

## EcoJustice for Teacher Education Policy and Practice The Way of Love

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### Abstract

EcoJustice Education is both a framework for thinking about our ethical responsibilities as educators and community members, and a socio-ecological and political movement. In this essay, I trace my own personal history in the development of this field, focusing on the theoretical foundations, major scholars contributing to those founding ideas, and a number of concrete practical manifestations in organizations, curricula, programs and institutions. I begin the essay with a focus on “relationality” as a particularly important concept in the epistemological, ontological and ethical frames that make up this particular approach to teacher education.

Keywords: EcoJustice Education, Teacher Education, Relationality

### Introduction

EcoJustice Education is both a framework for thinking about our ethical responsibilities as educators and community members, and a socio-ecological and political movement. It is a way of educating teachers, a way of analyzing the cultural roots of social, ecological and educational problems, and a set of principles for the reform of educational

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institutions and relations at all levels, and in diverse contexts. It offers a framework for understanding the complex discursive processes that construct the way that we understand, reproduce, and rationalize relations of domination among each other and with the natural world. We focus on these relations locally in the places where we dwell, as well as globally through the economic and political forces of Western consumer culture. As such it is also an institutional and policy reform effort. That means that those of us involved in teaching for EcoJustice work on many different levels at once. Our network of personal, academic, institutional and political relationships is growing, slowly but surely inserting important questions into educational scholarship and programs across the United States, Canada, Finland, and beyond.

For me, navigating my way through these various networks and developing friendships within it over the last 20 years has defined everything that I do as a teacher educator, community member, friend, colleague, and organizational leader. It has been a powerful, sometimes frustrating, but also invigorating journey. I want to tell a story here that provides an overview of the history of this movement as I've witnessed its growth and worked with a host of brilliant, committed people within it. I write this with the knowledge that the others involved along the way have their own intersecting trajectories and influences. It's the connective points and the effects of those meetings that I want to explore here, the relationships that have made it all possible.

### On Relationality

One could say that EcoJustice Education begins from an acknowledgement of relationships, or relationality, as the key to all life systems, all creation. As the Buddhist tradition makes clear, nothing comes into being outside its relationship to something else. This is true whether we are talking about the reproduction of species, ecosystems' interdependencies, or the birth of ideas. We are all part of an amazingly complex, beautiful and generative system of relationships. We interact with each other as humans and with the natural world, and, as these meetings happen, all sorts of different effects are created that in turn create new relationships and new effects. The world is generated out of the spaces of difference that occur because of relationality among everything. Being is defined *there* in our dependency on all sorts of others. And who we are—the fullness or weakness of our humanity—depends precisely upon the meanings used to define ourselves in relation to those other(s). Recognizing ourselves as dependent creatures with other dependent creatures is the first step toward breaking with the myth of individual-

ism and competition that grips our culture, feeds us lies about happiness and success as “self-made” achievement, accumulation and consumerism, and violates the very communities we need to live. Becoming responsible means recognizing the intricacies of living systems by learning what our communities require of us. What sorts of skills, traditions, and practices do we need to reclaim, and what do we need to change? What if, as French feminist Luce Irigaray (2002, p. 2) asks, wisdom was defined as the way of love, that is, “the search for measures that help in living better; with oneself, with others, with the world?”

Protecting life requires learning to care for and nurture relationships that are generous, compassionate, mutually supportive, and responsible. As Wendell Berry (2012) reminds us in his book of the same name, *It All Turns on Affection*. In that sense, this is a story of the ways affection and care have woven through my life to create a movement that is personal, pedagogical, and political. In the pages that follow I examine (1) what we mean by “EcoJustice” as the name for examining intersecting forms of violence, (2) my personal beginnings and pathway into this work, (3) the theoretical foundations of EcoJustice Education, and (4) a set of examples from my own experiences of how that theory can be put to practical use organizationally, pedagogically, and professionally.

### What's in a Name?

I suppose I should start with a caveat of sorts about the name Eco-Justice. In some ways, this tag has been a misnomer that continues to cause confusion among some of our colleagues, especially those working around primarily social justice issues. The problem is that the framework is too often seen as primarily or even exclusively about analyzing the causes of ecological degradation to the intentional exclusion of questions related to human impoverishment or domination. At nearly every conference presentation I've ever participated in or witnessed where EcoJustice is the offered theoretical lens, someone in the audience will raise his or her hand and say something along the lines of, “Isn't this focus a reflection of your positions of White privilege to address ecological issues, when in fact other people (the poor, people of color, etc.) are suffering much more direct forms of violence and degradation?”

The answer is always yes and no. First, yes, I am a White woman with all the unearned privileges that affords me and I certainly have not had to suffer the sorts of degradations that people of color have. And yes, it is clear that this privilege has offered different experiences and openings for particular questions. There is no avoiding that truth, and I would argue that this framework makes those differences a spe-

cific focus and enables these recognitions and conversations in the first place. Indeed, this field that we call EcoJustice is not “just about the environment.” Our first task is to analyze the cultural roots of all sorts of intersecting social and ecological violence that are created when we naturalize the superiority of some humans over others, and all humans over other living creatures.

EcoJustice scholarship and teaching insists that humans are unavoidably immersed in and dependent upon a larger set of living relationships and systems, and yet we are taught to believe in the normalcy and naturalness of our human superiority, which gets translated, using intersecting metaphors, into the superiority of White people of European descent over all people of color, men over women, perceived able bodies over disabled, and on and on. When we recognize that racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty and all other forms of social domination are based on the same basic logic of domination (Warren, 1998) that degrades life itself, we begin to see the problem with identifying as either social justice activists or environmentalists. Indeed, such a division simply reproduces the same hierarchized binaries that form the problems we are facing. Uniting around the ways these misguided and exploitive assumptions work ought to be our first task. Competing among ourselves for academic recognition or status or other resources is just activating more of the same problematic hierarchized logic.

### Personal Beginnings

For me, coming to terms with the fundamental understanding that everything comes into existence via relationships changed everything—from my personal relationships, friendships, and commitments to my teaching to my scholarship to my activism. But none of these activities changed or came to be all at once. It’s been a slow process of relationship-making, reaching out to elder scholars, accepting their mentorship, trying to articulate ideas I was just beginning to get, failing, and trying again. As I began to teach, the ideas became clearer, but that too has been a process of trial and error, and it has necessitated lots of conversations with others trying to do this work as well.

In the text, *EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic and Sustainable Communities* (Martuswicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2015), we tell students and other folks interested in learning how to begin teaching or working as community educators from an EcoJustice framework to start small, begin where you are, take baby steps. We say to look for other like-minded people to work with, paying particular attention to those who are already engaged in this kind of work. As I think back on

my years of working with others to develop this field, those words really ring true. In many ways, this process has been very personal for me, and yet, now I can see how that very insistence to do something with my own experience has led to important relationships. My own stumbling attempts to give voice to my questions have encouraged others to respond to their own personal distress experienced as we face undeniable social and ecological devastation.

I can remember the very first moment when it occurred to me that something in my own teaching and scholarship had to change, that I was ignoring the most profound questions both to me personally and, more importantly, for teacher education. I had been teaching at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) for nearly 10 years. I had achieved tenure and was promoted to Full Professor. I was trying to decide where to go with my work. It suddenly occurred to me that for all my life the suffering of the more-than-human world pained me more than just about anything else, but I generally kept that a secret. I certainly did not pursue it in my professional life as a teacher educator or scholar. I began to realize that my dedication to social justice concerns in fact had been the way I worked on my own emotional responses to violence in general, much of which I had spent my life witnessing perpetrated against other creatures. Why had I avoided thinking about or writing about these connections? Why did it never occur to me to teach others to ask about it?

As I thought about these questions, I knew that there was one person in my life who never questioned the way I experienced the suffering of animals, the destruction of trees or wetlands, or the inequitable treatment of people. My mom had been trying to protect me from the pain it caused me for years. So, I wrote her a letter. It was meant as a way to get started thinking about this strange conundrum of trying to write about something almost taboo in my life. Ultimately the writing of that letter became an offering of gratitude for all she had taught me, for being my first real teacher (Martusewicz, 2001).

All of this is to say, that learning to teach teachers from an EcoJustice framework, and working to create institutional space for such an approach, started for me from the humblest of places: my own life experiences as a woman dealing with a culturally learned sense of shame for being too sensitive to other creatures. As I've written elsewhere in more depth, I had internalized a deep sense of wrongness, or craziness created from being told that speaking up against the violence perpetrated against the natural world was silly, not acceptable, and indeed, marked me as weak (Martusewicz, 2014). It took a decision to fumble around and struggle against that identity to start down a new road.

I stopped apologizing for my sensitivity, and began to read. As I

got clearer, I began to talk to others about this developing awareness, and in that process, I began to develop partnerships that changed everything. The changes in how I approached teaching were probably the most important steps I could have taken because they brought me into conversation with students who were also struggling with their own experiences and were ready to see differently. For example, John Lupinacci, one of the guest editors of this issue, was among the first groups of students to be exposed to my beginning attempts to articulate these ideas in our required Social Foundations undergraduate course for teacher certification. I can still remember some of his questions in that class, and the day he leaned on my office door a few years later and said, "I think I want to do a Masters." That day marked the beginning of a long, intense partnership. Johnny became one of my prime sources of support and inspiration. He was hungry, he harbored deep compassion in all sorts of ways, and he helped me to see that there was real value in this work from the start. He worked as my "right-hand man" for years through completion of a Master of Arts degree in Social Foundations of Education, one of the first students to concentrate on EcoJustice. And, ultimately, he joined our Ph.D. in Educational Studies program. Along the way, we created a website that included a journal called *The EcoJustice Review* (no longer available), organized meetings and retreats, presented at conferences, traveled to India, worked on a film, wrote together, and on and on. In the process, I learned to teach differently in conversation with Johnny and others. And the theoretical framework began to take a specific shape with specific influences.

### Theoretical Foundations

There are many authors across an interdisciplinary range from philosophy to social theory, ecology, history, poetry and literature that are influential in shaping this field. But two scholars in particular have formed the scaffolding as I've engaged it with my students. The first for me was the late Australian ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood. I came across Plumwood's first book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) just as I was trying to write that early letter to my mom, and my first EcoJustice-related essay. I was starting to read what others had to say about an ethical orientation that didn't separate off social justice problems from ecological issues, but rather approached them as absolutely integrated in a long cultural history. In this work, Plumwood was influenced by a radical feminist framework to analyze the particular ways that hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal systems have become a dominant model for understanding what it means to reason. "The

overvaluation of rationality," she writes, "and its oppositional conception are deeply entrenched in western culture and its intellectual traditions" (p. 24). Plumwood links the domination of nature with hegemonic masculinity, rationalism, racism, and the mind/body dualism that devalues women, nature, and the reproductive subsistence aspects of culture (our relationships with the land and childrearing, for example). She takes apart the naturalized male dominated "mastery story" at the heart of Western industrial culture. Her first book (1993) traces value hierarchies woven through the western philosophical traditions beginning with Plato, Rene Descartes, and on into modern instrumentalism and rationalism. Along with ecofeminist Karen Warren, Plumwood exposes the way the concept "reason" is defined by pairing it with self-proclaimed supremacy positions: White, male, European, human. In this way, Warren argues, a naturalized logic of domination is rationalized and put into play to create our institutions, policies, day-to-day relationships and practices. At the heart of this logic, is the idea that humans are superior to all other beings, and some humans most superior of all.

I remember reading Plumwood for the first time with my heart racing. Here it was! Affirmation that my own sense of the world was shared by others who could teach me the details. Later I would claim her second book, *Environmental Culture* (2001), as my constant companion in thinking through the complex discursive relationships that create our rationalization of the most damaging globalized economic and cultural processes.

To this feminist philosophical analysis, Chet Bowers' work added the role of language systems, root metaphors, and their power to define consciousness and create particular behavioral orientations to culture. I distinctly remember the moment I was brought back to this connection between culture, language and thought and its centrality in the work I'd soon be immersed in. Just a couple years into my new path, in 2000, I was sitting in an American Educational Studies Association (AES) conference session in Vancouver. Chet was presenting with Kate Wayne, at that time a young education scholar from Western Washington University. I believe that she had been Chet's student at one time. The session was called Eco-Justice and Global Ethics. Chet's presentation, which eclipsed all the others for me, was about the power of language, specifically the ways particular root metaphors define the way we see the world. He was teaching us, laying it all out. I was on the edge of my seat. My earlier work using post-structuralism and discourse analysis had been dormant for a few years as I studied ecological theory and environmental ethics. But here was an educational theorist insisting that we recognize the ways symbolic systems function to create the very social and ecological crises we are facing. I asked a slew of questions,

and rushed to talk with him at the end of that session. And so began several years of intensive learning and organizational work with one of the most profound and courageous (and controversial) educational scholars I have ever known.

Bowers' work draws heavily on Gregory Bateson's analysis of an "ecology of mind" (Bateson, 1972; Bowers, 1993, 2011) and, with Plumwood and other ecofeminists (Warren, 2000; Griffin, 1995; Code, 2006) offers a clear critique of Cartesian dualisms hierarchizing mind over body, humans over nature, man over woman and so on. For Bateson, Mind is located in and defined by the relationships among all living and non-living entities that form the larger ecological systems that we are a part of and engage consciously or unconsciously at every moment. Everything we "know" is created within our relationships with this larger world and our attempts to interpret what we observe. All sorts of sounds, textures, movements occur in those relationships, events that Bateson calls cybernetic differences that make a difference. As we engage them, these relational differences move us to make sense. All creation and creativity, including human meaning-making, is a part of that overall communicating system which Bateson refers to as an Ecology of Mind (2000). When in balance, the differentiating system works to reproduce the life processes we all depend upon. When out of balance, chaos and destruction follow. Humans in modern industrial societies, Bateson tells us, have put the system out of balance by not recognizing our immersion in and effects on it.

As humans, we are limited by the very powers of perception and interpretation that allow us to be in relation with and say something about the world. In earlier work, I refer to a "limit space" between the world and the language that we use to "know" it (Martusewicz, 2001, 2014). Our interpretive "maps" as Bateson tells us, are not the territory itself. Recognizing this gap between us and the world, and our reliance on language to say what we think we know, is an important source of humility since it means that we will always be limited in what we can grasp or understand. While we should learn as much as we can about the places where we live and what our communities—both human and more than human—require of us, a precautionary principle built upon this acceptance of our limits as humans must be accepted as the frame within which we learn to act. Our survival and the ability of the world to flourish depends upon this principle requiring us to be careful. And again, it's all about recognizing that everything happens in relationship.

What matters then are the specific sorts of metaphors that humans use to make sense of who we are in this system. If we insist, as is the dominant pattern in Eurocentric cultures, that humans (especially those

from assumed “superior civilizations”) are outside of or superior to the living world around us, we overlook necessary limits, and will invariably damage the very relationships we rely upon for survival. Or, as Bateson puts it, “lack of systemic wisdom is always punished” (2000, p. 440).

Bowers identifies the specific “linguistic roots” (1993, 2012) in our modern discursive system that have led to cascading catastrophic effects in the ecosphere as well as within human communities. Individualism, mechanism, anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism and a faith in technological change as “progress” are just a few of the root metaphors that he pinpoints as important in framing how we think in modern industrial societies. These root metaphors would eventually be identified and expanded upon in our book *EcoJustice Education* (2015) as key “discourses of modernity” shaping dominant patterns of belief and behavior. To this list, using Plumwood and Warren as our guides, we added androcentrism/sexism, rationalism, and consumerism, arguing that it is really a logic of domination that is at the heart of a globalized system of exploitation impoverishing both human and more-than-human communities.

Because we understand that we are created as thinking, acting beings through historically embedded discourses, EcoJustice education can be understood as a form of self-work as much as curricular and pedagogical work or policy reform. That is, we need to see that our subject positions—the positions from which we speak, act, think, teach—are created within a complex discursive system that has very real effects in the world around us. We are the cause of the problems that we are studying, not because we necessarily choose to be this way, but because we are born into a cultural system that teaches us that it’s the way the world is. The changes that we need in our relationships with the world will only happen to the degree that we can begin to use these questions and concepts to see and think and be different from who we have been taught to be. How is it that we come to participate in the processes causing such immense damage to our communities? What other meanings, practices and relationships create more just and sustainable ways of being? What ought we imagine as our responsibilities to the places where we live? What is the proper purpose of education if we aim to develop people who can support diverse, democratic and sustainable communities?

In the second strand of the framework, Bowers (2001, 2006, 2012) uses the concept of the “commons” and their enclosure to argue that we are not completely without the knowledge, traditions and practices needed to live differently with each other. The environmental commons are those relationships that we have with the natural world—the soil, the forests, air, water and other creatures. The cultural commons are

the non-monetized relations, beliefs, practices and traditions within diverse cultures (including our own) that, when oriented toward mutual aid and caring, could help us to learn to live in more just, humane and ecologically sustainable ways. In his exploration of the commons, Bowers introduced me to the works of many authors and activists including the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) (Mander & Goldsmith, 1996; Cavanaugh & Mander, 2002) which included Vandana Shiva, Jerry Mander, John Cavanaugh, Wendell Berry, and Helena Norberg-Hodge, among others. Norberg-Hodge's work with the International Society of Ecology and Culture (ISEC) (1991, 2010) in Ladakh, India exposed me to land-based villages of Tibetan Buddhist farmers and their families who were struggling against the undermining effects of an expanding globalized market.

As I thought about these scholars' work, I was reminded of the ways I had been raised, those grounded values and principles my mother offered that constituted part of the commons of my childhood (Martusewicz, 2006). And now looking back, I am very aware of the strong feminist impulse in my work that opens the way toward drawing on and learning from the personal relationships that I have grown through. These experiences from childhood until now informed as they are by what I read, shape everything that I write and teach about. Relationships bonded by affection, kindness, and care are the source of our intelligence and our strength. We must never forget that. This does not mean that I've always been successful, but I have worked hard to bring this sensibility into my work with students and colleagues in a variety of contexts. Below are a few examples of how that work has manifested more concretely.

### Theory into Practice

#### ***Community Activism and Revitalizing the Detroit Commons***

Embracing the questions and concepts I was beginning to grasp, I began to look for like-minded people on my own campus. I found Charles Simmons, a long-time Detroit resident, activist and journalism professor, and Janet Kaufman, a creative writing professor and water activist fighting against the growing emergence of Confined Animal Farming Operations (CAFOs) in South Central Michigan. Both were interested in the ways their communities were being polluted by careless dumping: of liquid manure by large CAFOs in the case of Janet's small community, and of truckloads of trash, tires, and cast-off building materials in the case of neighborhoods in Detroit. We began to meet and talk over lunch. Charles invited me to Detroit, a short 30-minute drive from Ypsilanti, to work with a small group of neighborhood folk and activists who were

trying to clean up an abandoned factory lot to make a playground and raised-bed gardens for the kids in the neighborhood. For many Saturdays in the summer of 2002, I drove into Detroit to work alongside a small group of lively and committed folk, some neighbors, some local activists.

The elders from Charles's neighborhood knew that safe and sustaining places for their children, healthy food, and strong relationships of care would need to come from them. I listened to stories about this part of the city and soon learned about other efforts across Detroit to address serious food insecurity. The work they did began as they imagined together what they believed their communities could and should be like, right there in the heart of a devastated economic context. They worked together to bring it about in small pockets around the city without waiting for a government agency to give them the permission or the resources.

Over the next 15 years, what began as a somewhat fragmented effort involving around 150 neighborhood gardens, grew into a bona fide urban agriculture movement with 2000 gardens, including farms of several acres, and a network of community organizations that wrote the city's first Food Policy (<http://detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net/>). While I had originally been invited to help clean up an abandoned lot with shovels, rakes, and wheel barrows, that opportunity eventually introduced me to a whole range of brilliant activists, educators, artists, poets and farmers all working on the ground to revitalize their commons (Bowers & Martusewicz, 2006; Martusewicz, 2010; Martusewicz, 2013a). In what to some might be seen as the most unlikely of places, I learned the fundamental value of love, collaboration, kindness, humility, and good old fashioned physical work in creating life sustaining possibilities in the places where we live. I learned that it begins from the willingness to imagine what it could look like if we are responsible to that vision. That idea forms the third strand of EcoJustice Education.

### ***EcoJustice Retreats and Faculty Development***

The same summer that I was introduced to Detroit, Chet and I began to work together to organize the first EcoJustice faculty retreat. We invited other interested faculty, graduate students and community leaders from all over the country to join us in a three-day seminar to study the framework he had been developing over several years. David Greenwood (Gruenewald), Kate Wayne, Jeff Edmundson, Jennifer Thom, Sandra Spickard Prettyman, and Eugene Provenzo, along with a sprinkling of my graduate students were among the first group to participate in our inaugural gathering on the shores of Lake Michigan. Over the next five years or so, Johnny Lupinacci, Chet, and I organized several

of these meetings, one in Miami, FL (a mini conference), one at Eastern Michigan University which brought together local community activists to discuss their work in revitalizing the Detroit commons, another in Detroit (which included an urban agriculture tour), and the last back in Traverse City, Michigan, in 2006. These became important relationship-building opportunities for my students and me as we were introduced to others concerned with similar questions. Emerging scholars, senior faculty and community activists (Sean Blenkinsop, Steven Mackie, Richard Kahn, David Flinders, Elena Herrada, Jim Embrey, Charles Simmons, Kelly Young, and Andrejs Kunieks, and others) created a network of scholarship and teaching bringing our local concerns to bear as we examined deep cultural and political problems with Chet as our guide.

As a result of meeting David Flinders at the last Michigan retreat, I was invited to co-create and offer a pre-conference graduate student seminar for AERA's division B that would explore the intersection of ecological and ethical issues. Johnny and I worked with Marcia McKenzie from the AERA Environmental Education Special Interest Group (SIG) to create a two-day seminar, an opportunity that we continued to work from over several more years. For some of us, articulating more explicitly what it could mean to translate theory into practice became of paramount concern. Jeff Edmundson and I began to articulate a definition of pedagogies of responsibility as practices that could translate a cultural ecological analysis and commons-based relationships into effective classroom relationships and strategies (Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2005).

### ***Teaching and Curriculum Development***

As these thematic and personal connections developed within these conversations, I worked at EMU to shift the way I approach my work as a teacher educator. Working early on with Jeff Edmundson and later Johnny Lupinacci, a new way to approach our courses began to unfold. I started by reorganizing my undergraduate course (required in the teacher certification program at EMU) to begin with a novel, *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn (2000), to spark a conversation about the existence of very different organizing worldviews, and their important effects. From there it was an easy step to introduce an analysis of language, thought, and culture. Using a cultural ecological analysis as the grounding for the rest of the course, I was able to integrate an analysis of diversity and democracy with typical social justice issues (racism, sexism, social class, and globalization) without avoiding an examination of anthropocentrism. And, with *Ishmael*'s introduction of Leavers and Takers, we also explored the possibilities expressed by diverse cultures organized

by stronger ecological values as primary cultural foundations. I am so fortunate to have had such strong local mentors to make this section of the course come alive. Most of my students are from the White working-class suburbs surrounding Detroit, and many of them have very little if any connection to the city beyond sports teams and music venues. Learning to identify intersecting value hierarchies helped us all to identify, analyze and challenge the racist policies and assumptions that have devastated Detroit economically and ecologically. Learning to think about and identify the commons, helped us to recognize inspiring practices of self-determination, love and “collaborative intelligence” (Martusewicz, 2009).

This is the general approach that I have tried to offer in several Masters level courses as well, albeit with a wider range of authors for support and examination of key cultural, economic, and ecological questions. Eventually, I created a concentration in EcoJustice Education in our Social Foundations of Education Master’s degree, which uses a core of discipline-based courses (Sociology, Philosophy, History of Education and Comparative Education) with a required research course, and adds a concentration of theory courses that focus on the primary strands of EcoJustice Education. The program is small but growing. The development of the undergraduate course and Master’s program eventually culminated in our co-written textbook, *EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic and Sustainable Communities*, now in its second edition (Martusewicz, Edmundson and Lupinacci, 2015).

One of the most challenging questions is how to help the teachers we are working with to translate the analytic framework into classroom practices at the K-12 level. Some of my current Masters and PhD students are taking on that challenge as they work to create meaningful research projects from the EcoJustice framework. For my part, I began to address this interest when an opportunity to work with a group of New Hampshire teachers fell in my lap about 10 years ago.

With the support of an EPA grant and a project called Building Leadership Capacity for Sustainability Education that Susan Santone of Creative Change Educational Solutions and I received, I went on sabbatical to experiment with just that question: How do we help teachers bring EJE to high school aged students? Susan was working directly with two schools in New York; I had been invited to join three other teachers at Souhegan High School, in Amherst, New Hampshire to create an interdisciplinary course on Food Systems and Sustainability for seniors (12<sup>th</sup> grade students). I joined a team consisting of a Social Studies/Geography teacher, an English Literature teacher and a Conservation Biology teacher.

For two years, the four of us worked with between 25 and 40 12<sup>th</sup> graders for two hours per day to examine the roots of social and ecological crises, in particular problems associated with food production and consumption. The students built five raised-bed gardens; planted, cultivated, cooked and preserved the vegetables grown there; learned the chemical properties and proper use and maintenance of compost; explored poetry and fiction; examined their local history as a former farming community; analyzed the corporate control of food production; and became critical discourse researchers via EcoJustice Education. I had never experienced such excellent teaching or worked with smarter people on a daily basis. It was life changing, and showed me that this sort of responsible pedagogy is possible with the right institutional support and context (Martusewicz & Schnakenberg, 2010; Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016). This is, of course, difficult for most schools given limited funding and other restrictive policy issues.

In this climate of assessment-driven curriculum reform and efficiency models, what public school has this sort of freedom to be creative with their curriculum and pedagogy? I needed to try to find a way to bring what I was learning from the teachers in this unusual and powerful school home to Michigan. Using our experience with BLCSE, Susan Santone and I wrote a grant from the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (GLSI), supporting an EcoJustice-framed place-based education model of professional development for K-12 teachers. The Southeast Michigan Stewardship Coalition (SEMIS) was born in the Spring of 2008. As you'll read about from its current director Ethan Lowenstein later in this issue, the SEMIS Coalition uses a collaborative partnership model, encouraging teachers to work directly with community organizations to teach students to identify, analyze, and solve local social and ecological problems. This is an organization built intentionally on relationship building as key to sustaining change in schools.

This work was also essential in creating the *EcoJustice Education* text (2015) as Jeff, Johnny, and I now all had experiences in K-12 schools. And, as it turned out, our work to translate these pedagogical experiences into a textbook to guide teachers and teacher educators led to another important connection and publication. Rita Turner, another of the guest editors of this issue, contacted me to see what I thought of a book that would offer specific curricular ideas to teachers interested in *Teaching for EcoJustice* (2015). I was excited by her interest and sent her immediately to our editor at Routledge, Naomi Silverman, who shepherded Rita's book into publication. And, of course, another friendship was born of our mutual interest in how to translate this theory into practice for teachers.

### ***Professional Organizations Supporting EcoJustice Education***

While I'm no longer working with SEMIS, learning how to create and direct such an organization led me to recognize the importance of building institutionally supported programming that can help teachers, scholars, and other community members approach their pedagogy and curriculum standards from the critical insights offered by EcoJustice theory. Finding ways to help teachers and teacher educators to use the primary strands of EcoJustice Education to engage pedagogies of responsibility in their own classrooms has been one of the most satisfying aspects of this last 20 years. The Souhegan and SEMIS teachers taught me that translating complex theory into viable K-12 classroom and community-based practice is possible and exciting. Other collaborations have used existing organizational structures to establish other needed articulations of EcoJustice where it had not been receiving enough attention.

For example, working with many of the folks already mentioned, we've used our existing memberships in the American Educational Studies Association (AES) to create a Special Interest Group (SIG) that invites featured scholars every year, and is growing as a political organization within AESA. Steven Mackie, who I first met at one of our Lake Michigan retreats when he was still an Oklahoma State Ph.D. student, has been a great leader of this effort. Along the way, a new generation of leaders in this field has been born and EcoJustice is now a known field of study nationally among social foundations faculty and students. The editors of this volume are a testament to that effort. It has been fun for me to watch these connections and friendships develop into enduring scholarly partnerships.

I remember fondly the first time I met Alison. She and Johnny were on a panel together at an AESA conference, but had never met. I was sitting with Johnny and a small group of other folks, when she rushed up. They were meeting to prepare for the panel, and as I needed to be elsewhere, I quickly introduced myself and prepared to leave. It was an intense and wonderful moment as she (a bit flustered) gushed about my *Seeking Passage* book (2001). I was so touched (who knew people were reading that book!), and then blown away again, as I sat and listened to her presentation later that day. So beautiful, poignant and full of care! I became an immediate fan of her work. This is all to say that these moments (and what happens next) matter! They create movement and becomings of all sorts that can really change the direction of teacher education, and the collaborative scholarship that supports it. Looking for ways to make such connections possible with more intention is a crucial part of the work.

With just this in mind, Johnny and I created the Ecojustice and Activism conference, now in its seventh year at Eastern Michigan University, which attracts a growing array of international as well as local scholar activists, artists, and educators from diverse contexts. The point has been to bridge problematic gaps between the academic world, the world of teachers, and the world of non-profits around questions that we all care deeply about. I have been inspired as I listen to internationally renowned scholars like Derrick Jensen, Madhu Prakash, Derek Rasmussen, Peter Linebaugh, and Robert Jensen engage in deep conversations with teacher educators, K-12 teachers and their students about the challenges and successes they experience as they take on this work. Those connections have led in all sorts of directions.

### **Conclusion: A Sense of Gratitude**

Little by little, collaborating at all of these intersecting levels locally, nationally, and internationally, we are building a strong community of EcoJustice educators. The road has not been without its bumps, testifying to the difficulty as well as the joy of relationship building around these critical issues. There have been interpersonal conflicts, some of them regrettably serious, others temporary. I have lost a few really dear friends to the ugly competitiveness of this academic world, and to my own failings as I push for clarity and depth in the publication of our work. I suppose some of that is to be expected when the stakes are high. Still, some of those losses could have been avoided and I realize my mistakes in not always tending to those relationships as carefully as I should have. In the end, it's all relational and for me, it's the deeply personal and pedagogical relationships that constitute the very fabric of critical education and community. For those seriously committed to a pedagogy of responsibility, we accept ourselves as students of a larger ecological world and patterns of being. In that context, I've shared my hope in these future leaders; they are continuing to build this movement in ways I could never have imagined, and I'm proud to be working alongside them all (see for example, Wolfmeyer, 2013; Lupinacci & Happel, 2016, Turner, 2015).

I feel such a sense of accomplishment and pride about that, and gratitude for all who have contributed and will carry it on. Eastern Michigan University is attracting excellent students to study with us in graduate programs that use an EcoJustice perspective. And students from here are going on to inspire and connect with like-minded others. Moreover, I feel so fortunate to be included among the many people who are a part of the international network of EcoJustice scholars and for the inspiration I have experienced with those brilliant, kind-hearted

people. A shout out here to my colleagues and friends at the University of Tampere in Finland where art, philosophy, sauna, and Finnish forests have stolen my heart.

I am sure that my specific story is just one example of how powerful these experiences can be. These networks of relationship and experience exist in specific ways in diverse places all across the world, and are the soul of this work. If I've learned nothing else it's that friendship is the most important source of strength in this work, and sometimes more fragile than we realize. As I near the end of my academic life, I can honestly say that having had the opportunity to work with and learn from so many brilliant people has been the highlight of it all. And so it should be. All the accolades and publications in the world could not mean as much as the love I have shared with my students and colleagues in this EcoJustice endeavor. I offer you all my thanks and best wishes as we continue on in this critical work.

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