

# Sharing Environmental Education Stories: A Critical Incident in a Canadian Community

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## Abstract

In this article I present environmental education as a sharing of contested stories about the human-nature relationship. I suggest that the most vigorous story telling occurs in non-formal and informal education, and the contestation reflects polarised environmental ideologies. By way of introduction, and in keeping with my experiential epistemology, I summarise my own environmental education story. For the major part of the paper I try to do the same for a Canadian urban community, using the listening, observing and reflective strategies of an ethnographic evaluation research methodology. I identify five major themes, or discourses, relating to the way the Peterborough community is addressing its human-nature relationship. In terms of the evaluation part of my methodology, I make two observations: one concerned with who will be the “keeper” of Peterborough’s environmental values, and the other about how “green” these values will be.

## Résumé

Dans cet article, je présente l'éducation relative à l'environnement comme un échange d'histoires contestées à propos des relations personne-nature. Je suggère que la narration la plus énergique d'histoire se déroule en éducation non formelle et que la contestation reflète des idéologies environnementales polarisées. En guise d'introduction, et en lien avec mon épistémologie expérientielle, je résume ma propre histoire d'éducation relative à l'environnement. J'effectue ensuite le même exercice avec une communauté urbaine canadienne, en employant l'écoute, l'observation et des stratégies réflexives issues d'une méthode de recherche d'évaluation ethnographique. J'identifie cinq thèmes prin-

cipaux ou discours pour décrire la façon dont la communauté de Peterborough évalue sa relation personne-nature. Dans la partie évaluative de ma méthode, je propose deux questions. Qui sera le “gardien” des valeurs environnementales de Peterborough? Jusqu’à quel point ces mêmes valeurs seront-elles “vertes”?

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The founders of environmental education have been depicted as searching for “the one true story” about the definitions and learning models appropriate for the emerging discipline (Greenall Gough, 1993, p.36). Three decades on, the story telling continues, but with a heady mix of heightened moral imperative and increasingly polarised narratives. I offer two contributions to our contemporary understanding of environmental education: the first concerns some useful distinctions, and the second shares some research findings that are avowedly experiential and contextual.

The distinctions concern environmental education as a descriptive term. Any understanding of this as inclusive is misleading, because it ignores critical differences and contestations contained within “environmentalism” and “education,” and assumes a self evident link between the two terms. Consequently, environmental education is perceived as like math or science education, rather than as a doubly problematic challenge. It is more helpful to see environmentalism as encompassing a range of positions (or world views) between human-centered and nature-centered poles, which are variously designated by different writers as paradigms (dominant social/new environmental), ecologies (shallow/deep/ social), or variations of green-ness (light/deep/red). While it is possible to mount arguments against this particular manner of representing the way we perceive and behave towards the natural world, using such a scale does bring into focus the social, cultural and historical elements which inform the human-nature relationship. It also indicates that there are significant philosophical questions involved.

The second set of distinctions concern the education component. It is useful to differentiate the arenas in which environmental learning might occur, namely, formal (i.e. institutional, as in schools), non-formal (not in an institution but with a declared educational aim, as with environmental groups, government agencies and the

advertising campaigns of industry), and informal (where the environmental learning is incidental and unacknowledged, as with some media and advertising reporting). It is commonly assumed that environmental education is primarily the mandate of the formal sector, but it is eminently reasonable to argue that the most vigorous and persuasive education is being promoted in the non-formal and informal spheres. The cognitive approach typical of formal education stands less chance of engaging the reader than the unabashed emotional appeal commonly used by non-formal environmental organizations, while the subliminal message about the instrumental value of non-human species in the informal media and advertising domain may be more powerful again.

When we attempt to combine “environmentalism” with “education,” it is obvious that adopting an ideology from either end of the scale, or postulating an ideological journey towards the “green” end, will have profound implications for practice, bearing in mind that the defining polar positions repel each other, and are separated by a real barrier (Beder, 1992). So, while designing and teaching an “accommodationist” (Light Green) environmental agenda might involve making space for some new ideas, it is a long way from the ontological, epistemological and ethical challenges integral to a Deep Green or Red Green position.

Making these two sets of distinctions makes me think that environmental education’s central concern with beliefs and values defines it as something essentially personal as well as communal. It is as much about educating ourselves as it is about attempting to educate others. Sharing our stories about this process, is the perspective on environmental education which has informed my own research, which started with an interest in how rural communities understand their environment (Mahony, 1995 & 1996a), but has been increasingly drawn to exploring personal environmental stories, including my own (Mahony, 1996b & 1997). Sharing environmental stories is the motivation behind the following attempt to understand a particular Canadian community’s experience of environmental education. It accords with Cheney’s belief that the task in environmental ethics is “to tell the best stories we can . . . about our, and our community’s “storied residence” in place” (Cheney, 1989, p.133).

## The Peterborough Story

Peterborough is a middle sized Ontario city of 68,000 people, located 40 kilometers north of Lake Ontario and 110 kilometers north-east of Toronto. Its scenic attractiveness comes from the two waterways around which the town has grown (the Otonabee River and the Trent Canal), the glacially-formed drumlin hills in and around the city, the proximity of the rural landscapes, and the predominantly soft and comfortable architecture of the city. The distinctive character of Peterborough is further enhanced by Trent University and Sir Sandford Fleming College contributing a “university town” atmosphere, its strong links with the surrounding Kawartha Lakes cottage and recreation country, its adoption of a clearly demarcated city/township/county system of government, and the continued existence of local newspaper, television and radio services.

I came to Peterborough at the beginning of February, in the middle of one of the longest winters in recent memory, interested in the environmental education story of this community and what that might contribute to stories of humans in general, and to my personal story as an environmental educator. I opted to use the same ethnographic evaluation methodology I had employed in my two previous Australian studies, selecting strategies suitable to the context and the limitations of time (three months). In practice this meant placing most reliance upon in-depth interviews and targeting “gatekeepers,” that is, those environmental education voices already acknowledged by the community. This would be complemented by observation of relevant meetings of community organizations, and studying relevant documentary material.

The ethnographic stage proceeded without difficulty, and included 18 interviews (averaging 80 minutes) representing government agencies, schools, Trent University, community groups and individuals of perceived environmental repute. I attended three community meetings and my documentary study included a systematic analysis of the community daily newspaper over a period of 30 days. Interviews were audio recorded for later transcription and a field journal was used to aid the observation of community meetings.

Listening again to the voices I had recorded from the Peterborough community, I detected the following discourses.

*“Environmental education in schools does not have a big thrust”*

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s curriculum specifies environmental education only in ecology programmes in elementary school, and in some Geography and Science electives in high school. If a school or teacher has a particular interest in environmental matters, then two other avenues are commonly followed: Outside groups may be contracted to run school programmes, e.g. Kawartha World Issues Centre, Peterborough Greenup, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters; or, an outdoor education programme may be utilized. The Provincial government is seen as bureaucratically incapable (“It is such a leviathan”) or insufficiently interested (“Environmental education is on the backburner”) to produce stimulating resource materials. While the Federal Government introduced some major initiatives in the early ‘90s, with its Environmental Citizenship programme having particular relevance to schools, this does not seem to have reached Peterborough schools.

Traditionally, teachers are seen as having effective control over the classroom agenda, “When you close the door you dictate what goes on,” and so contemporary and local environmental issues may gain a voice, depending upon teacher interest. In this regard, environmental concerns will reflect the importance they have in the wider community—which at present is not very much, “I think the general population goes along with things, and I think that is pretty much the same with schools.” Controversial issues are treated with caution. “Balance” is important and outside groups seeking to introduce “really controversial issues” will “probably be turned down.”

*“There are links all over the place to Trent University”*

Trent has a significant physical presence in Peterborough, with its extensive main campus straddling the Otonabee River and its downtown colleges intermingled with apartments and businesses. Trent graduates fill numerous positions in administration, business and the professions, and the university community has strong traditions of community liaison and activism, and a decided environmental focus. Its Environmental and Resource Studies programme and the Haliburton Bioregion research project have a high profile and incorporate a range of environmental ideologies.

Members of Faculty are prominent on committees and boards, and care is taken to include the community in university activities, including visiting lectures and student research projects. Particularly noteworthy is the activism tradition, "Doing research that pertains to current public issues," and "paying attention to the relevance of what we are doing." This has resulted in contributions to mediation, planning and policy matters, and has produced the prominent environmental education journal *Alternatives*, with its decidedly activist and practical character. (This is now produced at the University of Waterloo).

*People are concerned about environmental matters "that affect them personally"*

Despite the eastward expansion of The Greater Toronto Area, and also as a consequence of it, Peterborough citizens take pride in the distinctiveness of their community. This is variously attributed to the city's unique and well documented history, its well known scenic and cultural attractions, its strategic location away from Highway 401, the modest size of the city, and its success in retaining its own media.

Some understanding of how the Peterborough community positions itself regarding the natural environment can be derived from two surveys.

First, market research into this area was commissioned by the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority (ORCA) in December 1993. The consultants distributed 10,000 questionnaires within the ORCA catchment area (Otonabee, Indian and Ouse River watersheds), and randomly selected 500 of the 1100 returns for analysis. 68% of these returns came from within the Peterborough city boundaries. Three significant conclusions emerged about the community's environmental orientation:

- "Environmental consciousness for most people has been formulated on a global scale, and focuses very little on what I might conserve in my own backyard."
- Responsibility for environmental/conservation programmes and activities (including environmental education), was seen to lie with the three levels of government and the Conservation Authority, rather than with individuals and the business com-

munity. In fact these last two received nil recognition in any of the 13 environmental/conservation categories listed (Table 1).

- ORCA was seen “as a respectable and valuable contributor to environmental protection,” 95% of the respondent sample rating the Authority as either “extremely important,” or “important.” But the consultants comment, “Where the picture fades somewhat, is when respondents are asked to describe their relationship with ORCA, and to identify what ORCA does.” It would seem that the community endorsement was more a general concern that someone should be out there looking after the environment than any recognition either of their own responsibility or what ORCA actually does.

The second survey was my own monitoring of *The Peterborough Examiner* over 30 days. Describing itself as a liberal, community newspaper, it aims to provide a platform for the community to express itself. The accompanying table (Table 2) illustrates that environmental matters rate only modest attention, averaging 2.6 items each day. Local matters impacting upon the day to day lives of Peterborough residents (water quality, oil and chemical spills, dog and cat droppings, waste disposal, and the environment/health connection) represented 59.7%. Items about world and national environmental issues (depletion of forest and fish resources, species protection, genetic engineering, nuclear waste disposal, and planetary health) made up 40.3%.

These findings are supported by the ethnographic data, with discourses lamenting a “disappointing” attendance at public meetings specifically set up to provide public input into the planning process, designating the public as one that “just goes along with things,” which will only be roused to action by matters “which affect them personally,” who need to be “educated” with programmes that connect with pragmatic self interest. Further argument for this interpretation comes from the lack of public participation in a “multi jurisdictional” system of environmental governance.

<b>Summary of Table # 10</b>	
<b>Prime Responsibility for Various Programme Areas</b>	
<p>Q. Who do you feel should be most responsible for the following activities?</p> <p>Conservation Authority    Provincial Government    Municipal Government            Business Community    Federal Government    Individual Citizens</p>	
<b>Programme Areas</b>	<b>Group Perceived As Most Responsible</b>
Planting Trees	1. Conservation Authority
Protecting Wetlands	1. Conservation 2. Provincial Government
Environmental Education	1. Provincial 1. Conservation 2. Federal
Managing Wildlife	1. Conservation 2. Provincial
Outdoor Recreation	1. Conservation 1. Municipal 1. Provincial
Forest Management	1. Conservation 1. Provincial 2. Federal
Improving Water Quality	1. Provincial 1. Federal 2. Municipal 2. Conservation
Regulating Land Development	1. Municipal 2. Provincial
Licensing Fishing	1. Provincial 2. Conservation
Licensing Hunting	1. Provincial 2. Conservation
Environmental Protection	1. Provincial 2. Conservation
Promoting Energy Conservation	1. Federal 2. Provincial
Promoting Recycling	1. Municipal

Table 1. Responsibility For Environmental Conservation Programmes (from Otonabee Region Conservation Authority 1994, Appendix C)



<b>Environmental Concern</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Number Of Items</b>	<b>Local Emphasis % Of Total Articles</b>
<b>Pollution</b>	Water quality, oil and chemical spills, dog and cat faeces	15	93%
<b>Species Protection</b>	Seals, deer, bear, whales, tigers	8	13%
<b>Nature Watch</b>	Birds (notably the Great Grey Owl), fish, turtles	10	60%
<b>Environment - Health Connection</b>	Planetary health, food supply, community gardens, effect of environment upon the aged and sick, fertility	11	73%
<b>Waste Disposal</b>	Recycling, composting, garbage bag limits, nuclear waste	19	86%
<b>Environmental Controversies</b>	Forests, fish, seals, fur trade, genetic engineering, 'mad-cow' disease, toxic waste disposal, water quality, ORCA, local nature reserves	20	30%

Table 2. Environmental Matters Reported In  
*The Peterborough Examiner*, March 1 - 31st 1996

*Specific interest groups currently represent the frontline of environmental values in Peterborough*

Community groups with an environmental/conservation focus have received recognition as wardens of such values, and legitimate contributors to any public discussions. Their role is accepted by public authorities and the general public as the de facto voice of environmentalism in a multi-jurisdictional context. A clear ideological demarcation exists between the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (a province-wide organization with its headquarters in Peterborough) and the allied Ducks Unlimited, and a second group which includes The Ecology Council, Peterborough Greenup, Kawartha World Issues, the Ontario Public Interest Research Group, and The Field Naturalists' Club. Trent University influence permeates many of these groups through the activities of its graduates, faculty and students, as well as through its own committees and programmes. A handful of individuals are particularly enthusiastic in this second grouping and are seen as "lightning rods" directing energy and ideas into the Peterborough environmental movement.

*"Governance issues . . . are really at the forefront right now"*

"Management" (of the environment) and "conservation" (of natural resources) are dominant terms in official environmental discourse in Peterborough. In practice, this is no simple task, since a bewildering array of governments and their agencies share jurisdiction, particularly over the waterways. The city's scenic Little Lake, for instance, has ten authorities. "We are so multi-jurisdictional that planning, deciding responsibility are fuzzy." The pragmatic answer to the problem has been to network and agree upon lead agencies, and the ideology and enthusiasm of the latter has been critical to the ultimate environmental protection. Three significant instances illustrate this.

First, in 1959 the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority (ORCA) was established, together with 37 other Conservation Authorities in Ontario, "as a way of achieving a clean and healthy community" through an environmental leadership based upon watershed planning, local initiative and cost sharing by provincial and municipal governments. ORCA's strategic position as a lead agency including the two levels of government in its organizational structure, and its 37 year history have given it some notable successes.

Local government acceptance of the “fairly novel concept” of watershed based planning, “the environment doesn’t know municipal boundaries,” its recognition as a specialist organization, “We don’t have that level of expertise . . . .We rely upon them,” and its experience in environmental conflict resolution are prominent examples.

Second, the establishment of the Trent-Severn Waterway Authority by the Canadian government to protect and manage a place of natural and cultural heritage, and administered by Parks Canada—with a dedicated environmental ethos. “A bunch of us were indoctrinated in the 60s.”

Third, a particularly significant kind of networking occurred by government entering into partnership with community groups. This was partly a response to lobbying, partly a remedy to a perceived lack of specialist knowledge and skills at the local government level, and a pragmatic adjustment to scarce government resources. In City and Council planning, using environmental groups was a convenient way of “planning with the people,” and countering the disappointing turnout” at public meetings. Using the personal time and expertise of Field Naturalist and Eco-Council members to develop a Peterborough Natural Areas Strategy “worked very well on the City side.” This was a useful way that “environmental considerations can be incorporated into the planning process,” and a convenient way of dealing with the “real balancing act” involved in tuning into community attitudes. Other instances of this involved Peterborough Greenup and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH). Peterborough Utilities Commission was happy to enter into a partnership with the former, involving a total of more than 3000 home and school visits. The annual cost of \$135,000 was seen as the least-cost method of achieving the Commission’s aims of a reduced power and water usage, while Greenup was able to advance its own education for sustainability aims. OFAH’s partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources embraces an extensive range of community education programmes aimed at “the wise use of natural resources” (e.g. Hunter Education Programme, Wild Turkey Education Seminar, Family Fishing Weekend, Exotic Species Control), as well as research projects and the management of hunting areas.

The equilibrium achieved through this system of lead agencies, (ORCA promoted) networking, and partnerships with community organizations has been destabilized by a dramatic shift in the ide-

ology of governance at the provincial and federal levels. This is seen as a single-minded focus on deficit reduction, and interconnected moves towards smaller government and adjustments to the boundaries of political responsibility. Environmental groups reliant upon federal or provincial government funding are experiencing the same trauma as those responsible for delivering education, road maintenance, and a comprehensive range of “essential” services, and conversations return again and again to this theme. “Political ideology has shifted so rapidly from the previous government to this government, it has basically buried anything that is environmental. It doesn’t care about it. “A number of metaphors are used to convey this: it is a “paradigm shift”; the government is “walking away” or “in full retreat” from its environmental guardianship role; it has now confined itself to “steering,” leaving the “paddling” to others. In financial terms, this has meant the partial or complete removal of provincial funding for the environment, and the termination of flagship programmes like The Green Plan and Environmental Partners Fund.

### **A Response to the Peterborough Environmental Education Story**

The ethnography part of my research identified the five discourses discussed in the preceding section. I now turn to an evaluation of what this body of data means for the environmental education context in which I am working. There are some preliminary points about context to consider:

- There are some obvious differences from my two Australian studies: in size (the Peterborough community is at least six times larger), in settlement pattern (urban rather than rural), and in the duration of the research (shorter but more intense).
- My listening has been selective regarding my subjects. I am well aware that, although I have sought out the public environmental voices, there are many others who have not spoken. Some of this is to do with the deliberate choice for in-depth, holistic understanding over systematic, reductionist understanding. But the cost is an inferred knowledge about the silent majority.

- My listening has been selective regarding content. My research focus makes me primarily interested in ways of environmental knowing, ownership and contestation, and what ideological journeys are occurring.

The dominant environmental discourse in the Peterborough community concerns governance, and the sharp reduction in government funding appears to constitute a critical incident in that the community is forced to reassess the value it places on the environmental services lost as a consequence. In addition to this ethical question, this process also opens up a window into the epistemological question of environmental knowing, and the ontological question of how human-ness is defined vis-à-vis nature. Two considerations came to my mind as I thought about this: the first was concerned with where the environmental leadership will reside in the new order of things, the second related to the nature of Peterborough's environmentalism, and the extent to which this is changing.

The first and most pressing matter concerns who will be the "Keeper" of environmental values when the guardianship role of federal and provincial government is removed or "devolved." The critical question as to whether such a devolution will and can occur, and to whom, has led to considerable anxiety about the future of environmentally focused organizations, and the fate of the green ethic. ORCA, with its high profile commitment to environmental protection (it has acquired 10,000 acres for Conservation Areas) environmental conflict resolution through watershed planning, has suffered a 70% reduction in provincial government funding and finds that its future "rests entirely with its member communities." Other lead agencies charged with environmental protection and severely affected are Parks Canada, The Trent Severn Waterway, and Parks Ontario. Prominent community groups, dependent upon some mix of government funding, now face an uncertain future. Some responses to the crisis were already emerging at the time of the field research.

ORCA's response was in two directions: Moving swiftly to adjust its physical operation to the new budgetary reality by reducing staff (from 20.5 to 8.2 full-time equivalents) and office space (sub letting the space no longer needed), Reformulating its mandate to meet the needs of a non-mediated constituency of county, city, town

and village administrations (i.e. taking responsibility for a watershed perspective in planning and floodplain management, acting as environmental monitor, maintaining its property portfolio of conservation areas, and providing environmental information at a local level). In addition, ORCA thought it prudent to explore new revenue sources (ORCA, 1995, and ORCA Board Meeting of 28-3-96).

Peterborough Greenup's thinking also involves an immediate "survival" plan involving cost reductions, and a long term programme involving reliance upon environmental services capable of yielding a financial return. This might well involve demonstrating to new sponsors the economic value of existing services such as the energy-saving home visit, and it is possible that householders (who currently receive the service gratis) could be educated to accept a sponsorship role.

Other groups such as Kawartha World Issues, and Ecology Park (a subsidiary of Greenup), are looking to Peterborough's strong volunteering tradition, and are willing to provide training. Donations are also being sought, sometimes by becoming A Friend or contributing to a Trust. Both volunteering and Friends are also being used by Parks Canada.

So the first uncertainty concerns the possibility of new alliances of stakeholders, adequately resourced, to plug the hole left by the withdrawal of federal and provincial government support. The answer will come partly from ingenuity (stitching together an alternate mix of sponsors), but mostly from a readjustment of values. How important is environmental protection when the powerful government patron not only withdraws, but indicates economic values now have precedence? Indications at the time of the field research were that future environmental funding will rely upon local government, business and individuals (with the option of contributing in kind, by offering time and skills), amounting to a shift in the locus of control closer to the community—a community which all the available evidence suggests is most interested in what affects its members personally. So the second question for Peterborough concerns the "green-ness" of their ideology. A "light green" position which aims to "accommodate" environmental values without disturbing the status quo, and relying on government to "manage" the environment is no longer an option. So does this community care enough when asked to "integrate [more] radical conceptions of ecological protection and sustainability with a workable set of trans-

formations of society and economy" (Paehlke, 1992, p.23)? To my mind, the greater uncertainty facing the Peterborough community, is the sudden, unavoidable confrontation with the challenge to venture away from a traditional and comfortable cultural world view concerning the relationship between humans and the rest of nature.

As for the second consideration, I admit to feelings of trepidation as I share my reflections on this sensitive and relatively unexplored topic of environmental paradigm shift. It is difficult to represent this in any other way than as an environmental ideology scorecard, which may be considered an unwelcome parting offering from a visitor so warmly received. But maybe this is the kind of service the community would want from an outsider, particularly one who has been at pains to declare his own journeying.

As a relatively short-term resident in the Peterborough community, I was impressed by some of the environmental initiatives on show. The remarkable success of Greenup (and its partner organizations) in making recycling and energy saving part of the community's day-to-day life is an outstanding achievement. The Peterborough Natural Areas Strategy aims to provide protection for the remaining undeveloped forests, stream systems and wetlands by enshrining them in the City's official planning document, and a steering committee led by the Eco-Council and the Field Naturalists has assembled a representative mix of government and community interests to produce a draft strategy for public consideration. ORCA has also taken a prominent role in acquiring and managing environmentally sensitive lands—a "property folio" of some 10,000 acres. The residents of the Village of Lakefield worked with ORCA to save and restore the important wetland known as Lakefield Marsh. The five acre Ecology Park offers an enthusiastic and popular education programme about harmonious cooperation with the land. Trent University's choice of a bioregional model for its major research effort in the Haliburton region represents another significant and public recognition of natural values. Also based at Trent is the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG Peterborough) which seeks to use the energy and enthusiasm of students to redress social justice problems, including environmental issues. Kawartha World Issues Centre also sees environmental education within a social justice context. Its present focus on food access provides a pertinent example of the interconnectedness of environment, health, trade and labor issues. Also significant are initiatives

in community based economics, providing direct public access to farm produce and encouraging communal gardening.

Underpinning these achievements, Peterborough has an obviously proud sense of itself as a watchful, supportive and receptive community. This provides a rich culture within which the environmental activities noted above have prospered.

Less positive aspects relate to a comfortable equation of environmentalism with recycling in the public mind, and little recognition of the need to challenge the ecologically disempowering values underpinning the preference for an environmental "governance" discourse, minimal attention to the intrinsic rights of the non-human world, and a steadfast assertion of the right of a Canadian citizen to hunt.

Governance means the exercise of authority and control, and the term is common within lead agencies. It assumes an order of things where the rights of humans over the non-human world is unquestioned and suggests a technocentric environmental ideology, with elements of both cornucopian and managerialist positions (Fien, 1993; O'Riordan, 1990). It is in conflict with the ecocentric ideology of both deep ecology, which espouses unity with nature, equality of species and a desire to "tread lightly" on the earth (Mathews, 1988), and social ecology, which challenges the legitimacy of such governance. An environmental vocabulary dominated by "governance," "management," and "natural resources," indicates a culture still locked into the notion of human superiority and arbitrary authority over everything else on the planet.

This perspective is, of course, culturally determined, and it is not difficult to appreciate its origins. Canadian geography and history, like that of Australia, has not fostered an ecocentric culture. A harsh climate and landforms, together with an unquestioned development ethos has led to the environment being equated with "natural resources," and the human relationship being described in "management" terms. One interviewee spoke of "a Canadian immigrant culture," with a "history of conquest over a vast land, overcoming geography to link this narrow band of settlement along the 49th parallel." Another referred to being "blessed and cursed in Canada with thinking, "We've always got the North." But we can only ever live in a small section here." It is not helpful to minimize the problem here. To challenge dominant cultural values, such as human superiority over the rest of nature, in real and practical ac-



tions is a daunting task. Initially, it may require working within the “governance” concept but undertaking what Dorcey calls “accelerated learning” about radically different value positions (Dorcey, 1995), but the ultimate challenge to a preordained human superiority depends upon change occurring in the second area, of ethics, and more specifically, in moving from assigning the natural world instrumental value, to intrinsic value.

I observed little interest in this area in Peterborough (there was a demonstration against the fur industry, and some reporting of seals and other species at risk in *The Peterborough Examiner*), and again a cultural factor seems to be involved. The right of Canadians to hunt appears to be part of the cultural heritage, unchallenged even by an ardent environmentalist: “Waterfowl get hell kicked out of them in the Fall. I think that should be curbed, although I will defend people’s right to hunt.” Moreover, this right is supported by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. A Provincial Community organization, boasting a 68 year history, 525 member clubs and 74,000 members, it has its headquarters in Peterborough and has developed an impressive portfolio of education and natural management programmes, a number of which are in partnership with the provincial government. From the viewpoint of environmental ethics, hunting can be justified for a subsistence society, but it is difficult to argue the case for hunting as a “sporting” pastime for members of our contemporary industrial economy.

Waterways, wetlands, and forests are other spheres where intrinsic rights are an issue. As I walked along the banks of the Otonabee each day on my way to and from Peter Robinson College, observing fluctuations in river levels due solely to the opening and closing of upstream barriers, and recalling what I was hearing about its use for both sewage disposal and water supply, I wondered where was the voice for the intrinsic rights of The Otonabee and all the creatures dependent upon her.

### Conclusion

I have been relating two stories in this paper: the primary ethnography recounting of how a particular Canadian community sees its human-nature relationship, and its reaction when the existing arrangement is critically challenged, and the subsequent retelling of

this in the context of my assessment of, and approach to environmental education. The ethnographic data indicates a community environmentally aware but focusing its active interest upon local matters. The effective proactive bodies in Peterborough after the withdrawal of federal and provincial governments, are community organizations and Trent University—with ORCA still holding a strategic position as marshal of local government support for watershed thinking and protection of environmentally sensitive lands. Looking at this from the viewpoint of our common human ideological journey, I see this as a critical time for the Peterborough community and have flagged two major issues to be addressed, namely, who will emerge as the new keeper of environmental values, and what will these values be. The two are connected, because the withdrawal of the upper tiers of government has necessarily shifted responsibility back to the local community, whose environmental values vis-à-vis other cultural values, will ultimately decide the new position taken at Peterborough. This line of thought has led me into the difficult area of attempting an assessment of this community's environmental values.

The real strength of Peterborough is its commitment to community values of pride, compassion, and receptivity, and the existence of a focused, politically astute environmental leadership at the community level. This accounts for the noteworthy environmental initiatives which have occurred to date, which well illustrates the Peterborough version of Slocombe's thesis (1987) of how human-nature values over the last three decades have been drawn towards the green end of the environmental ideology scale. The problem which this community shares with others, is that encompassing cultural inertia that continues to hold on to some kind of self-evident truth concerning nature as a resource base which needs to be governed, and the task which the Peterborough community shares with others is to accept values of intrinsic rights, the integral connectedness of humans with nature, and a subsequent redefinition of what it means to be human.

### Notes on Contributor

**Denis Mahoney** works in the Faculty of Education at The University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, teaching and researching in environmental and teacher education. His home is some 80 kilometers inland, surrounded by forest and full of native animals, and he has formed strong attachments to these native communities and the area's Aboriginal heritage, extending back perhaps a thousand generations. His experiential learning at home increasingly informs his professional life.

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