produced or constructed by researchers”. And this embodied and reflexively implicative process is arguably never more acutely apropos than in Participatory Action Research (J. Cammarota, & Fine, M., 2008; Definney & Ball, in press; Glassman & Erdem, 2014; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McTaggart, 1997). In this post-qualitative/new materialist way of researching, there is an imperative to face the many layers of power (Gerrard, Rudolph, Sriprakash, 2016) the insidious forms of oppression and agentive capacity of all participants, now and very importantly, historically, in this context conscious research. Likewise, criticisms of a Eurocentric hegemonic tendency in place-based pedagogies and ‘sustainability’ education generally, that maintains a “colonial/imperial history which so much current ahistorical scholarship perpetuates”

(Payne, P.G. personal communication, November 20, 2014), will be critically addressed in future articles and the impending thesis but further discussion here is not possible in the limited scope of this piece.

### *Significance or potential contributions*

This project aims to contribute to both the theoretical and empirical understandings of local ecological learning in schools. The empirical data generated in this PAR will provide particular, placed insights into the broader research that conceptualise schooling as concerned with generating sustainable, peaceable and fruitful futures in our places through tangible and locally relevant means. In this time of climate change, this localised, eco-education project offers urgently needed empirical research for teachers and whole schools to offer their students an education equipped to deal with their future lives in “facing Gaia” (Latour, 2013).

There is a growing body of international literature in pedagogical philosophy that considers this juncture of localised knowledges and place-responsive, emergent ecopedagogies (Nakagawa & Payne, 2015; Somerville, 2010; Payne, 2009; Bussey, 2008; McKinley, 2007; Ellsworth, 2004; Gruenewald, 2003) and this project draws on these sources among many others, but it also generates stories yet untold in the growing ecological educational ‘compost’ (Haraway, 2016).

This research is particularly pertinent in bringing together school-based place responsive ecopedagogies *through* Participatory Action Research which is a surprisingly uncommon marriage in the empirical data (Green et al., 2013) and yet fertile and mutually symbiotic.

### **Early Days in the “Field”**

*At the beginning, fieldwork is very exciting for this early career researcher. Then it starts to get messy. Then it becomes quite scary. Then there is a lull. And then, for this researcher at least, it becomes even more exciting – when you stick with it and break through to the other side of ‘what might be’. To paraphrase Margaret Somerville (2013b), it is like being at the edge of a territory and having the courage to generate unfamiliar ways of navigating further into the unknown depths of that territory.*

In my first few months at the school, known as “EcoTardis High” (for the purposes of anonymity in this project), my main co-researcher comrade, “Anja”, and I searched for a fertile place in which to situate this research project and from which to navigate the PAR process. Anja (a science and English teacher and the school’s ‘sustainability coordinator’), suggested we might start with the Enviro Team. The group started the previous year when most of them were in year 7, fresh off the back of ‘positive environmental experiences’ in their various primary schools. The Team met initially weekly, during lunchtime on a Tuesday. The lunch meetings were attended by three to nine female students. While the group was



initiated by these passionate students, they look to Anja to ‘direct’ their actions or at least provide the form of the meetings and actions. And while this propensity to ‘subordinate’ themselves to an ‘authority figure’ flies in the face of this school’s egalitarian ethos, this manifestly demonstrates the implicit power plays and macro layers of young people’s subjugation by authoritarian school regimes over time. While to some degree such skewed power positions still exist in some schools in Australia today, this is not the case at EcoTardis High that consistently and authentically embodies a very strong commitment to establishing horizontal, mutually respectful relationships with all (human) members of the school community. The ‘tone is set’ from leadership, with the principal staff giving teachers immense autonomy and trusting their pedagogical direction. Illustrative of this point is the remarkable freedom-trust this research project has been given and continues to enjoy.

When I first visited the school, and wandered around the corridors during class times, I could seldom distinguish the teacher from the students, such was the seamlessly constructed collaborative learning. Having come from a primary school teaching background with the far more overt age-power-differential and my relative unfamiliarity with *adolescent bodies in a learning environment*, this power dynamic provided a fresh embodied example of school pedagogy. The Enviro Team was thus, not short of big ideas that flowed freely.

*Field notes, 22/03/2016*

*What strikes me is the quite incredible degree of awareness, understanding of complex concepts and capacity to communicate, articulate and build on “messy” areas of ecological overlap.*

*There is one student in particular, “Robin”, who manages to express a deeply connective understanding of the layered nature of ecological bodies, which often renders “Anja” and I speechless. I feel that she could facilitate this group as a powerful educator for her peers.*

After a term of meeting weekly, with much constructive discussion around the roles and logistics of setting up the research project, in accordance with PAR processes, we otherwise made little headway into enacting any dreams for either ecological activism/ecojustice or ecoliteracy within learning contexts. When Anja and I suggested we might morph into an elective subject the next term, a rich discussion ensued. It crystallised with this quite insight from “Robin”, an eloquent year 8, female student who is a very active member of the group –

I think we should let it be what it is and see how it goes, and sort of what it does, and if it turns into something else then that’s great, but if it doesn’t, that’s okay too.

This reveals quite a clear grasp of the fluidity of ecological thinking and likewise a strong sense of security in an openness to the unknowing – welcoming, even inviting, a creative, emergent process. The structural decision we came to is that we would maintain Tuesday

lunchtime meetings for the ecojustice work of school based actions, then also meet on Fridays to ‘dream into being’ the broader research project, what was unanimously and uproariously named the “EcoTardis” – the medium through which we were to engage with ecopedagogical hopes for the school over time. After another term of these fertile musings, it further spread its tendrils, morphing into an elective subject, called ‘Green Monsters’.

### The Material Messiness of ‘Green Monsters’: Wonder-Wandering to the Creek

“We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible” (Haraway 1988, 196).

This study cannot understate the importance of actually getting outside and *regularly* even if the weather seems inclement. As the reportedly northern European axiom goes ‘There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing’. The students always come prepared with adequate clothes and sturdy shoes but we also take a bunch of ponchos, as well as plastic mats (the base inserts of ‘green’ shopping bags) to sit on while we’re journaling. The material-metaphysical power of sitting on the ground, in the Riparian zone next to the Creek – soil on our pants and in the grooves of our soles, leaves in our hands and under a magnifying glass, flowers pressed into journals, a breeze on our cheeks and the sun’s warmth on our backs, cannot be devalued as trivial, insignificant or not *worth the effort*. ‘Experiential education’ writes Payne (2014, p.49), aims for participants to ‘temporarily become other than what they had been positioned as “educationally”’ (Payne, 2014, p.49). That is, getting outdoors, *out of the door*, enables – or at least opens to the possibility – of students *and* teachers, getting out of their implicit, assumed roles and is thus more fertile ground from which to explore exciting emplaced pedagogical possibilities which encourage more-than-cognitive (McIntosh, 2016) ways of meaning-making.

Accompanying Anja (in a role of teacher mentor) for this elective subject, is another science teacher “Bruce”. Both he and Anja are remarkably brave and consistently embrace the creative unfolding of the emergent boundaries of this ‘subject’, both in the details of each session as well as in the supra structure and reflexivity of the bigger research project. They are each, in their own ways, enthusiastic, creative, knowledgeable, warm and incredibly democratic with these young people. If it weren’t for these two powerful pedagogues and the school philosophy that affords them freedom to make their own programs, this project could not have spread its rhizomic tendrils into the curriculum space.

Walking down to the Creek, to the designated ‘meeting place’ that we ‘discovered’ in the first session, one student, “Nathan”, says ‘I love this subject...we don’t really do anything – we just walk and talk and draw and sit near the creek and stuff’. Lily agrees –

‘Yeah I really like it ‘cause it’s just really good to be like out of the class and outside and have the fresh air and the space. It’s just not stressy like lots of things are, I worry about at the moment’.

At the Creek, rock hopping and exploring, I ask “Jeremy” one of the less engaged students how he’s finding this term –

‘Well I am more into this subject than most [subjects] ‘cause like, at least we can just, like, be outside and like explore the rocks on the Creek and stuff’.

Later one of the more contemplative students, “Anatoly” muses –

‘We do find out about stuff too but it’s just more peaceful to just *be* out here’.

And weeks later, as we sit on the rocks by the subtle rapids with the trickling and burbling, one of the least engaged students “Trina”, talks about how she never thought of this place as ‘special...just dirty... I never get time to do this. Just to, like, chill. Without nothingk else to, like, think about.’

This encounter, along with a discussion about how ‘stressed out’ even year 9 students are at the pressure mounting to study ‘all the time’ and pick subjects that will *DETERMINE THEIR FUTURE*, impresses on me the desperate need to slow down and be present to the bigger systems of the Earth, to very particular more-than-human others in their local places and to their own selves. As we wandered back from a walk down to an overhead bridge, “Penny” a year 10 student, enthusiastically reflected on her term last year (in year 9) at the Alpine School<sup>1</sup>, saying ‘being outside was really awesome. I got really motivated to just do it more, like all the time...[but] we learnt as much about ourselves as we did about the Earth and, like, sustainability and stuff...I think that getting to know ourselves and how we think and learn is even more important cause we’ll have that wherever we are, into the future’.

When I query Nathan about what he meant by ‘don’t really do anything’ he speaks about this elective being different from other subjects that ‘make you do’ set requirements with purportedly more rigid outcomes. I ask him to compare this subject to other electives which might be somewhat looser than main subjects but he said it was more like “Hands On Learning”, (an experiential, interdisciplinary program offered to students at the school with learning or behavior needs, run three days a week to students on a rotation due to the demand and lack of funding to resource it in a fulltime capacity). I wonder how ecopedagogy-based electives offered at this school in the future might cater more for this clear demand – a way for disengaged students who predominantly learn affectively, somatically and/or kinesthetically to actively engage in learning and feel more accepted/celebrated in this school space.

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<sup>1</sup> A school campus for year 9 students from government schools across Victoria, for which there is a selection process. There are now two additional campuses - Snowy River Campus at Marlo and the Gnurad Gundidj Campus at Glenormiston in Victoria's Western District. This is the only such initiative for government schools in Australia.

But is this enough? Or do we require a firmer framework that consolidates a more concerted ecological education through various subject areas and school systems over time? There are also intricate implications for power distribution and agentic capacities in learning encounters here that require further discussion in subsequent articles.

## **Emplaced Pedagogical Futures: Early “findings”/makings**

In this place where I live, work and research, north west of the Yarra—Woiwurrung Country, ecopedagogy includes stories of local members of the Merri Creek community, including the River Red Gum. As we wander in our Green Monster elective, I recall ‘information’ I have heard and read (especially Bill Gammage’s lyrical ‘The Biggest Estate on Earth’, 2011, and Bruce Pascoe’s important ‘Dark Emu’, 2014), and try to capture these details at the ‘right time’, in the ‘right way’ to mildly curious students. As we stop to harvest a fallen gum leaf, I speak about the magic of Eucalypts that change their leaf shape over their lives. I invite the students in – ‘why would they be round and face up to the sun when they’re young?’ A confident male student, “Stan” suggests ‘to get enough energy to grow’. Then later the leaves become long and droop down. ‘What is the gum’s priority now’, I add, ‘in this dry land?’ ‘To get enough water – maybe if the leaves point down to the roots to help it drink’, Penny enthusiastically suggests. And we find an example of a sapling Eucalypt that has indeed got the evidence growing of each of these stages – round leaves on its lower limbs, and lanceolot further up.

Later, inspired by Gammage, I tell them in so many words that “most eucalypts have another trick, their bark not only heals wounds, but revives trees seemingly dead. It snakes from the ground up a dead trunk, then sprouts buds. In time branches hold and the dead trunk is covered anew. Many eucalypts may be much older than we assume” (2011, p. 116). This captures the students (eco)imagination and engages them materially in *making sense* in lived, multisensory and *beautiful* ways *in* the biome of their local waterway, right now. This may be their/our intimate way into the magic of the Earth. This fleshy, embodied immersion in our local outdoor places regularly and over time, might remind us materially of the bigger body in which our bodies exist and emerge. While there are metaphysical-ontological spaces offered in this subject – arts approaches to reflect and communicate the students’ feelings, wonderings, dreams – it is in being physically situated within the rich outdoor living biome that connects the otherwise abstracted intellectual investigations with lived, somatic, polysensory experiences –

walking, exploring, testing; sitting, drawing, writing; wondering-waandering-wondering...

This metaphysical-material interplay and rhythm, seems to be constructing a context in which to nurture an emotionally connected commitment to *interbeing* and a third space amongst our human bodies, the trees and grasses, the creek and ducks, the bridge, bicyclists and stormwater drains, and the ways each relate to the others; the threads of relationships weaving through each one, the many and

the whole. Like a Bower bird's mating ground of connected though disparate, meaningful and beautiful, though seemingly random artifacts, our bodies are placed at the alter of the Earth's vastness. Our 'meeting place' in this urban, partially 'regenerated' riparian zone of the Merri Creek, acts as a sort of portal into the Earth's 'mathematical sublime' (Kant), the ever-ness of the ecosphere and a stilling point in the heavily inhabited surrounds for encounters with slow, interdisciplinary elearning over time (Payne, 2014).

While the current forces the waters of the Merri from north to the Birrarung downstream and then onto the Bay and the Sea and the Ocean, we regularly lose track of time, *lose ourselves in Earth time* and become at once primordial bodies bouyed by the biome's beauty, but also contemporary citizens increasingly mindful of our behaviours in and impact on this place and in turn impact on us by this place. This place has acted on us as we have on it. It – this multibodied, multistoried, emergent place – is agential. The more-than-human/posthuman community of this school's less recognised boundaries, is teaching us at least as much as anything we learn *about* "it". In this place, these young people are beginning to open anew to their more-than-intellectual ways of making meaning; they are learning about how they like to learn, about their own dreams and imaginings; becoming more intune with their own bodies and how they move around fallen branches and bushes and river rocks; and importantly, they are opening to *others*, through the bodies of this riparian biome.

This takes bravery, foresight, creative openness and a willingness to hold space and welcome silence; to be patient and persevere with pluralistic ways of engaging with our place in this place, by both the students and very importantly – if these learnings are to be sustained – the teachers. It insists on developing the conviction to ward off a reductive propensity rife in secondary schooling to compartmentalise learning, have structured expectations and set outcomes. So far this research project seems to have engendered these behaviours and attitudes in these participants. There is courage in the individuals who are prepared to teach into this new, unknown, emergent trial subject; there is courage in the individuals who chose to participate in this class and show up each session; there is courage from the school leaders who trusted this process; and there is a sort of collective courage and conviction that propels us back to the emerging spaces in our meeting place on the Merri twice a week, rain, hail or shine.

What has become very clear in this project and particularly in this current iteration of the elective subject, is that the researchers in this project inhabit a liminal space of experimentation and vulnerability in "working from the perspective that they may not actually understand what they think they understand" (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 209), including myself – the academic researcher. The PAR being assembled in this project, actively deconstructs traditional research roles in that it is "especially committed to the idea of shifting researchers' role from that of "expert" to that of "facilitator"" (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 215). This notion is supported by critical Youth PAR

(YPAR) literature which asserts that “PAR is intimately concerned with extending the notion of the so-called ‘expert’ to encompass a wider notion of stakeholders” (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. xiii). I have been de-centred from the singular role of expert and others have come into this space, espically Anja, the teacher co-researcher. What has become apparent, is that while the young people participating in this research have a more active role in the construction of their learning than is conventional, the subjects of oppression (in this particular project) are not the students (as in YPAR), but the *ecosystem* – the local place; and the learning for, about and in that place – the *ecopedagogy* itself. For the most part, Anja and myself as co-researcher/facilitators have brought this voice to the ‘table’.

In this vein, we continue to embark on the slow yet steady process of engaging with potentially transformative learning, in which ‘the well-being of the entire earth community is the primary project’ writes David Selby (1999, p. 131) and where ‘its curriculum and pedagogy offers a new cosmology, a widened and permeable sense of self, and a radically different orientation to quality of life issues’. This is just the introductory chapter in an exciting new story of pedagogical possibilities actively emerging at this school. This project and broader story of the school’s burgeoning ecopedagogy is permeating the fabric of the school structure on a strategic level, pointing towards a revisioning of all learning through locally immersive, interdisciplinary, arts based ecopedagogy. In the short term, lessons from Green Monsters are informing a new elective to run next term, this time structured formally around Art, Science and the Merri Creek. It is this confluence – arguably the most important work right now of scientific inquiry and arts-based ways of responding and communicating, based in our local places – that seems to be engendering a critical ecological ontology not shying away from or denying the mass ecospheric crisis but geared in “staying with the trouble” (Harway, 2016) in order to assemble inspired, post-Anthropocene, mutually beatific, regenerative educational stories.

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