

Socio-Ecological Formations of Nature's Others: A Response

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The process of researching 'Children's conceptions of nature' was spontaneous — a story in itself! Having taught in Victorian primary schools in the 1970s, after 15 years in teacher education in the university sector, I felt it was important to 'return' to the classroom — to walk the talk! Each Friday afternoon for an hour or so, I met with Year 6 children to 'chat'. In the mid-1990s, 'philosophy for children' was emerging. My doctoral, completed in the early 1990s, focused on philosophies of education and environmental ethics. We chatted a lot in class — about anything. One puzzled kid asked, 'Where does space start and finish?' Another, 'Are not running spikes a way to enhance sport performance?'

One student asked 'What is nature?' For the next two visits, we talked about nature and their experiences — but also walked it outside the classroom! Some chose to draw their feelings. I told an academic colleague, who suggested — write an article! Too often, we ignore children's 'free' thinking and their spontaneously lived, mobile and playful everyday 'worlds'; we unwittingly impose language, norms, standards, expectations and values. My article empirically reconstructed the 'teacher thinking' focus of research also emerging at that time and replaced it with 'children's thinking' and 'doing' about the local natures they sense, perceive, interpret, socialise, construct, and verbalise; how they differentiate (or not) between nature, culture and environments; and are capable of 'representing' it artistically — all of which are increasingly relevant in 'othered' approaches to environmental education research.

This study was one project only of an ongoing 20-year long 'post-doctoral' research program about critical curriculum theory (Payne, 1995): children's imaginative experiences (Payne, 2010a); family (Payne, 2005a), intergenerational influences (Payne, 2010b) and young adult embodiments (Payne, 1997); the 'reconstituting of subjectivities' role of technology (Payne, 2003a); slow ecopedagogy (Payne, 2014); as well as how approaches like 'post-phenomenology' (Payne, 2003b, 2005b) and 'new' methodologies in the social sciences, humanities and performing arts are responding 'post-critically' to a number of exciting 'turns' in theory (Payne, 2013).

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Biography

Phillip works in the Faculty of Education at Monash University as an Associate Professor. His primary research interests focus on environmental education curriculum and pedagogy as they occur in a range of settings (i.e., different levels and types of schooling, families and communities as well as international and global scales). He is well known for his critical and creative contributions to environmental, sustainability, experiential and outdoor education as they occur across the spectrum of research, curriculum and pedagogical inquiry and development. Email: Phillip.Payne@monash.edu