

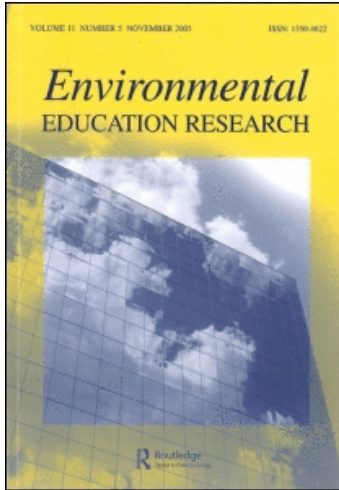
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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

Experiencing environment and place through children's literature

Once upon a time ...

Not so long ago, a well overdue clean out of the garage and its accumulated 20 years of family life stored in an array of deteriorating boxes led Phil, one of the co-editors of this special issue, to reflect on the glorious story that might be told by those forgotten artefacts. But, it was time for this bloke to reclaim the garage as his 'shed'.¹

However, what my partner and I had expected to be only a few short hours of sorting donations for a local charity shop and recycling depot was soon capsized: we had stumbled our way into something far more absorbing. The boxes held many story books and, thus, parenting memories of what we had read and showed to our child as a baby, a toddler, a young child and the ones she read later as she became textually and visually literate. As we opened successive boxes with a *I wonder what's in this one?* on our silent lips, we found ourselves re-inspecting each book with much shared 'memory work' about the stories we had read, time and time again, to our then child. Shifting gear, a morning's labour became a nostalgic engagement with things past and with fondly remembered 'once upon a times'. We were re-imagining what we valued most in our parenting. And what we thought about the future. Needless to say, many of the boxes of books were returned to the rapidly diminishing prospect of an uncluttered shed. For we now thought that many of those story books could be read once more, even time and time again, to an imaginary child of our daughter should she one day become a parent.

Recent scholarship on children's literature displays a wide variety of analytical interests in exploring key classic and contemporary children's books.² As yet though, the bulk of this work has not engaged the significance of either an ecological imagination or socio-ecological experiences to both the authors and (younger or older) readers of these texts. So-called 'ecocriticism' has begun to make some inroads into illuminating these particular blind spots in the context of literary theory and criticism in general as well as in relation to environmental education (see, for example, Garrard 2004, 2010). This special issue of *Environmental Education Research* also sets out to address these concerns but offers a different route through some of the challenges this contested terrain presents.

Bringing together a set of original research-based papers, the special issue explores the role of children's literature in environmental education and its research through a particular focus on how children's literature contributes to an experiencing of environment and place. To this end, it critically explores the value and relevance of children's literature in providing what are arguably some of the first and possibly most formative engagements that some children may have with 'nature'. It examines how children's literature variously represents, mediates and informs experiences and understandings of diverse environments and places as well as the people and other 'presences' (that may be, are no longer, or never are) found therein, be these imaginatively construed or firmly rooted in a diversity of realities. The collection is framed by the assumption

that engaging with children's literature, in the form of storybooks, mythic tales, and image-based and/or written texts, can be deeply pleasurable as well as troubling, on aesthetic and ecopolitical as well as affective and connective levels. Such literature can afford openings for dialogue both with and against dominant cultural texts, images, narratives and figurations of eco-cultural relations, and may offer incompatible as well as compelling understandings of childhood, adulthood, place and nature. It may also encourage a 'comparing and contrasting' of these alongside questions of the ecologies and cultures depicted in children's literature, including children's and adults' conceptions and constructions of environment that might be experienced with or through them, their senses of an eco-identity, -citizenship or -responsibility related to such places and nature, and the significance that immersive pedagogies might play in engaging these themes and their challenges.

'Alan, you are an ecocosmopolitan.' A warm-hearted remark in a colleague's email that emerged after our recent 'hanging out together' at an international conference, the possibility that it wasn't meant as a compliment is not my immediate concern here. Rather, it is how it has undone some of my assumptions. My prior understanding of 'cosmopolitan' had been that it spoke of a comparative disposition: towards experiences of the processes of cultural uniformity and divergence, the scope and limits of our understanding and truth in the face of otherness, the responsibility of recognizing subjectivity as not objectifiable, and so forth. Yet since this ascription, I notice I have regarded the eco-inflection as suggesting a need to consider this again and other dimensions, such as some of the conditions and challenges faced by contemporary 'types' of ecologically minded, self-regulating, self-validating 'citizen-consumers'. Perhaps most likely a postmodern-ish (sub-)urbanite, not probably living in the 'countryside' let alone 'bush', he or she may still likely have an interest or maybe even a wild hope that the 'nature', 'places' and 'environments' that surround the 'urbs will yet have some bearing on matters 'professional, domestic and recreational'. Liberally sprinkled with accounts of our various shortcomings and delights amid the everyday and exceptional of our conditions, expectations and life histories, these had, of course, been some of the things my colleague and I had been idly discussing. That is, until we embarked on a more portentous narrowing in on some of the circumstances and choices we lived by or with and to which we were about to re-engage once more and more fully, following our imminent returns home.³

A few months later, with this editorial now firmly in view, I found myself pondering our conversations and their ramifications once more. One thing I began to question with 'critical friends' was whether the notion of an 'ecocosmopolitan' really had any legs, so to speak. Might such a category hold some potential for making sense of the conscious features of a life most often lived in and around Bath? Did it even have something to say about the books we selected, read, gave, borrowed or shared as a family and with friends? Digging a little further, I noted that Ulrich Beck (2002, 37) had recently claimed, 'Cosmopolitanism presupposes individualization.' My gut response was to interpret this as challenging some of the naivety and provincialism of my 'lifeworld'. Yet having an empirical bent too, I wanted a second crack at this. I should test my reaction as well as some of my wonderings further in relation to matters 'eco' and children's literature-wise, before (perhaps) bringing this to the attention of a wider audience.

Tentatively at first [... would I need to secure ethics clearance on this with the university?], but soon overtaken by the sure knowledge that something always seemed to emerge (even if not as originally envisaged) whenever I proceeded this way, I continued my inquiries. With my family hat firmly on, I got to work, seeking out someone close to me who might offer an alternative view, albeit in a register and framing quite different from Beck, my colleagues and me.

'Lucy, do you mind if we have a look at some of your books together please ...'

Our call for papers for this special issue invited environmentally oriented educators and researchers to submit manuscripts that were informed by research and that focused on experiencing environment and place through children's literature in environmental education. We sought contributors who would write in scholarly, creative and insightful ways about the key arguments and features of a socio-environmentally conscious experiencing of children's literature, and who would draw on research and scholarly literature that might add to current discussions of key examples, themes, trends, issues and tensions in this field.

We also encouraged authors to consider the value of adopting an auto-ethnographic approach in presenting and discussing pedagogical uses of children's literature that would engage different types of experiences and dialogue about the meanings and values of environment and place. We envisaged the collection would include diverse pedagogical and theoretical frameworks and examples, such as social ecology, socio-cultural theory and a/r/tography. And alongside original research and critical commentaries, the call solicited contributions that reviewed, synthesized and critiqued policy and practice in using children's literature in teaching and learning about the environment and place, as well as constructing/writing/creating that literature.

... Lucy, aged 6 at the time, took her dad, approaching 40, up to her bedroom to do some reading. Choosing some picture books, she took the lead and exclaimed 'Charlie and Lola' were 'great' and 'very funny', and we should read some of those first. Lucy immediately drew out similarities between Lola's life with her older sibling Charlie, and those of her own interactions with her *two* slightly older brothers, Tom and Jonathan; but I just had to interject: couldn't we read something else this time, as I was now quite familiar with Lola's escapades. Lucy paused. *Hmm. Something else by Lauren Child, dad?* Okay then, yes. *No!* For Lucy, Child's tales about Clarice Bean (her 'slightly sassy' and 'spunky young heroine') were probably what dad had had in mind but these were just a bit too serious and not as amusing as those with her beloved Lola in. She took *What planet are you from, Clarice Bean?* (2001) from her bookshelf and sat me down on her bed. With 'Dad's iPhone' on mute, it was time for our lesson to begin ...

Child's books are award winning and highly regarded for their mixed-media artwork, illustrative styling and witty text – a heady mix of collage, textiles, photographs, drawings, paintings and creative fonts on each page, coupled with an arresting line in smart banter, casual sarcasm, and engaging characterizations and plotlines to boot. Or, at least that's what Lucy's dad had been led to believe. Lucy gave me a forgiving smile that nearly managed to mask her exasperation at my blindness to a larger truth. She turned to the first page.

So, Clarice Bean's Planet. We are immediately confronted with a fast-paced tale that starts with Clarice arriving just a little bit late for school. In the first few pages, we learn that gravity is an amazing force to Clarice, as is the fact that the sea doesn't spill over at its edges. Her teacher, Mrs Wilberton, assigns the class a report to write on 'the Environment'. As usual, Clarice's creative mind sparkles at the possibilities: *Can it be more than simply all that nature in the backyard? Or how about holes in the sky caused by her sister's hairspray? Or should it be about the self-styled nature safari right there in her older brother's bedroom?* Except back in classroom realities [slightly different from Lucy's, she observes *ex tempore*], it's just Clarice's luck that she's been paired with annoying Robert Granger once again to complete her project. (This is Clarice's third outing in the series, and Robert, the pesky next door neighbour, is her nemesis, appearing in many of the tales.)

Robert insists on doing the report on 'who can walk faster, a snail or a worm?' Clarice protests that this isn't important, but Mrs Wilberton overrules in Robert's favour

[prompting an (intertextually aware? or ... ?) 'again!' that Lucy and I sigh together]. Outside of school now, brother Kurt (not a Charlie but representative of the typically silent and moody teenage boy type) has learnt that the local council plans to cut down an old tree on their street. In fact, the whole family, including grandfather and parents, become upset about what might happen. The normally lazy Kurt is spurred into action to become an 'ecowarrior'. He ends up camping in the branches so it can't be cut down, waving a sign that says, 'Free the Tree' ('because it rhymes'). In the end, Clarice's entire family joins Kurt, and as the story reaches its climax, they even find time to enjoy a pasta supper between the leaves. A local reporter takes their picture – Robert, who Clarice just can't seem to get rid of, manages to muscles in on this, much to her annoyance – but that's not to distract from the positive note sounded in the final pages: the Beans have saved the tree, leaving Clarice in the much better position of being able to complete her report on being an ecoguardian instead. *The End ...*

Okay, ... so you don't really like Clarice and her adventures, is that it?

Clarice is okay, she's quite cool and the story's kind of interesting – well, sort of – ... and Robert is so like Harley at school. But can't you see, it just isn't as good as Lola! And Dad, why is it you always want us to talk about the book afterwards ...?

Lucy, you know that's not quite true, or fair ... but before we start on the next one, for just a moment, perhaps we look this book up online and see what some other people have said about it ... Okay – here, let me read you this; it's from Amazon. It's about the book, mainly to get people to read it, and buy it, at home, in libraries, at schools:

What planet are you from, Clarice Bean? is perfect for children ages four to eight. It handles the important topic of the environment in a lighthearted way, so that even though several things are explained (such as the hole in the ozone layer, pollution, and grassroots protest action) readers won't even realize they've learned something.

And here's someone else, not a reviewer this time but from the publishers:

In a new installment in the Clarice Bean escapades, Lauren Child makes a clear case for ecoaction – and gives the cause of saving the planet a hilarious new spin.

And look at this link, there's even some activity sheets you can get online too. This one, *What can I do to help the environment?* is a writing and colouring sheet. It says it invites children your age to 'put down all the things that you and your family are doing (or would like to do) to protect the environment'; while, *Clarice Bean's 5 favorite [sic] ways to save the planet* combines extracts and illustrations from the book, so that children, their parents and family can see the different ways they might: '(1) recycle; (2) keep it clean; (3) save energy; (4) respect wildlife; (5) protect growing things ...'

Dad, dad, stop! I'm bored now. This isn't school! Can we all go out now please, with mum? Or can I play on your phone, please! Can I ring Ruby? I want to talk to my friends.

Lucy shuts the book and the internet browser. And I'm left wondering whether such observations, possibilities or indeed (mis)handlings of events say anything: to the 'ecocosmopolitan', to how we understand or approach children's literature within or as an environmental education, and to how any of this deserves a closer reading, interpretation and analysis in other parts of a life, be that at 'work' or at 'play' ...

It is easy to say stories matter, and clearly some have come to matter more than others and most profoundly to our various ways of living, experiencing and evaluating the world. Our senses of life and death and the horizons for all that lies between and beyond are the very stuff of culture and its expression, exploration and contestation in and through literary forms. Be they the stories we can and do tell one another and ourselves, or those we are no longer able to or won't give voice to, stories also matter to our individual and collective sense of experience, nature, environment and place, as crafted and (re)told across a range of times, places, realities and worldviews. Obfuscate a central aspect of a character or setting, a plotline or convention, a twist or discovery, and a story can fail in its imaginary as much as in its telling. Continue to tell stories that no longer hold true to current times, and we risk condemning them to the realm of historical curiosity and nostalgia. Create new ones, grounded in close attention and exploration of experience and imagination, and we may yet reinvigorate what Rushdie (1990) terms the 'Sea of Stories' on which we navigate, narrate and name our lives.

The environmental philosopher, Arran Gare, drawing on Ricoeur (1990, para. 11), notes how 'learning how to live through stories is at the same time learning who one is. It is through stories that people define themselves and establish their identities'. In the face of so many 'Processes too Complicated to Explain' (Rushdie), be it in our relations to one another and the world, who we are and what we might be, we often ground our experience and reality in narrativizations to give an account of ourselves. Hence, it is through stories, their telling, contestation, reception and rejection, that relationships and identities are 'established, stabilized and defined and redefined' (Gare 2001, para. 11) between diverse and evolving situations: communally, culturally, socially, institutionally, politically, ecologically, personally and so on. Analysing the transformative power of stories to the ethics and politics of environmentalism, Gare also writes:

People are 'caught up' ... by stories and the world is experienced as having a claim on them ... Understanding such a story situates the recipient as a potential participant in the story, as someone who could play an active part in shaping the future projected by the story. This is associated with the appreciation of the corporeality of human existence, that people (including ourselves) are not detached consciousnesses but as actors bodily engaged in the world. [para 25]

Turning to MacIntyre's (1984, 216) *After virtue*, Gare quotes the following much-cited passage:

I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed.

MacIntyre (1984, 216) continues – tellingly for this collection – as follows:

Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources.

The papers brought together under the auspices of this collection tackle a wide range of aspects to the call and its thematics. Our first paper, by Dobrin (University of

Florida), is titled 'Through green eyes: complex visual culture and post-literacy'. Dobrin seeks to unsettle our understandings of the green metaphors and visual rhetorics that educators and researchers expect in and from children's eco-related literatures and environmental criticism. Whether this necessarily requires embracing film, television, graphic novels or Web 2.0-type open texts and interactions as the focus of inquiry in environmental education remains an open question. Dobrin though offers a map for prospective travellers of this increasingly virtual terrain; his contribution suggests a complex set of debates and traces some of the key problems and challenges within contemporary scholarship on children's literature, culture and subject formation. Arguably, key tensions emerge when scholarship and pedagogies are brought face-to-face with various technological shifts (as represented by the features and modes of the 'network society'), with new priorities being argued for in ecocriticism by the likes of Lawrence Buell and those drawing on systems ecology, and by those noting the increasing importance of visual texts (given the rise of screen-based cultures and their constitutive forms of interaction and exchange) to children's lived experiences and interpretations of environments and place. Taken together, Dobrin insists, also requires us to consider whether a shift is required in scholarship: away from a focus on narratological and interpretational expectations in inquiries towards directly addressing matters of the production, circulation and networking of children's subjectivities, literatures and engagements with environment and place.

Wason-Ellam's contribution (University of Saskatchewan) follows and offers a provocative twist on some of the themes outlined by Dobrin. In the context of globalization, her paper considers how those westernized children living as 'social cyborgs' in 'technospace', 'estranged' and 'de-placed' from their locales may have these effects countered by place-based education approaches to education that engage children and environmental educators in textual and visual activities for 'embodied learning'. 'Children's literature as a springboard to place-based embodied learning' autoethnographically describes her studies with a third grade class in a school that is variously understood to be marked by scarcities in resource, equity and opportunity. Her illustrations of the 'learning in the making' that is engendered in children's activities in the field along a local Saskatoon river valley, coupled with preparation and extension work with picture books and arts-based learning in the classroom, communicate the need for educators to be mindful of how feelings of attachment, respect and responsibility are afforded within and through socially and ecologically critical place-based pedagogies. Her particular interest is in approaches that set out to challenge those 'pedagogies of poverty' that are often the default mode of schooling in such settings and for these particular 'learning communities'. In such circumstances, Wason-Ellam asks us to consider if learners are better understood to be 'active risk takers who accept challenges and understand how and why to learn'? Indeed, does a critical place-based pedagogy or an environmental education more widely provide children with 'opportunities to restructure information in ways that make meaning personal' when working with children's literature?

The next two partially autoethnographic contributions come from authors who were and are variously teachers, teacher educators, scholars and researchers at Monash University. First, Payne's 'Remarkable-tracking, experiential education of the ecological imagination' draws on his longstanding interest in telling stories about 'hairy Peruvian' gnomes as an experientially driven way of playfully considering the openings they present for engendering an 'ecocentric sense of self'. Payne's paper illustrates how ecoaesthetically aware imaginative encounters with the ecological otherness of nature's

places, and a slower paced embodied and experiential education in story's places, might provide a counter narrative to the 'fast, literate, urban, technologically saturated and consumptive postmodern world'. This storied counter critique is also set against Australia's colonial past and our collective forgetting of its still inhabited place in the everyday lives of many of today's young children, beginning teachers and old researchers. Payne achieves this by drawing eclectically on the texts of Robert Ingpen's *Voyage of the poppykettle* and David Abram's *Spell of the sensuous* and his leading over many years and in different places of gnome-tracking expeditions, poetry and song. All are part of a deeper, richer and longer quest to connect experience, literature and art in the ongoing puzzle and challenge to develop those 'artful' pedagogies and pedagogues that are necessary for nurturing the 'still elusive reconciliation of human, social and more-than-human natures'. And in this case, as Payne notes, given Australia can be rendered the 'unchosen land' as much as it is the 'fatal shore' (Robert Hughes), such an ecopedagogical reconciliation allegorically aims to (re)incorporate the Indigenous ones into whose culture-nature relations the mischievous hairy Peruvians gnomes sailed over 400 years ago.

Burke and Cutter-Mackenzie's contribution 'What's there, what if, what then, and what can we do? An immersive and embodied experience of environment and place through children's literature' offers a series of questions drawing on arts-based methods to unsettle some of the usual answers to visual and ecological literacy approaches and curricula. As with Wason-Ellam and Payne, the assumptions and valuing of 'embodied learning' (as opposed to decontextualized and abstracted conditions and priorities) both inside and outside the classroom underpin their deliberations. Their paper discusses how immersive investigations of children's picture books can help learners and educators (re)examine concepts and experiences of environment and place, and describes an immersive process informed by 'a/r/tography'. This is extended to introduce a working model of 'a/r/t-e-ography' to foreground the dispositions and roles of 'the environmentalist' (established or nascent) as a vehicle for promoting environmental awareness and action. The paper is illustrated throughout with autoethnographic encounters and ruminations about Baker's (1991) picture book *Window*, and the windows that the children, pre-service teachers and the authors craft during the process. Burke and Cutter-Mackenzie invite readers to consider the qualities of experience afforded by such an approach to interacting with children's literature – in terms of interest, involvement, imagination, and interaction – alongside the 'ways of knowing' that are championed and silenced in this and other work with children's literature. Finally, the paper reflects on the 'ethics of being' *with* and *for* the other (human and more than or other than human) afforded by an environmental education that draws on experiences with children's literature and whether this is indeed efficacious in fostering a critical form of ecoliteracy.

The next two papers return us to Canada. The first, by Korteweg, Gonzalez and Guillet (Lakehead University), focuses on how Indigenous children's literature might challenge adult and child readers to consider different meanings and worldviews of the environment as a land-based value system. In 'The stories are the people and the land: three educators respond to environmental teachings in Indigenous children's literature', they use reader-response theory 'to explore a collection of rich alternative narratives of Indigenous land-based knowledge systems available in the work of Indigenous authors and illustrators of children's literature' (2010, 331). Referring once more to recent theorizings of and debates about critical pedagogies of place (most notably in the work of David Greenwood [Gruenewald] and Greg Smith), their study considers how Indigenous picture books might serve to 'decolonize

environmental consciousness through offering accessible and immersive Indigenous stories of the land' (331) Their paper illustrates their own responses to and analyses of Indigenous children's literature, and works from a prior commitment to the process of decolonization as a 'critical self-reflexive political process in which one's colonized beliefs are explicitly pinpointed, challenged and countered by Indigenous worldviews and perspectives' (2010, 331).

Another multiculturally authored work that draws on autobiographical, collective and reflective approaches to engaging some of the themes of the collection can be found in the next paper: 'Re-searching and re-storying the complex and complicated relationship of *biophilia* and *bibliophilia*'. Bai et al. (Simon Fraser University) offer a 'collaborative bricolage of poetry, autobiographical fragments, essay pieces, and images' to portray their 'ongoing existential, psychological, and epistemological struggles as educators and learners, parents and children' (2010, 351). They identify *biophilia* (love of life/nature) as a key learning in environmental education, and use their own life histories to explore how *biophilia* relates to *bibliophilia* (love of books). As with Wason-Ellam, Payne, and Burke and Cutter-Mackenzie, Bai and her co-authors identify an 'indwelling experience' of children's literature as a key to an environmental education that contributes to the experiencing of environment and place, but given their particular interests, in ways that seek to broaden this out to advocating poetry-making and story-telling as methods for fostering such indwelling, *biophilia* and *bibliophilia*.

Children's literature tends to be used with preschool and primary audiences rather than in secondary- or tertiary-level contexts, and this can speak to some of the limits rather than strengths in contemporary theory and practice in this field. In 'Exploring instructional strategies to develop prospective elementary teacher children's literature book evaluation skills for science, ecology and environmental education', Hug, currently a science teacher educator at California University of Pennsylvania, uses a vignette to start his reflections on his work to those ends. Hug dwells on two recurring themes that have emerged in his autoethnographically based inquiries: questions of *scientific accuracy* and *anthropomorphism* in the prospective teachers' thinking and evaluations. He suggests that cultural, instructor and student expectations merit close attention in the framings of practice and research in environmental education, notwithstanding a critical disposition to our self-narratives, career trajectories and positionings, and the opportunities and constraints on using children's literature for science, nature and environment work in schools and teacher preparation across a range of sectors.

Morgan's (Exeter University) contribution illustrates the ways some texts may come to overshadow others in these ecocritical times. While Amy Sloane (below) takes this in another direction, Morgan appreciates that it can be hard to break away from being funnelled towards a received reading of a familiar text. Indeed, while finding a space to strike new ground in an analysis of a well-known mythos and its reception is not impossible, it may involve a long and arduous journey. It goes without saying that there are still many stories yet to be told, be they the stories we might tell or about those we are told. With this in mind, in '*The Lord of the Rings* – a mythos applicable in unsustainable times?' Morgan considers the relevance of Tolkien's Middle Earth saga to environmental education and contemporary concerns about social and environmental injustices. Drawing on his own recent reacquaintance with the text, in both written and movie formats, he probes the author's environmental biography and those aspects of the story that highlight the connection between, on the one hand, Tolkien's personal experiential *informal* environmental education learning

journey in the real world and, on the other, that of his imaginative ‘sub-creation’. Morgan considers the saga ‘a work of “fantasy” or “speculative fiction” that holds the potential to re-enchant the world by engaging the *mythopoetic* imagination’ (2010, 383).⁴ He dwells on its treatment of place, character, journey and environmental ethics and how ‘the story implicitly promotes, and is grounded in, a “creation-centred” ethic of stewardship’ (383). As with many of the authors in this collection, Morgan concludes his contribution with a discussion of the pedagogical considerations that his observations and arguments foment, in this case, focussing on the saga’s status as ‘an inspirational work of literature, and its potential and limits as a source of inspiration for those engaged in challenging social and environmental injustices’ (2010, 383).

The next contribution also emanates from the British Isles. ‘Developing environmental agency and engagement through young people’s fiction’, by Bigger and Webb (University of Worcester), draws on a wide range of ideas and theorists, including Paul Ricoeur (on hermeneutics and narrative), John Dewey (on primacy of experience) and John Macmurray (on personal agency in society). Bigger and Webb understand reading fiction about places as ‘hermeneutical, that is, interpreting understanding by combining what is read with what is experienced’ (2010, 401). They explore this line of reasoning through examples and contrasts of four children’s writers, Ernest Thompson Seton, Kenneth Grahame, Michelle Paver and Philip Pullman. The second part of their paper focuses on questions of critical dialogue and active democratic citizenship that experiences of children’s literature might foster. Their paper concludes by considering whether ‘the concept of *heroic resister* might encourage young people to overcome peer pressure and peer cultures that marginalize environmental activism’ (2010, 401).

For Amy Sloane (University of Wisconsin-Madison), such a concept must arguably be tested against our assumptions about the human, humanity’s potentiality and, in particular, the potential of a text to transmit and violate natural life. In ‘Reading *The Lorax*, orienting in potentiality’, Sloane uses Theodor Seuss Geisel’s popular children’s book to encourage a step change in our thinking: the strong environmental message it transmits has been discussed extensively, but what of the ‘activity of transmission itself’? Sloane’s work brings that of Agamben and Foucault into conversation with this well-known tale from Dr Seuss about the Once-ler, the child and their Thneeds. Amid the ravaging of Truffula trees, Swomee-Swans, Bar-ba-loots and Humming-Fish, Sloane’s ‘post-anthropocentric’ elaborations (for want of a better provocation) in this collection set out to offer a reorientation to environmental education theory and practice and a different way of conceiving the child, reading and critique. We no longer need to engage in either a first- or second-order ‘dividing and abandoning’ of the grounds of the field’s pedagogical premises, because these are always already inherently problematic and confounding. Rather, what remains, Sloane avers, is to take up the challenge of offering ‘a mode of teaching without transmitting’ (2010, 423), realizing the potential in environmental education ‘not to transmit’. She concludes, ‘perhaps environmental education can save the past by realizing that the child’s task, if it can be called one, is not to receive a message but to play without it’ (427).

And they all lived happily ever after ...? Or did they?

Lily was born at 3:45 pm, 14 August 2008, in ‘Bays Hospital’, Mornington. Chris (Amy’s partner) and I had spent the last nine months talking and reading to her in utero. We started off with some of our favourites, including *Where the rainforest meets the sea*,

Hidden forest, and Possum magic. When we read to her, she became animated, lightly kicking and moving about. When she was born, to our amazement she didn't cry or fuss. It was like we already knew each other, and just a couple hours later we read to her. Yet when a maternity nurse witnessed this, she affronted us with, 'She can't understand. It's too early for that.' Not wanting to deny our previous activities, I countered quickly and somewhat wistfully, 'This isn't the first time we've read to her, we're just picking up where we left off.'

I really saw the first six weeks of Lily's life as a fourth trimester where we were continuing our getting to know each other. Children's literature provided an opening to nature and wild things, all the while opening up a beautiful and imaginative world to us both. Lily is now 19 months and we still read together each day, be that at home, in the car, under a tree, in the garden, at childcare ... She now turns the pages, points and talks to the pictures, revealing an immense wonderment and fascination with this 'world', and Chris and I are fascinated by where this might lead.

It is little more than a cliché to observe this can never be the end of the story for how we might address the themes and challenges broached by such a collection. And being mindful that we can but look forward to seeing this work and its framings engaged and contested in the field, in the final contribution (Reid, Payne and Cutter-Mackenzie) to this special issue, we try to offer some modest possibilities and potential lines of inquiry toward that end. Our final paper sketches the ecologies of fear, risk and of hope that lurk within, between and around the papers published herein. It also aims to encourage a wider development of the discourse of environmental education research that, in this instance, clearly engages how children's literature also has a pedagogical place in the positive social construction of intergenerational ethics told through story and illustration and associated means, and which grapples with the elusive ends of encouraging consideration and engagement with questions of social and ecological justice. That is, as illustrated in the vignettes throughout this editorial, we ask not just about the hows and the whats, but the whys and what ways textual and visual messages are passed on to the next generation, and how and what they might take up in ways that are more positive and generative than ill-thought through or stymied. Finally, given the scope of this special issue, we engage a series of possible research issues that we hope will broadly nurture the development of scholarship on children's ecoliterature, arguing that it is still a nascent field of inquiry that works with limited evidence to justify its purposes or elaborate its values and usefulness, all of which warrant further development.

In conclusion, our expectations for this collection remain twofold. First, that this special issue offers readers a wide range of possibilities and provocations for further scholarly debate and engaged research development as it relates to environmental education. Second, that it might help achieve two broader and related intentions: that this research community and interested persons continue research-based conversations and build credible bodies of knowledge while, at the same time, reflexively forge a more comprehensive theorizing of an aesthetics as well as ethics and politics of environmental education and its research, that is informed by and informs plentiful 'ecos' – be they pedagogical, curricular, imaginary, literary, experiential, interpretational, constitutive, or otherwise.

Notes

1. Sheds, like gardens, are often a somewhat secretive place that might no longer be all that real to which an individual, or parent and child, can temporarily escape from the hurly

- burly of the everyday, do odd jobs, fossick around in or, more earnestly, pursue or pass down a long forgotten but meaningful craft.
2. Recent Anglophone examples include *Children's literature: Classic texts and contemporary trends*, edited by Montgomery and Watson (2009). Essays therein examine, among others, *Little women*, *Treasure island*, *Peter Pan*, *Swallows and amazons*, *Tom's midnight garden*, *Northern lights*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Junk and Mortal engines*. We note *Children's literature: Approaches and territories*, edited by Maybin and Watson (2009), has contributions in *Part V: Words and pictures*, on 'Texts and Pictures', 'Picturebook Codes' and 'Postmodern Experiments'. Tatar's (2009) academic-popular hybrid, *Enchanted hunters: The power of stories in childhood*, is noteworthy for this special issue too, given its exploration of the power of children's literature to take hold of their imaginations, how classic and contemporary tales of beauty, terrors, death and horror stimulate their curiosity, and how transportation and transformations may evoke wonder and engage emotions in ways adult readers may not expect. But despite its scope, it does not offer a significant analysis of place, nature and environment. Similarly with Gubar's (2009) *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the golden age of children's literature*. Even though it critiques the power and focus of children's literature studies, and in particular, both 'the cult of the child' and Rose's (1984) analysis of it in *Peter Pan and the impossibility of children's Literature* (arguing that, for example, 'Golden Age' authors were centrally concerned with the complexities of children's agency), Gubar frames this anthropocentrically rather than with ecological or socio-ecological considerations in mind. Also, in focusing on recent texts on children's literature, this is not to forget that young adult/juvenile/adolescent literatures have also received similar treatments; while some texts, such as *Where the wild things are* and *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* have continued to attract new generations of young readers in the decades since their initial publication, and this has often been triggered by film versions – see Morgan (2010) too.
 3. Our wider conversations had included sharing a mutual cherishing of Leopold's (1948/1987) *Sand County Almanac, and sketches here and there*. This too would suggest another dimension to ecocosmopolitanism to consider: on the importance of having embodied selves not always turned citywards, but landward, at least once in a good while.
 4. The MacIntyre (1984) quotation noted on p. 261 continues, 'Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things.' Arguably Leopold's *Almanac* is littered with mythologies. It exemplifies a form of nature writing whose register, structuring and foci both celebrate natural history, processes and rhythms, and lament the narrowing and diminution of the West's 'ecology of values' to utilitarianism, expediency, conquest and self-interest, in this case, through careful observation and illumination of the local and wider effects of Abrahamic, evolutionary and ecological community conceptions of land. Leopold's meditation on the geese returning in March to Sand County rhetorically asks, 'Is education possibly a process of trading awareness for things of lesser worth?', concluding that the mid-twentieth-century consciousness of the well- and 'overeducated' risks the same end as that of the goose 'who trades his': she or he is equally soon 'a pile of feathers' (1948/1987, 18). The question is also raised by Cooper's (2002) recent philosophical and historical meditations on humanism, humility and mystery. We return to some of Cooper's themes in our endpiece in remarks on how literature-based ecopedagogies might engage aspects of the (ir)real, but note here that Cooper's essay is a fine examination of the history and consequences of a lack of humility in humanism and absolutism in the face of the mystery inhering in nature and 'the Other'. It also offers an account of how this 'virtue' for our beliefs and conduct might overturn the default 'hubris' of modern-day encounters with realities independent of the 'human contribution', albeit striving via quite different means for something approximating to a 'harmony with land' among a people who 'have forgotten there is any such thing as land, among whom education and culture have become almost synonymous with landlessness' (Leopold 1948/1987, 210).

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