Towards a better press for animals
Denis Mahony

Environmental Education as an education of conscience

I work at environmental education. By this I mean that while environmental education is the major component of my professional life, it is not confined within these boundaries. How I eat and travel, what I buy, where I put my waste, the judgements I make about the actions of government, industry and business, increasingly invade the formerly comfortable realms of my consciousness and conscience. This whole process constantly challenges me to reinterpret what environmental education means.

I would like to comment on two aspects of this. Firstly, when I seek to apply this change in my thinking to the subject’s rationale, I am most comfortable in placing it in the domains of epistemology, ontology and ethics; epistemology because I see this way of knowing as experiential and subjective, rather than expert and objective. I look to ontology and ethics because, when I seek to simplify the plethora of definitions that introduce environment education documents, I find they are essentially about the human-nature relationship, and about how far to extend human compassion into the non-human world.

The second point is that change is the central focus of this understanding of environmental education, whether viewed from a personal perspective, as I have recounted, or as something affecting whole societies. This change is made more problematic because of its intrusion into personal space, and because it confronts commonly held/hidden understandings of human epistemology, ontology and ethics.

The environmental education literature shows a preference for discussing these matters in the generalised language of ‘world view’, ‘ideology’ and ‘paradigm shift’. Much of the writing presents environmental world views or ideologies as vigorously contested, with a basic polarisation resulting from human-centred and nature-centred poles. Two and four-category representations
predominate. The first distinguishes the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) (low valuation on nature, compassion restricted to those near and dear, accepting risks in order to maximise wealth, unlimited growth, and satisfaction with present society and politics) from the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), which challenges each of these value/belief positions. The second commonly subdivides the DSP into Cornucopian and Accomodationist/Managerialist ('Light Green') positions and the NEP into Deep Ecology ('Dark Green') and Social Ecology ('Red Green') positions. Ecofeminism is a particular orientation of Social Ecology.

While a challenge to change our ideas, values and beliefs is central to the New Environmental Paradigm, in the four part scale, the focus is more on defining variations of the original classification, and the reader may form the impression that these are equally-spaced positions on a continuum. It is true that, in the West, 'deep green-ness' has dragged the fulcrum of environmentalism from the Cornucopian to the Light Green position. But as Sharon Beder has argued, there is a fundamental discontinuity between the Light Green and Deep/Red Green positions which my own research supports. The environmental education literature seldom ventures into the areas of subjectivity and experiential knowing, which together form the pathway which has led me to my understanding of what environmental education is. It is consistent with this epistemology to view the collective education part of this as a sharing of our individual stories, a process which respects subjectivity and experiential knowing, while contributing to the search for a change in the collective human-nature relationship.

1 There are many variations of this in the Environmental Education literature. I have drawn mine from John Gien, *Education for the Environment*, (Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1993), p.25.
2 Ibid., p.27.
Stories which I and others tell about paradigm shift experiences are sometimes based on a 'critical incident'. As understood in traditional biographies, a critical incident refers to a significant change or turning point in a person's life, but David Tripp adds another meaning:

I extend 'critical incident' to include the commonplace events that occur in the everyday life of a classroom. Such incidents are rendered critical by the author by being seen as indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures, and are often presented to teachers in the form of a dilemma in which they have a choice of at least two mutually exclusive courses of action.

I have applied Tripp's concept to an insight into the discontinuity between the Light Green and Deep/Red Green positions, which constitutes a breakthrough in the dominant culture's conditioning of our environmental ideology. It is akin to the conversion experience described in detail by Nancy Dudley. In my case, subjective research, via a critical incident, audited my values and brought me to identify with a forest community. This was not a totally pleasant experience: I discovered that I loved and championed the forest to the detriment of my desire to be accepted by some of my human community. At times I felt angry, sad, determined, alienated, insecure - but beyond all this, I was sure that this was where I wanted to be.

I suspect that critical incidents are rare experiences, and not something that can be easily incorporated into an environmental education context, although the experiential education methodology can attempt to do so. The term 'conscientisation' refers to an adjustment of our moral judging to include what may be good or bad for the natural world, and is seen as contributing

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6 Denis Mahony, ‘Green Stories: The Experience of Environmental Commitment’, Earthlinks '97. Proceedings of the 9th Biennial Conference of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (University of Tasmania, Hobart, 1997). See the stories told by Denis, Mary and Col.
to an education for the environment, within a critical pedagogy. In this respect it exemplifies the experiential-subjective epistemology I have been advocating. The remainder of this discussion will be based on this conscientisation approach.

It is not so difficult to accept the challenge to adjust our consciences to include compassion for non-human creatures when a particular environment or species is presented as being under threat, and occupies centre stage. In these cases, the battle lines are clearly drawn, and press reports commonly look to representatives of the human and non-human ethical positions to state their opposing cases. My concern here is with informal environmental education, where animals are included in the content of a press report, but the values they represent are not the primary focus. In such instances those interviewed, the journalist, editor, or illustrator, inadvertently teach readers about the worth of the animals. In this scenario, I argue, there is an obvious need to look to our conscience for a moral judgement.

Press coverage of selected animals and habitats

My purpose here is to illustrate this incidental cultural representation of animals in the press in three categories: animals in the wild, domesticated animals, and the places where animals live. My selection of newspaper extracts is not the result of a systematic survey, but a concentration of my ethical attention on the values being assigned to selected animals as I did my usual reading of local, regional and national Australian newspapers. I have in fact been tracking my own conscientisation, flowing on from the 'critical incident' awareness that commenced when I read the chapter on animal testing and factory farming in Peter Singer’s Animal Liberation, and which was further advanced when I felt compelled to intervene for the sake of my local forest community.

Among references to animals in the wild, larger animals living in the ocean appear to be objects of ambivalent regard. While I have read of concerns about beached whales, the 'by-catch' from netting (including driftnets), the live fish trade to Asia, and occasional murmurs about the damage resulting from plastic flotsam and the shark meshing of swimming beaches, game fishing seems to be quarantined from any ethical attention.

10 Fien, Education for the Environment.
Extract one
‘Shark catch sets record for boy’

It was first time lucky yesterday for Chad Nelson, who beat a NSW and Australian junior record by landing a 214kg mako shark. Chad, 10, of Swansea, had his first chance on the rod yesterday after accompanying his father, Mr Bob Nelson, for the past three months on game fishing trips on Scotch Mist, a boat owned by Mr. Col Hutchinson. The boat was in 65 fathoms of water off Merewether when Chad hooked the deadly shark with a 10kg line. Four hours and five minutes later he landed his catch, exhausted. Chad’s mother, Mrs Colleen Nelson, said last night that the previous junior record for a mako shark was set in 1988 with a 92kg. The new record would be verified with the NSW Game Fishing Association this week. The shark was dumped out to sea because its weight rendered it potentially harmful to eat through mercury contamination. Chad will keep the jaws as a memento.

The Newcastle Herald
29 March 1993

When I read this, I was struck by the contrast between the praise heaped on the boy and the negative esteem accorded to the shark. The article appears under a photo (twice the column space of the text) which shows a smiling boy with one hand resting on the head of the dead shark, which is suspended by its tail, the reporter tells us it was the boy’s ‘first chance on the rod’, he only used a 10kg. line, and the four hours and five minutes activity left him exhausted. Meanwhile the shark is regarded as ‘deadly’ or at best an object (described as ‘the shark’, the boy’s ‘catch’, or ‘it’, rather than a gendered being). There is no mention of how the shark felt about its four hour and five minutes experience, and after the weighing, photographing, and dissection to obtain the jaws for a memento (a symbol of deadliness?), its body was ‘dumped’ at sea because its flesh had been poisoned. The newspaper staff and, by inference, the game fishing interest group, seem oblivious to what I saw as an amazing denigration of this non-human animal.

Extract Two
‘Catch of a lifetime for junior angler’

After four hours of “constant play” with a 109 kg striped marlin, Robert Besoff reeled in the biggest catch of his
life on Sunday evening and broke an Australian junior game fishing record in the process.

The 12-year-old Toronto High pupil had good reason to brag yesterday after breaking the junior record for striped marlin (105 kg), which is listed by the Game Fishing Association of Australia.

Robert caught the marlin on Sunday when he was fishing with his father, Paul, and friends on his father’s 38ft Riviera game fishing boat, Kazoo.

Robert’s mother, Mrs Debbie Besoff, spoke of her son’s prize catch from her Fishing Point home yesterday while her son attended school.

Mrs. Besoff said Robert and her husband went to fish for sharks at a deep-sea location near the continental shelf known as The Canyons, 70km south-east of Swansea Heads.

“They were actually fishing for sharks out there,” Mrs Besoff said. “Just a few weeks ago Robert was fighting a really big tiger shark for a few hours but he ended up losing it.”

“But there are also some big marlin out there and this one actually took the shark bait.”

Robert played the fish for four and a half hours before reeling it in. It was weighed about 8pm at the Swansea Game fishing Weight Station to qualify for the Australian record and junior world record.

“It’s a really great honour as the Australian record he’s broken has been standing for the past eight to ten years,” Mrs. Besoff said.

“Four and a half hours of constant play with a fish is quite a feat; a marlin can knock a man around.”

“It’s a very difficult sport...and marlins are particularly hard to catch. They jump around a lot and they’re fast swimmers and just rush up to the surface. You’ve got to keep the line taught [sic] all the time and it’s very hard going; you’ve got a lot of weight on you.”

“Paul’s played fish and sharks for up to ten hours at times. You don’t often get a really good catch when everything goes right. So many things can go wrong and that’s what makes it such a triumph. Actually landing it close to dark and breaking a record...Robert’s ecstatic.”

With Robert a junior member of Lake Macquarie Game Fishing Club, Mrs. Besoff said the sport ran in the family, with her father-in-law, George Besoff, and her father and brother Jack and John Heathfield, well-known game fishermen in their time.

She said Robert had been fishing “since he could hold a rod”, but became involved in game fishing only in the past 12 months.
To qualify for the junior world record, the equipment Robert used, including the rod and line, must be sent to the United States for verification for the world record. Mr. Paul Besoff said there was no junior world record for striped marlin and the category was vacant as it was created only recently.

Gillian McNally
The Newcastle Herald
22 April 1997

There are some similarities with the previous extract. There are two photographs occupying twice the column space of the text, one replicating the boy-and-dead-animal pose, and the other showing the boy with rod under full strain, over the stern of his father’s boat. Again the focus is on a boy’s achievement in establishing a record. It is a great honour, a triumph, which makes the boy justifiably ecstatic and gives him ‘good reason to brag’. It took a similar time to accomplish (about four and a half hours). Although the striped marlin is not represented as inherently dangerous, ‘a marlin can knock a man around’. We are not told about what happened to the fish after its death and the weighing-photographing ritual, but the report suggests that the value of these animals lies only in their capacity to be ‘played’, and so hooking the marlin was a bonus beyond the intended sharks, because the former will intensify the battle/victory experience for the humans.

Figure 1. The Newcastle Herald 22.4.97
This story is also used by Lewis, the newspaper’s cartoonist, to satirise a political event (Figure 1). The cartoon depicts a white-coated ‘judge’ distracted from his task of taking details from the boy (posing alongside the marlin), by an Australian fisherman/prime-minister gesticulating about his ‘one that got away’, seen in the background as an enormous senator-fish, which has battered the prime minister, wrenched his gear and sunk his boat. Two additional messages are conveyed: there is a characterisation of undesirable human qualities by fitting them into animal form which I will discuss with regard to some other examples; and in this cartoon the marlin trophy has a winner’s rosette attached, inscribed with ‘Aussie Record’, which to my mind reinforces the ‘Australian-ness’ of the activity - a healthy outdoor sport, winning against the odds, and in a family setting. Confining the value of the marlin to a ‘prize catch in this patriotic context, makes a contrary sentient valuing even more difficult.

Extract Three
‘Record marlin catches off Port Stephens’

Phenomenal results from game-fishing tournaments out of Port Stephens during the past two weeks has elevated the “blue-water wonderland” to one of the world’s best marlin waters.

The result smashed the 1000 tagged marlin milestone, which is more than any tournament in the world.

In seven days of fishing, 1340 billfish were caught, and in modern game fishing with the accent on conservation and tag-and-release very much the norm, only 36 were taken and weighted.

The NSW Inter-Club Game Fishing Tournament, held each year has always been considered one of the premier game-fishing tournaments, even by world standards, and was held over the past two weekends.

Between the weekends, Monday was Ladies Day and on Tuesday and Wednesday anglers fished in the Australian International Billfish Tournament.

During the first two days of fishing there were an incredible 543 marlin tagged and released by 230 boats.

Normally a day’s marlin fishing is considered successful if a boat has half a dozen strikes and hooks up two fish, but during the tournament boats were reporting anything up to 20 strikes with 10 and 15 tags.

On Monday, 59 boats fished in the ladies-only competition and tagged 68 marlin, while on Tuesday
and Wednesday another 259 marlin were tagged, with last weekend pushing the total to 1340.

The marlin have come down the coast with a warm tropical current which has pushed the water temperatures up to 26 degrees, and contains huge schools of bait fish which the marlin are feeding on.

Fred Studden
The Newcastle Herald
3 March 1997

This extract reports on a seven day game-fishing competition offshore from a marine-based holiday resort some hundred kilometres north of Sydney, during which 1340 marlin were caught. As well as giving details of the catch, the reporter makes two points. The first notes that the total score is a new international record for such a tournament, which 'elevates the "blue water wonderland" to one of the world's best marlin waters'. This is another example of accrediting game fishing by providing it with contemporary cultural values. In this instance it is another Australian winner and a means of attracting tourist dollars. The second point relates that all the marlin except 36 were tagged and released, which typifies 'modern game fishing with the accent on conservation'. While this is undoubtedly an improvement, I would regard the statement as a very human-centred idea of conservation, once again with no recognition of the marlins' perspective. This is also illustrated by the caption under one of the photos accompanying the text, referring to a marlin 'dancing' across the ocean after being hooked.

The final illustration in this group is a photo showing two Australian test cricketers on tour in South Africa (Figure 2). They are framed by two dolphins leaping high out of the water in unison, and the caption makes a word play on 'flipper', associating the dolphins' limb with a bowler's trick ball. Probably few would object to the association made here, but my conscience is unhappy not only with these animals being held captive and made to perform for human pleasure and gain, but the added trivialisation and reinforcement of their condition, by the dolphins being made to carry some banter about Australian cricketing prowess. The last is a source of considerable national pride, and there is a subtle value transfer implied of a similar kind to that intended by cigarette advertisers, where a wholesome
value (like enjoying outdoor recreation) is associated with one that is ethically questionable.

The next extract is different in that it does not exhibit the bland indifference of the fishing people and the reporters to the sea animals. Instead the animal is 'demonised'.

Extract four
‘Vicious kangaroo attack’

Weston man’s horrifying ordeal.
Exclusive: David Quick

A Weston pensioner is still in a state of shock after a fight to the death with a huge rogue kangaroo at Richmond Vale on Monday. The 71-year-old man, Mr. John Hall, was attacked by the monster kangaroo early Monday morning while he was quietly picking mushrooms and says he is lucky to be alive.

Mr. Hall suffered severe lacerations to his face, right arm and stomach but was able to stay the beast with his pocket knife in a close quarters struggle.

His cries for help were eventually heard by rural workers in the area who rushed Mr Hall to Kurri hospital.

He was later allowed home after treatment for severe lacerations.

Still dazed and weak from the extraordinary ordeal, and with one arm encased in plaster, Mr Hall was barely able to talk about it yesterday.

“I had often picked mushrooms in the area before and had seen kangaroos. I know from experience to be wary of them and we simply ignored each other.”

“On this occasion, though, it might be the mating season or something, it was different,” Mr Hall said.

“I was bending down getting wild mushrooms and when I stood up the roo was rearing over me. He must have been more than 6ft to do that.”

“He was obviously cranky and making snarling hissing noises. I tried to gently back away thinking a peaceful retreat might work but the roo followed me, swiping at me with his forelegs. Each time those razor sharp claws took lumps out of my arm. The smell of blood seemed to make him more aggressive.”

“The next thing I know he had knocked me to the ground and then I knew I was in real trouble.”

“I’ve never been so scared because I’ve seen what these things can do when they rake with their back legs.”
"I'll never get over it. Normally I pick the mushrooms, but on Monday I had decided to use my small pocket knife instead and as real good luck would have it, it was in my hand."

"Without it, I wouldn't have had a chance. I was so terrified that I really didn't know what was happening but no matter how old you are, instinct for survival makes you fight like hell and I instinctively stabbed at the beast, all the time shouting for help and realising what little chance there is of killing a big roo with a pocket knife."

"I feel it was largely my own fault in being too complacent, a false sense of security."

Mr Hall, who was born in Abermain and knows the bush well, says his ordeal is a lesson for others.

"I didn't want this publicity, but to get the message across that all these animals are dangerous. Even in a park, I wouldn't let a child go near a kangaroo or an Emu."

"I'm lucky to be alive - what chance would a child have?"

The Advertiser
11 January 1995

It appears that this man had a frightening and dangerous encounter with a kangaroo. The manner in which this event is interpreted reveals not only the expected anthropocentric perspective (tempered here by the throwaway line, 'It might have been mating season or something.') but it also goes far beyond this to rewrite the event as an epic and heroic struggle between man and beast. The lines of battle are clearly drawn by representing the man as aged (and a pensioner), (almost) defenceless, engaged in a simple rural activity ('quietly picking mushrooms'), and avoiding confrontation ('I know from experience to be wary of them.'). But the beast is a 'monster' and a 'rogue', 'cranky', 'vicious' and 'aggressive' (particularly after it smelled blood), emitting 'snarling hissing noises', and armed with 'razor sharp claws'. The man is forced into a 'fight to the death' and, against the odds, manages to 'slay' the beast with nothing but his pocket knife.

The story has a moral, delivered with the authority of a man who 'knows the bush well', that 'all these animals are dangerous', particularly to children. It is instructive to contrast this interpretation of a frightening and dangerous encounter with Val
Plumwood’s unadorned narrative of her near-death crocodile experience.11

The media reconstruction of these events illustrates well that ‘deep-seated fear of “non-human” nature [which is] portrayed as evil, random, and innately aggressive’ described in Doyle, Dyer and Stratford’s report on the media coverage of the 1994 New South Wales bushfires. ‘Bushfires, along with earthquakes and floods are media events par excellence. They show how fearsome nature is at work, how weak and how vulnerable humans are’.12

I turn now to domesticated animals.

Extract Five
‘Egg firm awaits Lake go-ahead’

Ringal Valley Pty Ltd, the Lake Macquarie egg company that has agreed to run the egg farm proposed for Green Point, has indicated that it may have to leave the region if the project does not go ahead. At the same time, the Newcastle branch of the Animal Liberation group has signalled that if the development does proceed it will stage protests at Green Point, with the backing of the organisation’s national office.

An Animal Liberation spokesman, Mr. Mark Pearson, said yesterday that the group would initially lobby members of Lake Macquarie City Council to try to have the 120,000-hen egg farm refused.

The managing director of Ringal Valley, Mr. Ian Livingstone, said yesterday that his family’s firm had lent its support to the project as a way of updating its own production equipment and complying with new State Government regulations that will, from 1995, require larger cages for battery hen farms.

Mr Livingstone said there was no other land in eastern Lake Macquarie large enough to accommodate the sort of modern egg facility that Ringal Valley has been asked to manage by the owners of most of Green Point, McCloys Pty Ltd.

He said the company had already been looking at moving to the Tamworth area, where it already had

four farms, before the McCloys offer was made and would do so again if the project did not proceed.

This included whether Lack Macquarie City Council refused approval for the $3.5 million egg farm, or whether McCloys shelved the plan in the event of gaining its preferred option of developing half of its holding for residential purposes and donating the rest for a public park.

"We have been farmers in this part of Lake Macquarie since 1938." Mr Livingstone said.

"Our intention is to continue living here because we love it."

"This is where our market is and this is where we want to stay."

"To get another opportunity like this we would need to move to Tamworth."

Mr Livingstone said Ringal Valley, started by his grandfather, had about 7% of the NSW egg market and employed 80 people at Belmont North, Wyong, Kurri Kurri and Tamworth. He said he hoped that the Green Point project did not become an animal welfare issue, because the planned egg farm was intended to be the most modern such facility in the world.

Birds would be kept in air-conditioned and humidity-controlled sheds, safe from predators.

At the end of their laying life they would be taken from the egg farm to a meat processing plant off Green Point.

"The success of a farmer depends on how he cares for his stock". Mr Livingstone said. "The welfare of our birds is our number one consideration."

But Animal Liberation's Mr Mark Pearson said the egg farm planned for Green Point would be a "concentration camp for birds".

Mr Pearson said that under current regulations each bird had a caged floor space less than the size of an A4 sheet of paper. That would increase to about A4 size after 1995.

Birds were placed under enormous stress, they constantly pecked at one another and their bones became weak from lack of exercise.

Kevin Love
The Newcastle Herald
28 April 1993

The newsworthiness of this issue derives at least partly from the fact that there is considerable interest in the future of this still undeveloped Green Point land on the shores of Lake Macquarie, a
large saltwater lake system on the southern side of Newcastle, New South Wales. This newspaper report is unusual in that the hens have a human champion, whose assertive statements (like 'a concentration camp for birds') force the egg company manager to justify his treatment of the hens. His arguments that the proposed project should not be regarded as an animal welfare issue are: that the facility will be modern; that the air breathed by the hens will be temperature and humidity controlled; and that they will be safe from predators. As reported by the newspaper, the manager's summative statement asserts that the interests of the birds are synonymous with those of the farmer. But these are clearly commercial interests: the hens are 'stock', and a 'laying life' equals their life term, after which the short trip to the 'meat' processing plant is the natural next step, unworthy of any justifying comment. This choice of descriptors illustrates how language can be used to narrow ethical considerations almost to the point of extinction, as Val Plumwood explains in her discussion of the *Babe* achievement.13 The telling confirmation here comes both from the manager's apparent belief that there cannot possibly be any animal welfare issue involved, and the prominence the newspaper gives to the implied economic consequences of non-approval by Lake Macquarie City Council.

**WHY THE FREE MARKET IS**

**A DANGER TO DEMOCRACY**

Figure 3. *The Weekend Australian* 8-9.3.97

My next concern is about the representation of pigs. All three examples are in the form of illustrations. Figure 3 illustrates a double page article on ‘Why the free market is a danger to democracy’, in which the author argues that in the post cold war period, the threat now comes from within. The laissez-faire capitalist ideology has spawned ‘local tyrants’ and some sovereign states bent on pursuing self interest with no regard for the common good. This important but intellectually weighty article in the general reading section of a weekend newspaper clearly needs illustrating, and the editor is not mean in allocating space. The figure spreads across both (large format) pages and measures a remarkable 51x22 cms. But even more remarkable to my conscience is the illustration chosen to convey this message about human greed. The Sturt Krygesman drawing is remarkably evocative; the flight of marauding pigs is tearing apart the cloth-like surface of planet earth with their teeth and ‘hands’ while dressed in pin-striped suit coats, and further adorned with large diamond rings, cigars and a dollar tattoo on their naked thighs. But it is their demeanour that is most striking: slobbering jaws are agape, showing huge teeth, or clamped tight over torn-apart earth fabric, with tusk-like molars protruding. Beady eyes almost lost in faces screwed tight with a lust to devour, they claw at each other to better get to their victim.

To my mind, the illustration carries a far more effective message than the text: perhaps about corporate greed, but also that pigs are a natural metaphor to illustrate human aberrations concerning heartless and violent greed.

Figure 4. The Sydney Morning Herald 10.4.97
The next pig illustration (Figure 4) combines filth with greed. This cartoon by Moir, in The Sydney Morning Herald, shows an Australian senator-pig wallowing in a huge black-muck-filled trough happily throwing fish skeletons etc. over himself, while other politicians (in their normal human likeness) are also in the trough, arguing heatedly with each other.

Finally, Figure 5 argues pig connivance with humans' decision to eat them (and by implication with the 'farming' methods involved). It comes from the wrapper of a full leg ham. The picnic theme is carried by the pig family (males only) partly dressed in human clothing suitable for the outdoors, in smiling relaxed poses. The human disguise is beguiling. I had to do a 'second take' to recall the reality of what really happens to the animal part under the wrapper's picture ('absent referents'\(^{14}\)). But the amazing message here is that the pigs actually embrace their destiny as a picnic repast of humans, by becoming part of the marketing team. This manner of advertising is also used in the highly competitive cooked 'chicken' meat marketing, as in 'Henny Penny', which makes the barbecued poultry 'one of us', by commandeering the

Australian custom of adding a ‘y’ to make a nickname. Notice also the appeal to (100%) ‘Australian-ness’.

Finally, there are newspaper extracts that see environments as existing only for humans, ignoring any possibility that they may be homes for many other species.

**Extract Six**

‘$1.5m home for entire fishing fleet’

An interesting but tatty corner of Throsby Creek is about to undergo a $1.5 million redevelopment which will see Newcastle’s entire fishing fleet moored together.

The NSW Public Works Department’s Acting Regional Manager, Mr Paul Gilbertson, said yesterday that a contract would be let in the next couple of weeks for the four months work involved in extending the present jetty to add 25 new moorings to the current 24.

The 49 berths would be sufficient to house Newcastle’s entire fishing fleet. Public Works was also building a car park to accommodate a further 28 vehicles, landscaping the area and including an amenities block for the fishermen.

Mr Gilbertson said the area of the creek around the existing jetty was being dredged to allow for the extra moorings and the 30,000 tonnes of spoil was being deposited on the Carrington side of the creek, between Elizabeth and Howden Streets.

*The Newcastle Herald*

9 May 1993

At first, uncritical reading simply absorbs a directory of public works which now enable all of Newcastle’s fishing fleet, the boat owners, and their vehicles to be located at the one site with functional and attractive facilities. Re-read from a non-human perspective, there is a whole absent referent community here, described by the writer as a ‘tatty corner of Throsby Creek’. It was an estuarine community, whose sea grasses, mangroves and salt marshes would have provided a nursery/habitat for fish, molluscs, crustaceans and birds, but which has now been dredged, smothered in 30,000 tonnes of spoil and ‘landscaped’, in order to accommodate a community of humans, boats and automobiles.
A cult of ditch kids is growing up in the city section of Black Creek - Cessnock’s open canal storm water drain system - a senior police officer has warned.

Senior Sergeant Gordon Gorton told the Advertiser this week that the concrete sided storm water drains provide a security screen, a playground and an escape route for everything from break and enters, drug taking, under-age drinking and smoking to just plain vandalism.

“Kids ride motor bikes from Nulkaba and emerge on the western side of Cessnock Ex-Services Club.”

“It’s a hot-bed not a river bed and is nurturing juvenile delinquency. Just look at the shopping trolleys, beer bottles and other things deliberately tossed into it.” said Snr Sgt Gorton.

So far not announced is the fact that Cessnock Rugby League Supporters Club, which has a major stretch of the inner city water course running past its front door, is well ahead with plans for a $4 million refurbishment to the building.

The plans will include putting a half million dollar lid on 50m of the watercourse, from the corner of the building to the pedestrian bridge joining the car parks, which will then become car parking.

Snr Sgt Gorton sees this as a possible opportunity to put a halt to the community’s “ditch kids” problem.

“I don’t know how feasible it is, but it seems to me that if the equipment and resources are there doing one section it may well be possible to cover in the primary problem section around the Plaza area at a reasonable and affordable cost,” Snr Sgt Gordon said.

Mr John Knipe, secretary manager of Cessnock Rugby League Supporters Club has confirmed that development plans for the project will be put before council possibly as early as next week.

“It is true that we have had clearance from the Hunter Water Corporation to cover in our stretch of the canal. It is very early days yet and while we have met all the required specifications and conditions from the Water Corporation we have yet to get our DPA.” he said.

The Advertiser
24 May 1995
The feelings of sadness I experienced when I reflected on the voiceless lost estuarine community were amplified when I thought of the original Black Creek community. The stream acquired its name from the Aboriginal clan which periodically lived on its banks and drew its food from the animal and plant life existing there. It does not require a lot of imagination to realise the contrast between that vital and varied Black Creek community and the present cement storm water drain harbouring a community of criminals. The earlier catastrophe in the stream community’s demise occurred when its vegetation was removed and the stream’s migrating meanders were confined within a u-shaped concrete structure. Concerns about ‘a cult of ditch kids’ now threatens to banish this part of Black Creek underground, providing a car park bonus in addition to a possible solution to the city’s social problem.

**Conclusion**

I have argued here that environmental education is fundamentally subjective and experiential, and is concerned with a paradigm shift operating in both personal and social domains. This includes an extension of ethical concern to the non-human world, which in a pedagogical context is called conscientisation. I have endeavoured to illustrate how this works for me by drawing on the unintended but powerful informal education carried by the media, using newspaper extracts, illustrations, photos, cartoons and product advertising. What I have been sharing with you is in fact part of my journey-story, which I hope may contribute something to the humankind journey-story of rapprochement with the natural world. It seems to me that reflective story telling is a worthwhile epistemology for the kind of environmental education I have described, and I was greatly reassured to see this approach taken by Freya Mathews in the first article in the first issue of *Animal Issues*.

My reflections on my own experiences convince me that the paradigm shift to an ecocentric position is demanding and evolutionary, as Dudley’s detailed research indicates, and something we should think of sharing rather than teaching. Certainly it is a matter of creditability to me that I participate in this way. But the demanding element applies not so much to the adoption of the ‘Light Green’ accommodatationist/managerialist

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ideology, which does not fundamentally challenge those contemporary social values and institutional structures that estrange us from the natural world. Rather we should consider the leap across the divide towards that identification with nature, commonly described as deep ecology or social ecology. I doubt if this is something we can achieve unconsciously, although I concede that we may well be driven to it as a consequence of a looming ecocrisis. But in so much as this change process can involve that 'mindful, willing participation' identified by Dudley, the 'critical incident' and conscientisation strategies have proved useful in helping me focus on human-nature values which have escaped cultural conditioning.

Biography

Denis Mahony lives in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia. He and his family moved there from metropolitan Sydney thirteen years ago, fulfilling a dream of building a home in the country. Nearly all the property is forested and abounds in native wildlife. He has formed strong attachments to these nature communities, and to the area's Aboriginal culture extending back some thousand generations. He works in the Faculty of Education at the University of Newcastle, teaching and researching in environmental and initial teacher education.

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