Chapter 27
Values Education for Relational Sustainability: A Case Study of Lance Holt School and Friends

Kathryn Netherwood and Jennie Buchanan
Lance Holt School

Laura Stocker
Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy, Murdoch University

Dave Palmer
School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Murdoch University

1. Introduction

Last term we had lots of tours and stories and got told about Aboriginal history. We learnt about the Waaguls and the significance of the river... I go fishing with my dad on the river and I didn’t know about these spots, but now I can tell him what is what and where all of these important places are and how to respect them.

Jackson, Year 6

In this chapter we show how a relational ontology can underpin education for sustainability, by locating the learning process within children’s own place and community. We show how an open, inquiry-based, relational approach can lead the children into a deeper understanding of the place and community that sustains them, and ultimately into a deeper sense of stewardship for that place. We show that sustainability education and values education can support each other.

2. Relational Ontology

Ontology is the study of how we apprehend reality: our primary understanding of how the world is constituted. A relational ontology, as the term suggests fairly, emphasises relationships as fundamental: beings, or indeed any things or elements, are primarily understood and generated only in relation to others; relation is not secondary or derivative (Slife, 2004). Under a relational ontology the world is mutually constitutive. A being is a nexus of a whole range of relations. Its qualities are not generated entirely by what is inside it, but also by the world around it. A being, in turn, co-creates the world. As Slife (2004) puts it: “The fundamentally real is a part of a larger whole in which its very properties and being stem from its relation to other parts.” Under a relational ontology, our focus is on the meaning and significance of this experience of connection, rather than solely on an abstract understanding of a set of elements (be they facts, people or buildings). Relationality can be seen as allied to concepts of interdependence (Abram, 1996), connectivity (Rose and Robin, 2004), organicism (Merchant, 1989) and holism; and distant from a cluster of worldviews such as the Cartesian model of mind-body split, reductionism, mechanism (Berman, 1981; Merchant, 1989) and abstractionism (Slife, 2004).

3. Relationality, Place and Community

“In its simplest expression, geography asks humanity’s oldest, most fundamental questions: ‘Where am I?’ ‘How do I get there?’…” (Davis, 1993: 16). Hence, often, the first question we ask a stranger is ‘Where are you from?’ The question however
is not a purely technical inquiry. We don’t just want to know about the name of the town, its ecology, its latitude and longitude. We also want to know about the person’s lifestyle, her/his experiences, her/his stories, so we can begin to understand this person in relation to ourselves. We suggest that, under a relational ontology, a study of place and community also asks the questions: “Who are we? What are our stories? How do we belong?”

A concept of place that responds to these questions allows us to re-integrate the individual/culture/nature divides in a highly particularist, critical and narrative manner. A relational ontology assumes that community always and already is, and that community does not need to be, indeed cannot be, created by defining a shared set of abstract values, beliefs and characteristics that irons out difference and otherness (Slife, 2004). In fact, relationship requires, by definition, an ‘other’ with whom to relate; in the absence of such an ‘other’ there is only a narcissistic reflection of self and no authentic relationship (Slife, 2004). The main task of a community is therefore to recognise and nurture difference and otherness; differences within and among communities are the community’s richest resources. The ‘other’, as well as including different kinds of people, can also include the ‘other-than-human’ ecological community about which we can learn more in our process of relating to it. Communities, recognising this task, can respond to a range of cultural and social values and practices, including specifically traditional Indigenous owners’ (Rose and Robin, 2004), and encourage mutual learning about each other’s lives and about the various meanings of places and nature. We can thus deepen our awareness of our sense of place: we are of its cultural characters, its plants and animals, its air and water (Mathews, 1999). We can deepen our awareness of our selves and our values, and extend our understanding of what it means to be an active citizen in relation to our community. We can become stewards of our place.

4. Relationality and Sustainability Values Education

From an educational point of view, a relational ontology of place and community allows not just a study of the facts and figures about a place or a programme of outdoor education. It also allows for a critical pedagogy that seeks to more deeply connect students with the ecology of their place, and engage them in values dialogue about the politics of place and nurture their ability to change the world around them for the better (Gruenewald, 2003). Wooltorton (2006) recognises the importance of a relational ontology to sustainability education and emphasises the surprising properties that can emerge at the level of the whole that cannot be predicted by looking solely at the parts in isolation, to which we would add that surprising educational experiences can also emerge when a deep, relational, values-based inquiry is permitted. A relational ontology points to an epistemology as a basis for learning sustainability where knowledge is collaboratively created and shared (Wooltorton, 2006). “Knowledge is from the very beginning a co-operative process of group life, in which everyone unfolds his [or her] knowledge within a framework of a common fate, a common activity, and the overcoming of common difficulties” (Mannheim, 1936: 26). A relational epistemology suggests that knowledge generation also includes an understanding of how our culture and life experience affect how we relate to our world, and why (Mannheim, 1936).
5. Lance Holt School

Lance Holt School has been operating for 36 years and is situated on Whadjuk Nyungar country in the historical West End of Fremantle, the port city of Western Australia. Its unique location in a maritime, historic, tourist and educational hub impacts strongly on how the school community thinks about and relates to its environment. It has an enrolment of 100 students from Kindergarten to Year 7. The staff team has a wealth of experience and passion for values education and they continue to lead in this area, developing creative and exciting activities for the children.

History of values education at Lance Holt School

The Lance Holt School was established in 1970 to provide innovative education in a community. The school has consistently focused on implementing best-practice education based on values such as social justice, community participation, environmental awareness, peace education, child-centred learning, maintaining a balance between rights and responsibilities, and collegiate relationships between staff, parents and students.

Relational values are embedded in the whole school approach to educating the students. These values can be seen in:

- child-centred teaching and learning programmes
- behaviour management approach based on fundamental rights and correspondent responsibilities
- consensual and participatory operation of the School Council and its committees
- collegiate approach of staff
- whole school camps and meetings and school community events
- support for parent involvement
- problem-solving approach to conflict resolution.

During 1996 the school participated in the National Professional Development Programme (NPDP) Values Review Project. The school established a committee to reflect on the schools core values. This involved consultation with the school community (students, teachers and parents), a series of workshops and an agreement upon shared core values which, when examined, bear a close resemblance to sustainability principles.

In 2000 and 2001 an Ethics Committee of the School Council ran workshops with parents to explore the rights and responsibilities of school community members as a means of sharing and sustaining the school’s core values. The findings of the Ethics Committee are published on the school’s website www.lanceholtschool.wa.edu.au.

In 2002 we began to focus our values-based education explicitly on sustainability, and this has continued to the present day. It has been important for Lance Holt School that sustainability does not become a spray-on product, a purely technical task or an abstract concept ungrounded in the daily practice of values.
Lance Holt School sustainability values education: a relational approach

Like our values education generally, our sustainability values education has also focused on relationships: relationships among people, among cultures, among communities, and relationships between children and their place. We suggest here that Lance Holt School’s educational process is based on a relational ontology that distinguishes it from more abstractionist approaches to values education.

Values education is at the heart of our approach to sustainability education:

- we aim to bring concepts, values and practices of sustainability explicitly into the curriculum of our school and into daily practice;
- we interconnect sustainability across the teaching and learning programme and incorporate heads, hearts and hands in this process;
- we have developed partnerships with local government, indigenous elders universities to build relationships and resources;
- we encourage children to engage deeply in relationships with other people and their local places.

Lance Holt School First Sustainability Values Projects

The first sustainability projects focused on sustainability values in the broader community and in the school (Stocker and Netherwood, 2006). We aimed to explore how:

- the core values of the Lance Holt School relate to sustainability values;
- sustainability values are expressed in two case studies in the broader community;
- how sustainability values can inform and be interpreted into practice in Lance Holt School.

We developed partnerships with Murdoch University, with a local Indigenous Elder, with the Fremantle City Council and with the Coastcare Programme. The partnerships were developed in the context of two case studies. The project was launched with Mrs Marie Taylor, and Indigenous Elder who officially welcomed us to the area and became a partner to the school.

Sustainable Living

The first case was the study of permaculture and environmental technologies by the school at Murdoch University’s Environmental Technology Centre. Here, the Upper School learnt the basics of permaculture gardening, environmentally friendly technology, embodied democracy and cultural exchange. We explored the sustainability values underlying these practices in interactive workshops with members of Murdoch University’s academic staff from the Environmental Technology Centre and the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy. An inquiry learning process gave purpose to the learning and an opportunity to reflect on it. Students organised and conducted a sustainability conference for the school community, which was a very empowering process.

Coastcare

The second case was the establishment of the Lance Holt School as a Coastcare group responsible for the monitoring and care of Bathers’ Beach, a five minute walk
from the school. The Coastcare project built on a long-standing relationship between
the school and the beach. The Lower School explored what it means to become
stewards of a place, and the values necessary for this. It is an ongoing project:
learning about the ecology through scientific monitoring of the environment;
wondering about the beach and our relationship to it; learning about the Indigenous
and non-Indigenous cultures and histories by listening to stories from community
members; planting trees and collecting litter from the beach; and interpreting the
beach in drawings, weavings, collages, sculptures and maps. We formed lasting
partnerships with an Indigenous Elder, Fremantle City Council, local businesses, the
local Maritime Museum and the regional Coastcare programme.

Young children’s natural curiosity about their physical and social world underpinned
the learning experiences. Their strong desire to make sense of their world through
active participation was also central to learning.

6. Valuing a Sustainable World: Mapping children’s connection to place

**Project background**

Building on the sustainability values projects above the Year 6/7s created a DVD
entitled *Kids’ Guide to Freo*, which won a heritage award from the Fremantle City
Council. We wanted to continue to develop this work and to share it with others, so
as part of the National ‘Values Education Good Practice Schools Project’, Lance Holt
School and four other community schools formed a cluster to work together on a
Sustainable Values Project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education,
Science and Training (DEST) and managed by the Curriculum Corporation. The
project involved kids mapping the sustainability values of their places. The schools in
the cluster were small independent community schools from Western Australia:

- Lance Holt School in the West End of Fremantle;
- Strelley Aboriginal Community School near Port Hedland, Pilbara;
- Moerlina School in Mount Claremont;
- Nyindamurra Family School in Forest Grove, South West;
- Kerry Street Community School in Hamilton Hill.

Three of the schools were from the Perth metropolitan area, one located in the
country in the south west and a remote school located in the Pilbara. Children thus
came from a diverse geographical, cultural and socio-economic background.
Teachers from all five community schools had a wealth of history and experience in
working with school communities and values education.

**Project aims**

The project aimed to achieve a number of things including:

- encouraging children to consider the things that nourish and sustain them in
  their local places;
- encouraging children to consider how they in turn care for and share their
  places;
- offering children opportunities to articulate their responses through language,
  arts practice, mapping and other mediums appropriate to their age and
  background;
• offering children opportunities to extend their contact with children from other places;
• offering children opportunities to compare and contrast the things and relationships they value with those of others (both children and adults).

We were also keen to continue to find ways for students to learn about ethical judgement and social responsibility and how their place is managed. This we thought can help students become more active citizens and better able to participate in a diverse world.

**Sustainability values**

We framed our study of sustainability values using the cultural, social, economic and ecological layers of relationships. We focused on the values of care and stewardship of the local environment, social and ecological responsibility, respect for the diverse traditions and cultures of others and the value of comparing their own experiences with those of others in different regions and ecological areas. We hoped that involvement in the project would help students learn the value of integrating the rights and responsibilities humans have with their local environment and appreciating how different cultural contexts shape the way people conceptualise the use of place.

**Methods**

We used place mapping as a metaphor and a tool. The project started by introducing teachers to the use of conventional and digital mapping as a tool for exploring the importance of place to students. An initial overlay mapping process helped students identify ‘hot-spots’ or extra-special places for them. For details of the initial overlay mapping method see Stocker and Burke (2006). The next stage was to build interpretive depth into the maps. Teachers drew upon children’s experience and own conceptions of place values to start them using arts practice and other inquiry-based activities to build depth in their exploration of values. Examples of these activities included:

• collecting oral history and interviews with significant people;
• inviting Indigenous people to host excursions, story telling and language work;
• working with ecologists in the detailed study of special places;
• producing art (such as a tableau or silk land/sky/water scape)
• social action activities (such as painting public facilities and writing letters to local government).

Mapping special places enabled the students to focus on how these places sustain them and how they in turn sustain the places. Mapping reinforced children’s sense of place and commitment to it, that is a sense of stewardship. Stewardship involves taking action in taking care of a place.

Students participated in an extraordinary variety of projects with each school producing a combined website www.kidsplacemaps.wa.edu.au so that children can share and compare how others in different geographical and cultural contexts value their local places. Below we set out one example from each school from a range of many activities and outcomes that the project nurtured.
Lance Holt School: A Special Place – Bathers’ Beach

In this case example, we revisit Bathers’ Beach, as part of an ongoing relationship the Lance Holt School students have with the beach. Bathers’ Beach or Manjaree as it is known in Nyungar has always been a special meeting place. Nyungar Elder and school partner Marie Taylor officially welcomed us to Manjaree in 2002.

In the early days of European settlement, before the bar at the mouth of the Swan River was blasted to create Fremantle Port, ‘The Long Jetty’ was built to shelter. It became a bridge from land and sea. It was a meeting place for the coming together of people and groups. After the Port was built The Long Jetty fell into decline, almost oblivion. In recent years, however, a local sculptor named Joan Campbell built a beautiful wooden jetty-like structure on the beach as both a commemoration of the Long Jetty and a wonderful playground for children.

In the current project the children made a detailed comparison between it and a very nearby fast food outlet’s playground. Without exception, the jetty sculpture was preferred as a place to play. Unfortunately this structure has also fallen into disrepair, so our visit there was an opportunity to assess and record the things about it that need attention. The children decided that the most appropriate person to be made aware of the sculpture’s condition was the City of Fremantle’s Mayor. Each child wrote a letter to him, outlining their particular concerns and the class offered its assistance in the restoration work. Much to the delight of the children we received a positive response to the letters, inviting us to be involved in the future restorative project. Children had their photograph taken by the local paper and a story in the paper highlighted community concerns.

The Bathers’ Beach Jetty Sculpture stands in a place that has been a meeting place for thousands of years. Our children think it is a very special place to meet. It sustains them and they in return are committed to sustaining it.

Strelley Community School

Strelley Community School is the oldest continually operational Independent Aboriginal Community School in Australia and commenced operation in 1976. It is located in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, approximately 1600 km north of Perth. It has three annexes with students from Kindergarten to Year 12 located at Strelley, Warralong and Woodstock. Sustainability is understood best in terms of “caring for country and going along together” and has special resonance for the school. It is something they seek to share with children from other schools. Strelley Community School mapped people’s stories about their place. Students and teachers involved elders and other community members in making maps to help consider how important country is to their lives.

Here are some examples of the places Strelley kids identified as special, and why:

- ‘The Mikurrunya Hills are steep sloped hills with rocky outcrops. A traditional story explains how these hills were formed through a family quarrel. Today there are many animals near these hills that we can eat.

- The Port Hedland Truck Stop, better known as Dickson’s is an important place for our community. It is the last stop on the way out of town to Strelley and the
first stop back in. We buy fuel, food and drinks from Dickson's. Many of the big trucks that go past Strelley stop at Dickson's too!

- Cemetery Beach is on the foreshore in Port Hedland. It is an important place where our three campuses meet for school excursions. There is lots of grass and shade for a great picnic. We have lots of fun when we go to Cemetery Beach, playing cricket, football and eating Chicken Treat! Cemetery Beach is located opposite Port Hedland's Pioneer Cemetery. This is also an interesting place to visit. Sharona Foote writes what she enjoys most about Cemetery Beach: "I like going to Cemetery Beach with my family for the weekend. Sometimes we go to Cemetery Beach to sleep over, so the kids can play while some people go fishing and some keep the food ready. I like it when most people have church at the beach. Cemetery Beach is the best place to have a picnic."

**Nyindamurra Family School**

Nyindamurra is situated in Forest Grove near Margaret River in the South West of Western Australia. It has been operating since 1982. The school has a Kindergarten to Year 7 student population of 50 students. In the project, teachers used narrative, drawing, mapping and dramatic techniques in their classroom practices with the senior children. The teachers linked their past work on values and virtues to this project.

Nyindamurra considered how their community already cares for and sustains their place and how to best continue this. The children mapped how they use the school grounds and surrounding bushland. Environmental issues were explored through the children’s own personal experiences like the loss of a very significant old tree from nearby bushland. As with Lance Holt School, the project of mapping their place quickly led to a deepened sense of stewardship. Activities initiated at the school during the project included building a frog habitat with children in the upper primary class. The children also discussed the sustainability values of managing weeds in their school grounds. Several methods at three test sites are being trialled. Children are observing, monitoring and writing up the results. As with Lance Holt School, the activities initiated during the project are ongoing; the work on weeds and frogs has now linked the school to local and regional landcare groups and to a Western Australian Government land mapping extension programme in order to learn how to use GIS and GPS to help manage their place.

**Moerlina School**

Moerlina School is located at Mt Claremont in Perth. Moerlina has a student population of up to 100 from Kindergarten to Year 7 students. Moerlina Student Council was the focal point for the school's involvement in the Values Project. Student Councillors used the Project as a platform for trialling a new approach to leadership development. The project involved sustainable values mapping of Herdsman Lake.

**A special place - Herdsman Lake**

The children mapped economic, ecological/environmental, social and cultural aspects and found that nearby Herdsman Lake was a hot-spot or special place for them. They viewed Herdsman Lake through four time periods - geological history,
Aboriginal history, European settlement and the present, encompassing issues in relation to sustaining place, and the future of the community.

Tabloid day
The Student Council then became the source of information for the entire school body, and were responsible to planning and running a Tabloid day, designed to teach the rest of the school about what they had learned. The Student Council became the teachers for the day. A student, Sascha reflected on the experience: "Fun. I felt like I had a lot of power - I've been taught before, but I've never taught someone. It was not easy organising a group of people, everyone has their own opinions. If young people get involved in the environment, its sets them up for a good start so they don't start joining in with pollution. Community projects are a fun way to get to know each other. I worked on the bush glue activity and it was a great way for people to learn about Nyungar culture. I also learned a lot about pollution and blue-green algae."

Kerry Street Community School
Kerry Street is situated in Hamilton Hill. It is a family school with a population of approximately 37 children from Kindergarten to Year 7. It has been operating since 1980. A key element in their work has been equipping students with the means to consider alternative and contrasting values. Students have been encouraged to build their skills in debate using such topics as the use of school spaces, care of public places and protection of local facilities.

A special place - Manning Lake
Manning Park is near Kerry Street School and it contains a beautiful wetland which the school visits regularly and loves. Here is what the school wrote about why the park is a special place for them what they learnt there:

“Manning Park was our main sustainability hotspot a place where ecological, economic, social and cultural uses overlap to form an area of special significance for our school and the entire community. We visited Manning Park seven times [during the project] and we were lucky to have a number of people come and share their expertise or experience with us as we explored the park. These are the things we did...

We played on the playground. Naturalist, Eric McCrum, came and shared a wealth of knowledge about wetlands with us. We were fascinated by the tortoises we saw laying their eggs and later swimming in the lake. Tom, Harry, Tye and Brendan reported on the Spring Fair [held at Manning Lake and attended by the kids]. Sustainability expert, Laura Stocker, came on a walk around the lake and inspired us to map the park. Trevor Walley came and showed us how to introduce ourselves to the earth and the creatures, how to throw spears and lots more. Shana encouraged us to do beautiful observational artwork of the trees and wildlife at Manning Park. With Petra, the environmental officer at Cockburn Council, we tested the water in the lake, planted sedge and found out how trees help us.

We visited The Azelia Ley Homestead Museum and The Old Wagon House. We helped clean up an area of the lake by picking up all the rubbish. We recorded the water level in the lake over a period of weeks and graphed it. On our last day we had a picnic and a water fight and rolled down the big hill. The experience of visiting the park weekly was quite wonderful. Shana's class collected their memories of the term's excursions and they are beautiful to read.
7. Conclusions

For Lance Holt School and friends, sustainability education broadens and deepens our existing process of values education. We have carried out our projects in practical and significant ways, in the context of place and community, in order to explore sustainability values in the schools. We bring the concepts and practices of sustainability explicitly into the curriculum at our schools and into our daily practice of caring for place. Importantly, sustainability education is not seen as an “add-on” to complete, then put aside while we get on with the rest of the ‘real curriculum’. Rather sustainability education is becoming fully integrated into our schools and fully connected with the rest of the learning process.

We suggest that sustainability education should be appropriate to children’s age, responsive to children’s needs, not overly didactic, and enjoyable. Sustainability education should at least in part be undertaken in a practical outdoors context. Children learn and grow best while doing and being in place. These practices, taken together, point towards a relational ontology and epistemology for sustainability values education that deepen and broaden the children’s understanding of what it is to be human in relation to the world around them. As Year 6 student Jackson said, our children can now begin to tell others “what is what and where all of these important places are and how to respect them.”

References


Contact Email: l.stocker@murdoch.edu.au