

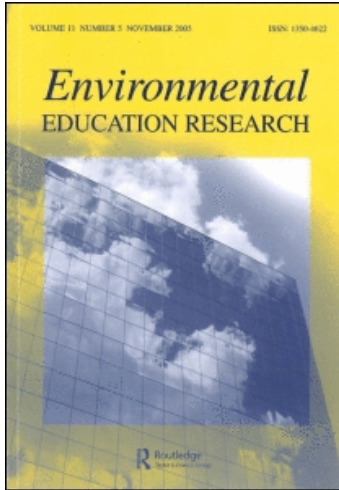
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Remarkable-tracking, experiential education of the ecological imagination

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Remarkable-tracking, experiential education of the ecological imagination

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Imagination might be understood as letting our senses, perceptions and sensibilities run free for no apparent reason. Here, for this special edition what might be ‘remarkable’ is the ‘opening’ of our imagination provided orally through storytelling. This opening involves the ‘placing’ of our own and our listeners’ embodied selves in the spatio-temporal geographies of those stories and their more-than-human natures. The remarkable opening is an important experiential dimension of becoming aware of the ecological otherness of nature’s places. Yet, opportunities for such embodied and storied encounters with nature’s places, in the wildly imagined other, are less available to children in what, increasingly, is a fast, literate, urban, technologically saturated and consumptive postmodern world. Story, storytelling, art, illustration, song and poetry provide animated means that, pedagogically, might re-place children within an ecocentric sense of self. For over 30 years, the author has told gnome-tracking stories in mysterious places so as to invite young school children and pre-service teacher educators to sense, perceive and (re)imagine their (un)tamed ecological otherness and their intimate connections with more-than-human natures. This article briefly outlines the author’s ‘significant life experience’ encounter with Robert Ingpen, illustrator and author of gnome stories. It highlights how the embodied dance of visual illustration and oral storytelling experienced in natural settings provides a playful means for listeners to explore, discover and relate to their inner, social and more-than-human natures and places. The article concludes with a series of cues about an ‘ecopedagogy of imagination’, whose end-in-view is to establish some grounds for artful pedagogues to nurture the still elusive reconciliation of human, social and more-than-human natures.

Keywords: ecopedagogy; environmental criticism; children’s literature; story; imagination; illustration; experiential education; autoethnography

Storying gnomes

The ‘first’ playful hairy Pervuvian gnomes from the High Andes in South America arrived in the ‘unchosen land’ (now known as Australia) over 450 years ago after a remarkable voyage of exploration, adventure and discovery across the Pacific Ocean.

Only recently, the last survivor of the original eight, Teresa Verde (Green) told the untold story of that epic voyage from Callao, the Port of Lima in Peru, to Indented Head, near Melbourne, Australia (Ingpen 1980).

I don’t dare define the terms ‘remarkable’ or ‘imagination’ in this account of the ‘pedagogies of gnome tracking’; an ecopedagogy I have developed over the past 30

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Figure 1. The eight hairy Peruvian gnomes with baby Teresa (third from right).

years that seeks the (re)discovery of various signs of gnome inhabitation in a range of very special places. Below, I highlight the role and value in this ecopedagogy of the ‘dance’ of illustration – a form of visual representation, and storytelling – an oral art form. I describe how this dance with gnomes in their telling should also be embodied and ‘lived’ in real experiential encounters in those gnome’s wild and untamed places. This ecology of the visual, oral and experiential ‘placing’ of storytelling and tracking combine as a form of embodied, sensory and intercorporeal perception and, hopefully, conception. Hence, a remarkable ‘ecopedagogy of imagination’.

This autoethnographic account of gnome storytelling and tracking, as it might occur in a radically revised notion of ‘ecoliteracy’ in environmental, outdoor, place, art, musical, drama, literature and geography educations, is a sketch only, a thumbnail impression of what really and unreally cannot be said. Why gnome storytelling and tracking? Why the dance, or intersection, of oral, textual and visual representations, via storytelling and illustration that, when storied experientially in nature, act as remarkable literary catalyst of the ‘environmental imagination’ (Buell 1995) and, perhaps, ecocriticism (Dobrin and Kidd 2004; Garrard 2004) or the environmental criticism (Buell 2006) of the ‘environmental turn’ in the humanities, in particular its literary and cultural studies formations? Simply, promoting imagination about our edgy and othered relationships with various versions of natures – our own, others and the others ‘out there’ is, I argue, a pedagogical key to *becoming* something other beyond our rationally assumed and narrowed sense of self.

Ecoliteracy and ecocritically? Now I am in hot water! First, contemporary children’s literature relies heavily on text, language and the alphabet. The visual dimension of literacy is less visible in the stories we tell while the sensory or experiential dimension is hard to find. David Abram (1996) has argued, often eloquently, how language, specifically the emergence of the phonetic alphabet in ancient Greek civilization, was a major factor in how the human species severed itself from animated nature and its special places. Abram argued that the new written literacies (and books) were a key development in replacing the previously sensuous and embodied experience of humans with objectified, static but easily transferrable representations of nature made mobile. That is, a very limited number of symbols replaced and, therefore, severed oral telling humans from their animated contexts and places in nature that, later, were substituted

for paper, ink, letters and the page. For Abram, the phonetic alphabet (as well as numbers) is an abstraction, as has become its languages, technologies of writing, grammars and texts whose accelerating mobility and autonomy from nature is close to complete, barring some remnant indigenous cultures whose endangered oral traditions sustain some memory of an animated relationship with nature and place (Chatwin 1987). Two thousand years after the Greeks, with numerous other enculturating forces, most contemporary children's literature privileges the text, its pages and screens and, hence, the ongoing de-naturing of animated nature.

As will be explained shortly, telling stories *in, about, with and for* nature's places is part of my attempt to create a reanimated version of 'ecoliteracy', presuming the ongoing popularity of that term, which recommends oral story be told and experienced directly in nature. Reanimated, remarkably? So that the connections of story, nature and place are spontaneously and sensuously experienced. This ecopedagogy seeks in a small way only to introduce children to an imaginatively real encounter with nature. While restor(y)ing imagination in child and adulthood is not a panacea in its own right to that which ails our younger generation (Stanley, Richardson, and Prior 2005) or 'fixes up' the ecologically problematic human condition, we note here that only recently have environmental education scholars included children in their studies; their growing up, their experiences, their learning and voice (see Rickinson 2001; Chawla 2002; Payne 2006; Barratt Hacking and Hacking 2007).

The role of imagination in educational research has received little attention (for example, Fitzgerald and Nielsen 2008). The dance of story (making, telling, doing, living), visual illustration and imagination has only been indirectly addressed and, in environmental education, is non-existent, as far as I know. The notion developed here of an ecopedagogy of imagination of nature/place constitutes a major point of departure from those studies in children literature where pedagogies and literacy occur, typically, within the unimaginative and non-remarkable confines of the four walls of the classroom. This article seeks to overcome some of the (eco)pedagogical silences in both the research in children's literature and in environmental education.

My use over the years of Robert Ingpen's gnome illustrations and accompanying folktales is part of long effort to conceive and pedagogically enact a phenomenologically lived but symbolic and mythical experience for children of *being not* what is anticipated by the everyday society in which they live and, in schooling, are expected to be 'culturally literate' about. It is difficult in this everyday to see how children can imagine something other than the crisis and fear conditions of postmodernity. Climate change, war, economic collapse and disease are intensified and individualized in a constructed 'fast' childhood that, increasingly, is mirrored in the equally quick 'downloading' in education and pedagogy of techno-consumerist-entertainment imperatives (for example, Payne 2003/2006; Malone 2007). Remarkably, an ecopedagogy of imagination provides hope for children to slowly immerse in, experience and reclaim some of the their untamed and yet to be domesticated wild natures.

Bob Ingpen's works reflect an abiding commitment to the re-storying, and reimagining of the remarkable times, spaces, places of nature, conservation and the positive prospects for the human condition, especially children's. He works through the medium and form of illustration, tale and text. In my pedagogical work, I have helped children and pre-service teachers live, dance and embody Ingpen's visual and textual inspiration. Ingpen's story *becomes* my own that, in turn, might *become* that of others, hence the intergenerational hope of the passing down of oral storytelling and illustration in nature's places.

My gnome-tracking excursus into Ingpen's remarkable world started in 1978 when I was a young, recently graduated teacher of Year 3 primary school children. A serendipitous combination of events introduced me to Ingpen's gnome storying, telling and tracking. In my pre-service teacher education program at college, I recall that we weren't introduced to gnomes in the 'children's literature' class! But I have faint memories of reading the 'Beowulf' story, an oral tradition from about the eighth century AD that is linked by some to the genesis of the modern wilderness concept. Indeed, that might have been the sum total of my environmental education as a pre-service teacher!

Ingpen is a remarkable pedagogue that I sought to emulate after my second year of teaching. So, after this year-long encounter in 1978 with Ingpen, I resigned from teaching and undertook overseas postgraduate studies in outdoor/environmental education. I wanted to *become* an academic and influence the next generation of teachers to become more than ordinary. Thirty years and many gnome expeditions later, I still teach Year 3 students in a pre-service teacher education unit called 'Experiencing the Australian landscape' (Payne and Wattchow 2009). This time they are 21- to 22-year-old third year undergraduate students in outdoor, physical, environmental and health education. Like my pre-service training, they are far less imaginative, more sceptical (Payne 2006), and I think I know why!

The underlying notions of the remarkable, experiential and imagination that I focus on here are a strange mix of ecopedagogical concerns that reflect the chance encounter in 1978 with Robert, an illustrator/author and parent of one of the eight- to nine-year-olds in my Year 3 class at Drysdale Primary School. In Australia, 1978 provided an educational climate in primary schools where curricula were far freer and schooling was less prescribed than what currently exists, as were the more open children and their less-protective parents. The school was located in a partially developed town. The mix of the bush, the built and the bay fostered numerous opportunities for children to explore, play and discover who and what they were, and what nature can mean (Payne 1998). And this mix of geography, demography and opportunity encouraged those children into a timely sense of self in 'place' in the broader scheme of faster things and worldly affairs about which the children obviously knew very little. Or so it seemed! And as a recently minted graduate, I was professionally naive, or was it frustrated with the stultifying nature of teaching in the already sterile confines of the four walls of the classroom. These ingredients, and others, led me into the gnome tracking experiences I recount here as they exist as memories of the past that persist in the significant present (Tanner 1980).

Chancy encounters with Robert Ingpen

A sealed letter hand delivered to me in class by nine-year-old Tom asked if I was prepared to allow the letter writer to trial on the Grade 3 I was teaching a new book he was illustrating and authoring. All I knew of Robert Ingpen was that he was Tom's father. I agreed via a telephone call.

Apparently Tom was telling stories at home about some of the things we had been doing 'environmentally' in class. I was piloting an innovative curriculum model for a new environmental education subject devised by Faculty of Education academics at nearby Deakin University (Castro et al. 1981).

In practice, this Deakin pilot project had me leading 'expeditions' into the local community, with some mums, to investigate six everyday sites of interest to the

children. The class had earlier ‘voiced’ and concluded there were three ‘good’ and three ‘bad’ changes to that local environment. These outside expeditions set the curricula for teaching inside the class – developing spelling lists of words newly used during the excursions; estimating distances and times walked; drawing maps; having guest-speakers from each site to tell us about the ‘change’ at each setting. The expeditions and spelling lists, and other things, were extended in class to reading and discussing storybooks (with environmental themes) like the *Wump world, Where the wild things are* and *Bunyip at Berkeley’s Creek*. Finally, in accordance with John Dewey’s notion of democracy in the classroom, the class voted about the personal importance of these six changes to their everyday, local environment. A drainpipe emptying into the bay was considered most worthy of further investigation and excursions with more mums and some dads.

Other wild things were happening in my class and, perhaps, being told at home by Tom (and others) to their parents: Mr Payne said it was OK to put on our raincoats and go outside to play even though (the Principal) had just announced over the school’s speaker system that there would be no play time due to the ‘bad’ weather.

After agreeing to Ingpen’s wish to trial a new book, the remarkable day came when Bob arrived with the draft text and illustrations for *The voyage of the poppykettle* (1980). Etched in my memory about the story and its reading and telling is the twinkle of his eye, the gaze, the timely display of each of the illustrations, the smooth voicing and gesturing of how over 450 years ago these eight hairy Peruvian gnomes, including baby Teresa (now elderly), descended from the high Andes to the coast and sailed in an earthenware poppykettle across the Pacific Ocean in a voyage of discovery to the ‘unchosen land’ (Ingpen 1981a) that by historically revisionist happenchance we now call Australia.

The class was spellbound! As was I. Ingpen, myself and another Year 3 teacher then organized (for some months later) a gnome festival for our combined 60 odd children, and their interested or curious parents, to Limeburner’s Point, near Indented Head where the friendly dolphin had beached the storm-damaged poppykettle and spilled its brass key ballast into the dunes over 450 years ago. Those brass keys, stolen by the hairy Peruvian gnomes from the Spanish invaders of the Andean highlands, were found deep in a cliff at Limeburner’s Point by lime diggers in 1847, exactly 263 years after the poppykettle crashed at Indented Head. Their discovery was documented by the then governor of the colony, Charles La Trobe, and is archived in what is now the State Museum. As an aside, Captain James Cook who is recognized as having ‘discovered’ Australia in 1770 never sailed into this part of the unchosen land. Others have hypothesized, possibly due to the brass keys, that Spanish or Portugese explorers might have first set foot on ‘the great southern land’. But, we now know better!

Now, or then in 1978, our gnome tracking festival to Limeburner’s Point had masses of children running, crawling, climbing, searching, high and low, here and there, for evidence of a gnome and, for enchanted and animated children who are not skeptics (unlike most mature and rational adults) the possibility of a sighting/siting. We had a gnome feast of sausages, mango chutney and poppyseed tea; the singing of the gnome national anthem; additional clues from Bob about how to track a gnome and, of course more and more searching and seeking of gnomes – maybe the garden gnome in the bush, the musical metrognome tuning an instrument high up in a tree or the vindictive marram grass gnomes who catapult sand into the faces of those people departing the beach but whom have been sighted, or sited, or cited,



Figure 2. Vindictive marram-grass gnomes riding the bulldog ant and catapulting a frond full of sand into the faces of pop-top littering people departing from a leisurely day-at-the-beach. Reproduced with permission from Robert Ingpen.

by those resident marram gnomes, for the crime of littering the sands and dunes during the day.

This chance encounter with Ingpen happened 30 years ago. Much could be said and written about the unfolding of an ecopedagogy of imagination but is summarized below in accounting for how I am now significantly positioned by these events. Ingpen and I struck up a (lifelong) friendship. I visited his home and we talked about gnomes, reality, imagination, stories, illustrations, teaching, knowing, children, learning, ticket sellers, side tracks and many other matters that mixed commentary, whimsy, wisdom, dreams, concerns, hopes and joys, worries and disappointments and many ‘what next’s?’ His timbered voice, twinkling eyes and gaze were and remain both fixating and alluring. The real was not real and the not real was real; Ingpen’s irreal was my introduction to metaphysics – the wild, untamed, edged and othered in us, nature and the world, lost somewhere from our memories of childhood that now gestures imaginatively and empathetically to the re-storying of nature, and critique of what now passes as education and pedagogy – thus ecocriticism.

Robert Ingpen

Bob Ingpen’s career and contribution to pictures and stories is a remarkable one (Ingpen with Page 1980; Ingpen with Mayor-Cox 2004), as is the story of the poppykettle told to him by Teresa Green, the baby stowaway and, now, 450 years later, remaining survivor of that voyage to the unchosen land.

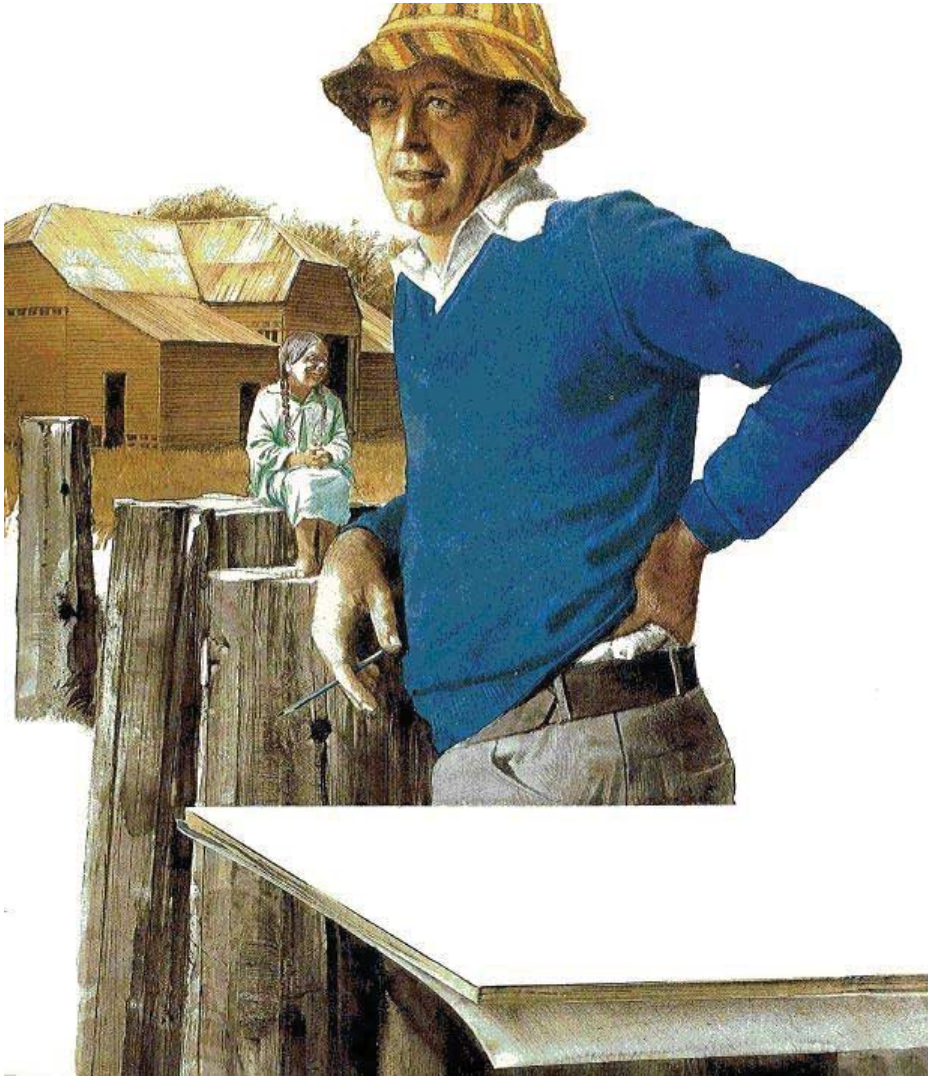


Figure 3. Robert Ingpen and Teresa at Brickenden Barn, 'marking time' somewhere near Longford, Tasmania. Reproduced with permission from Robert Ingpen.

A distinguished and prolific illustrator and writer, Ingpen's contribution crosses more genres than just children's literature. Ingpen was awarded the internationally prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Award for Children's Literature in 1986. For the purposes here, Ingpen's publications for children and adults about cultural history and geography (for example, 1979a), indigenous and natural heritage (for example, 1981b), and conservation in general, are prescient in the way they foreshadow, both visually and textually, many of the motifs we now ascribe to the discourses of environmental ethics, social and/or deep ecology theory and place pedagogy. Ingpen has always enjoyed close links with various educational institutions, be it as a founding member of the Council of Deakin University in the late 1970s, a lifelong commitment to the Geelong College and, indeed, to the Year 3 class at Drysdale Primary School where I was a young teacher.

Numerous things can also be said about Bob the person, Angela – his lifelong partner – and family, his career and its moral–political message by stealth (a point that escapes many), but I won't. For Ingpen is a beguiling bit of an outsider and in-betweener whose 'play' on the 'difference' between possible facts and fiction, the explainable and unexplainable, the real and unreal, the visible and invisible, gives imaginative life to the otherwise empty academic calls for the jargonized 'other'. Ecopedagogical imagination gives presence to this other. Gnome storytelling and tracking is easy, simple and practical – a discourse event that spontaneously embraces the openness of childhood and denials of it in adulthood.

Design, it must be added, looms very large in Ingpen's background and horizons, and the ways in which he constructs his work. But, Sarah Mayor-Cox (Ingpen with Mayor-Cox 2004) observes that 'joining the dots' about Ingpen's 'work' demands that the reader/viewer be attentive to those dots Ingpen confesses to deliberately leaving out. Those dots, metaphorically speaking, are part of what makes the dance of illustration, tale and text imaginative, simple and, potentially, ecocentrically wild for newcomers like me – to play with the dots I think are missing when I retell gnome stories. The missing dots in Ingpen's design have shaped much of my own post-poppykettle aspirations and efforts in environmental education pedagogy, curriculum development and (critical/post-phenomenological) approaches to research design and methodological inquiry and critique. Ingpen is less concerned about 'artistry' and 'colouring in' the dots than what he is about intelligent conceptual creation and the will to imagine and de-sign more than what is available, or present.

The slow discovery of the remarkable

The design just outlined has lived on for me and now takes the form of a 'slow ecopedagogy' in which gnome storytelling and tracking are a key part of a three-day discovery 'experiential learning program' (*elp*) I facilitate with university students. This ecopedagogy is described elsewhere (Payne and Wattchow 2008), as is its phenomenological role in the deconstruction of texts, including those that deconstruct other texts (Payne and Wattchow 2009). As part of a semester-long study of 'Experiencing the Australian landscape' the three-day 'Discovery *elp*' is conducted at the aptly named Bear Gully, near Cape Liptrap, on the coastal edge of SE Australia in late summer. Another three-day 'Rediscovery *elp*' revisits the same location some six weeks later in early winter when the place and its nature has changed considerably. The second *elp* is a further opportunity to sense and conceptualize what a 'place experience' might be by immersing in and, potentially, attaching to Bear Gully's natural qualities and cultural characteristics. Six half-day academic learning program (*alp*) seminars held at university before, in-between and after the two *elps* are designed recyclically to slowly embody the learning experiences. Following Dewey's (1938/1988) prescient call for an intelligent theory of experience in education, the slow pedagogical dancing conversation of *alps* and *elps* acts as a model for the still chronically undertheorized notion of 'experiential education' (Fox 2008).

Prior to the first Bear Gully 'Discovery *elp*', the third year students are informed that the three-day experience will be different. Gnoming is not mentioned. Indeed, the three days are de-signed and de-vised in a way that prepares 'students' to 'strip away' various personal assumptions, social baggage and cultural constructions often associated with outdoor/environmental education. For example, equipment 'needed' and distance 'to be travelled' are downplayed; boots, tents, jackets, maps, compasses

and activity driven notions of walking 20 kilometres from a to b in so many hours are replaced by nine locally placed ‘experiences’ of a few hours each that enact ‘different ways of doing, as meaning-making/knowing’ (Payne 2005). Rockpooling, shoreline art, water floating, beach strolling, sleeping under tarps in groups of 10 and preparing ‘slow food’ group meals with locally grown ingredients sourced from within 100kilometres of campus are some of these experiences. Over the three days most students will have remained within a kilometre or so of the Discovery camp.

I retell and show the *The voyage of the poppykettle* (Ingpen 1980) in a secluded spot a few hundred metres from camp on an edge-place in-between the sand and rocks meeting the coastal scrub and dunes. Dressed in a Peruvian poncho given to me many years ago in the Altiplano of the High Andes, I tell the story from memory, add bits when I feel the time is right, show the illustrations, glance carefully at students to retain eye contact, especially for the abundant sceptics, and move creatively amongst the group seated-in-the-sand.

But preceding the telling, I wander along the sandy and rocky edge-place, seemingly aimlessly and distracted by the surrounds, stopping, listening, pausing, looking – all of which are bodily pedagogies, or nonverbal cues and clues, for what I know in advance is the way most students will make meaning of the story and then track for gnomes in the dunes and bush.

Before the poppykettle retelling, I provide a ‘real’ history of Australian settlement. I read (not tell) fragments from two of Ingpen’s factual and illustrated accounts of (white) Anglo-Australian social and cultural history. I introduce poppykettle with the observation that those factual stories are one account only of the historical record and that others remain, often untold or not chosen and certainly not textualized. The ‘other’ historical story of the poppykettle’s voyage to the ‘unchosen land’ (Ingpen 1981a) and the facts surrounding the finding of the keys and documentation by Governor La Trobe is retold, steadily, with eye contact sustained – but occasionally distracted by more environmental cues, like the calling of a crow, and clues about gnomes (some marram grass I pause at and ‘handle’ on the edge space but do not name) known only to the storyteller. The clues will be revealed in a conclusion to the



Figure 4. The author telling gnome stories at the discovery of Bear Gully. Photograph reproduced with permission of Brian Wattachow.

storying that leads into my invitation for student pairs to explore the immediate edge area for a possible sighting of a gnome or, at least, the finding of some evidence of possible gnome inhabitation. Eventually we regroup, discuss our ‘findings’ and, in some instances, record via sketch or/and words in an ‘experiential log’, some of the shared evidence.

As might be expected, there are a wide variety of responses and contributions. For the most part, the openness I encourage is taken up by students with many searching, discovering, or pretending to, and then verbally sharing the imaginative experience. At its ‘end’ I ask the group to not ‘let on’ to the other groups what has happened. Over the remaining times of the *elp*, where and when appropriate, I ‘drop’ more non-verbal and verbal cues to individuals or a group. For example, I might listen intently to sounds in the high up branches that might, indeed, be the sound of metrognomes tuning their instruments.

I have collected data from the trackers of gnomes over the years, invariably a number of weeks after the first *Discovery*. In response to the question, ‘What is your overwhelming memory of the gnome storytelling and tracking?’ a random sampling of responses include:

It felt like hearing about Santa Claus all over again. It encouraged me to believe again in the irrational. Kids have it – a beautiful imagination. We now have to force that back on ourselves. It was about making something out of nothing – a kid mentality that is lost. (Greenleaf, male, 29)

Knowing that I was going to be given the opportunity to do what I love most was my favorite memory. The anticipation and excitement of being able to tap into an alternative reality – and create and explore the possibilities of the gnome world. I loved the freedom of living in that world – and being with the experience of valuing all things – and everything worldly holds an infinite and connected story. (Fairy Sparkle, female, 24)

It was a bit silly but the more I tried to get into it, the more I was curious about what was going on. (Troll, female, 21)

It made me feel a bit naïve. In China, where I’m from, only small children are told by the teacher to do that. I haven’t experienced it since kindergarten – the interaction of story and real nature. I’ve never seen a teacher take fun all so seriously. I liked it – very memorable. (Sun, male, 22)

Since the early 1980s, I occasionally bump into ex-students who, amongst other things, chat fondly about the gnome experience. Some contact me to describe how they have taken up ‘gnoming’, often with a class they are teaching, but also with their own children. One mother recently wrote to me:

Over twenty years ago you introduced me to Robert Ingpen. Since then I have had two children and they both know all about the gnome culture in Geelong. Many years ago, my son had a great time climbing over the Poppykettle in the park at Geelong. About three weeks ago, my daughter brought out ‘The Poppykettle Papers’ from the bookcase and has been getting me to read a chapter each night. She already has got ‘Australian Gnomes’ lined up as the next book to read. Thank you for sharing the special world with me so many years ago.

An annual ‘Poppykettle festival’ for children occurs in Geelong, near my first gnome tracking expedition to Limeburner’s Point in 1978 with the Year 3 primary school

children. It is regularly attended by Robert Ingpen. The event is a tangible expression of imagination by children in that it seeks to presence that remarkable possibility.

Remarkable pedagogies

Gnomes and their visualization played out through the sensuous dance of illustration, storytelling, pedagogical cueing and experiential tracking, in nature's classroom, is one example of a slow ecopedagogy of imagination. It aspires to be ecocentric and intercorporeal – that is, nature's places socially guide the embodied meaning-making and 'learning' of the participants. In schooling, the majority of literacies occur indoors, are primarily of the text and, therefore, mind and, mostly anthropocentric. Experiential and embodied 'openings' and the lure of the 'wild' of nature might not be accessible, or available, because texts and words reflect the tamed nature of the domesticated indoors.

Here, beyond the descriptions of gnome storying and tracking outlined above, is not the space to prescribe an ecopedagogy of imagination. That would be counterproductive! It would defeat for other creative teachers and researchers the possibility of other remarkable alternatives. But, in moving to the temporary end of this account, there are some broad dimensions of an ecopedagogy of imagination that the interested, possibly imaginative reader, might like to consider.

I concede the role of imagination is not a pedagogical aim for all teachers. Some might see it as a luxury. Undergraduates are often difficult to work with (in my experience) in that there exists a great deal of scepticism to that which is non-factual, or extraordinary, and speaks to the values of perception, imagination and exploration of the wild or the other. On the other hand, there are many who will welcome the possibility of a pedagogy of imagination, even an ecocentric and intercorporeal one. Children's story, telling, illustration and visual dimensions of literature can sustain childhood and nurture the wellbeing of their (and our) human condition. It can reinvent many of the assumptions we make about practices of education, including how meaning-making in experiences can contribute to the much-sought after engagement of learners. Viewed in this way, for the ecocentric purposes pursued here, children's literature can be a 'voice' *in, with, about* and *for* the environment and against the ecological problematic and what that entails for the next generations. They will inherit what we currently can't or don't want to see, or reimagine. Openings are needed.

Beyond the numerous cues, clues and exhortation described above, noting numerous dots are missing from that text, what non-prescribed dots about imagination do need to be joined, identified very generally and briefly coloured in as a textual account of an ecopedagogy of imagination?

It has been said many times that the human species is a storytelling one, ranging from grand narratives, scientific and moral truths to folklore, myth and superstition. We struggle to tell, or listen, to the right, true or correct story. Indeed, different stories, narratives and discourses are constantly told, rehearsed and lived. In education, we are too often confronted with the teaching and telling of a particular state-sanctioned curriculum story, or document. Children's literature, potentially, and the arts, potentially, retain the possibility of being different, other or wild. We need to grasp that possibility in education, including environmental education. That opportunity, potentially, is the source of a revitalized means of promoting the sensual, perceptual and conceptual dimensions of an aesthetic education, in this instance an ecoaesthetic

opening in ‘experiencing’, ‘living’, *being* the story and *becoming* other than what we currently are. Their confluence might well be the remarkable.

An ecopedagogy of imagination invokes that which can’t normally be accessed, or isn’t anticipated, expected and accepted. If so, and beyond the above characterization of gnome tracking, there are some indicators of an ecopedagogy of imagination worth mentioning, in conclusion, so that we might begin to contest and reimagine dominant views of pedagogy in education and how they are reproduced in environmental education, sometimes according to the imperative of pedagogical content knowledge as it might now inform the emerging popularity of the notion of ecoliteracy.

First, to what extent are our current pedagogies aware of the shift entailed in moving towards the possibility of an ecocentric approach to education? To what extent do we encourage the body and its experiences of stories in making meaning of our connections and, therefore, intercorporeal relations with environments, places and natures? Children’s literature, inclusive of story, illustration, telling and experiencing, can make a crucial contribution to an aesthetic education that is pleasing and meaningful to a range of ages. The main limit to a pedagogy of imagination is, ironically, our own imagination. There is, for example, an imaginative place in the slow ecopedagogy pedagogy referenced above for gnome storying but also silences and stillness that nature might tell not in words and not language, but in the strange, the wild, the moment, the now and nature’s call on our individual and collective memory. We, as pedagogues, educators and researchers, might not feel the rushed need to ‘fill’ pedagogy (or published papers) with preconceived notions of accelerated learning (outcomes) and predetermined content and its assessment/evaluation.

What, therefore, is harder to imagine in the practices of an ecopedagogy of imagination? And how might children’s literature contribute in ways that other curriculum areas associated with environmental education can consider? Here, I am in murkier waters! But my list includes the importance of fostering the suspension of belief that, unfortunately in the negative, recommends the need for us all to cast off, even momentarily, the existing assumptions and presumptions that we anthropocentrically bring to teaching and learning. But I think we can reasonably conclude that the perceptual–sensory nurturing of imagination and its pedagogical embodiment requires much more time than what we can ordinarily commit to, or our timetables dictate to us. Be it the very slow telling of a story in the classroom, allowing children much more time to ‘look at’ and interpret illustrations, or re-timetabling children’s schedule to encourage ‘reflection’ on the story told and shown. Or, as I have described above, the dance of slow time ‘opens up’ when we recycle the telling and experiencing of the story on site in that place (as we do at Bear Gully) with other different spaces, such as the classroom, as modelled in the Deakin pilot project.

The experiential nature of on-site storying immediately invites into our formulation of an ecopedagogy of imagination the emphatic role and value of the sensing and perceiving body, its corporeality and intercorporeality with others, be they human or more-than-human. And here, in conceiving a notion of the dancing relationship between imagination and embodied experience of story, a degree of importance can be attached by storytellers, artful pedagogues and craft-ful researchers to, for example, the sensuous spatiality of the body and ‘geographies of physical activity in time’. Here, I depart quite assertively from story read or told only within the confines of the indoor classroom, typically a disciplined space of, essentially, sedentary body engagement in learning that consistently targets cognitive growth only.

As an underlying dimension of human experience, but with a particular relevance to younger children, the spatialities and geographies of pedagogical experience are only ever implied in the discourses of environmental education and, to my limited knowledge, in children's literature and 'story' theory. While children might well anthropocentrically listen to the social nature of stories about their selves, or gender issues, and so on in the classroom, the embodied/experiential connection I am recommending with open spaces and more-than-human 'natures' places a heavy burden on environmental education pedagogues, storytellers and ecoliteracy/criticism researchers to go outside into those other, wilder, edgier places, spaces and versions of nature.

Notwithstanding these challenges, it seems to me that the storied suspension of belief and phenomenological/experienced suspension of time and the playful and sensuous connections of bodies and different versions of nature are some of the more vital ingredients of an ecopedagogy of imagination that might, indeed must, be developed in children's (eco)literature. And, potentially, adults! But, in reiterating the scepticism of the many about such gnome-like matters, I must also acknowledge there are other challenges. One of the Grade 3 children I taught in 1978 was not allowed to participate in the gnome festival or Deakin project due to religious reasons. Also, to not indicate that there is potentially a downside to imagination and the various forms in which it can be negatively promoted, or manifested, would be a serious oversight here given how certain images, constructions and expectations act across the broad spectrum of human endeavour and, potentially, anti-social and/or environmental behaviours. For example, some 'games' and their texts and narratives ask their owner to imagine themselves as a 'killer' and so on, all of which are contrary to the positive connotations of the remarkable pedagogies of imagination outlined here.

On this note of caution, clearly much of the work on the value of imagination, the role of story, the possibility of the remarkable, the wild and the open in children's (eco)literature is speculative and subjective. While the notion of imagination in education has attracted recent attention (for example, Egan 1997), Thomas Nielsen's (2004) book is one of the rare examples in education of an empirical study of imagination. His grounded theory study of Steiner classrooms helps elaborate some of the preceding ideas indicated above about a pedagogy of imagination. Nielsen felt that Rudolf Steiner's philosophical interest in imagination required empirical qualification and updating, particularly with how young postmodern children presented a different sort of pedagogical challenge to those children Steiner was writing about in the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century. Not surprisingly, Nielsen's longstanding motivation to study imagination drew autoethnographically on his 'childhood memories from school' where his 'unbearable anticipation' of the marking of his fourth grade 'imaginative story' was soured by a teacher who accused him of copying it from a book. Nielsen recalls how his now discredited 'gaze' returned to 'out the window' (3). Subsequently, Nielsen's ethnographic and phenomenological study of three Steiner classrooms identified three modes of pedagogy and seven methods of teaching. The methods included exploration activities, empathy, story, art, discussion, drama and routine or order while the overarching modes are described by Nielsen as 'leaving', where the teacher designs activities for pupils to imagine on their own; 'sharing', where imagery is negotiated between child and teacher; and 'immersing', where children are ensnared in a 'net' of imagery.

Ecopedagogies of imagination

Mindful of Nielsen's (2004) rare empirical study of the notion of imagination, and related speculative works (Fitzgerald and Nielsen 2008), and my autoethnographic restorying of 30 years of gnome storytelling and tracking experiences with various populations, I conclude with some observations.

There is a profound difference between 'story'-reading, telling and making or authoring and their 'doing' and how each might influence the experience of the senses, the growth of perception and imagination, and other learning outcomes. 'Story', to be sure, has different genres, such as the 'tale', 'tall', 'folk' or factual narrative, and so on. The physical or experiential setting of the story 'performance' will also be influential – in the classroom is, essentially, a vicarious experience that is easily and immediately accessed – but, at the end of the day, is abstract and primarily of the mind or intellect only. Story for more ecoliterate and broadly imaginative environmental criticism (Buell 2006) purposes can be performed orally (not textually) 'on-site' in nature's places or rehearsed outside, possibly in the real contexts, proximal spaces and geographies of the physical activity of that story and, if so, encourage a 'direct' embodying, sensing and perceiving of wilder, in-between possibilities of that 'place'.

The dance of story, illustration, performance, exploration and drama developed within the realm of sensory and ecological affordances of 'nature' will further open the imaginative into the realms of the remarkable. Eco, intercorporeal options enter freely into the magic of the pedagogical transaction as those stories are told, danced and 'lived' in an embodied manner on the 'real' stages of that which has been storied – the body(ies) ecopedagogically imagined story.

So, to the magical storyteller, read David Abram's (1996) *Spell of the sensuous*. It is a remarkable philosophical source for anyone contemplating an environmental education through story and literature. Telling imaginative stories imaginatively is disinterested in technique. Like Ingpen, know your story inside out and outside in. Understand its messages, overt and covert. Use the dynamics of your voice, mood, gesture, positioning, eye contact. Understand the importance of timing, tempo, rhythm, silences, pausing and stillness, even silliness in the telling. The teller holds and releases eye contact with the audience, sometimes intensely with a listener looking beyond the surface of his/her eye; other times roaming around and wiling/inviting the listener to share the uncertain moment. Gazes and pauses allow the place a voice in the telling. The teller can 'work' the spatiality of his/her movement, orchestrating a dynamic geography of activity in some of those more-than-human spaces important to the places inhabited by the children. What features of localized nature and places can be embedded in the oral telling (and mimicking) – for example, the morning warble of the lyrical magpie, a stand of old trees, the distant, recyclical roars of the crashing waves.

So, reflect upon some strategies for suspending and animating one self and the audience and letting nature speak through the story you select to tell. Know your environments – outdoors and indoors, school, playgrounds, gardens and parks and the bush, sea or coast – if outdoors nurture a 'drawing-in' of and for the environment, as that 'place' becomes co-storyteller and interpreter or embodied prompt for exploration and discovery. Understand the experience of the child and in the transactional nature of the ecopedagogy of imagination and its interactive positioning of teacher and active, participatory audience. Allow children to invent and tell their stories about the place the teacher has storied. In other words, a remarkable ecology of the (oral) story (telling) beckons pedagogues and researchers.

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