Place, empire, environmental education, and the Community of Inquiry

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Abstract

Place-based education is founded on the idea that the student's local community is one of their primary learning resources. Place-based education's underlying educational principle is that students need to first have an experiential understanding of the history, culture, and ecology of the environment in which they are situated before tackling broader national and global issues. Such attempts are a step in the right direction in dealing with controversial issues in a democracy by providing resources for synthesising curriculum though theory (curriculum content, including traditional subjects) and practice (practical learning as experiential education). Nevertheless, many place-based accounts discount Indigenous conceptions of place, which are integral to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, especially in relation to the ontological relationship to Land and Country. Indigenous philosophy has the potential to inform what place-based education means by students developing a 'sense of place' when engaging with local communities as their 'own' place. In this article we re-imagine the community of inquiry as a place-responsive pedagogy by learning from Indigenous philosophy, and recentring Indigenous notions of place in experiential learning. In addition to exploring the pedagogical potential of a place-responsive account of the community of inquiry, we look to the implications for teacher preparation.

Keywords

Community of Inquiry, empire, environmental education, Indigenous philosophy, place-responsive education, teacher preparation

Introduction

As the world becomes increasingly complex, problems emerge that are often accompanied by a lag in our ability to find solutions. Even when problems are predictable, such as in the case of anthropogenic climate change, too often we are slow to act—more cautious to protect the economy than the ecological systems on which all life on Earth depends. Knowledge of such crises, and the ways in which our societies contribute to them, is disseminated too slowly into common knowledge to create the public will necessary to make changes swiftly. And these changes are not small concessions to the environment, such as turning off a light bulb or recycling. They are radical and affect most areas of our lives: transportation, food, trade, retail, energy usage, and so forth. The very systems upon which many of our societies are built and upon which many of us are reliant for our own survival, are the very same that are strangling nature's reproductive capabilities, as more and more of nature's resources are turned towards human ends. Our consumption of Earth's resources, especially in high income countries, is unbalanced, exploitative, and unethical (Houghton 2009). Although the direct causes of climate change are physical, such as the burning of fossil fuels, many of these causes are underpinned by belief structures and knowledge systems that are perpetuated through education. Education, therefore, plays a part in the ongoing destruction of nature, but it can also be a site of knowledge disruption, creation, and adaptation.

In many countries, students are taught to value nature in the same way they have for centuries, namely, instrumentally. According to this view, the environment is little more than a resource to be used in the service of human ends, often without much thought to what is destroyed in order to meet these ends and with very little ethical oversight. To make matters worse, Western ethics is invested primarily in human agents leaving all other lifeforms and ecosystems out in the increasingly extreme weather, so to speak. Pedagogically, the choice to ethically disregard the more than human world is often touted as a neutral stance, or a way to avoid indoctrination. But those who forward these positions often fail to account for their own indoctrination into abstract systems of thought that discount the physical. This indoctrination becomes obvious when the views of other cultures are taken seriously. While inclusion of diverse ways of knowing, being and doing in the curriculum are

immensely important, so too is the ability to listen and learn from them—an ability that is often marred by unquestioned prejudice (Smith, Tuck & Yang 2019).

In this paper, we argue that education has misplaced place. Place is not neutral, merely somewhere for activities to occur. As members of social and political communities, humans cannot be abstracted away from place, but are ecologically embedded—locally, nationally, and globally. We are human animals after all. The idea that we are more than animals and somehow 'special' is a defining idea in Western philosophy; one that too often turns into speciesism. To mitigate this and other prejudices, we will argue that place-based pedagogies should be a key feature of education, as 'students need to experience a "sense of place" to develop their identity as citizens who are ecologically interdependent—a mode of associated living necessary for sustainable living' (Burgh & Thornton 2022, p. 10).

Taking Australia as our focus—although our arguments and conclusions can provide lessons to be learnt for education elsewhere—we argue that Indigenous conceptions of place reveal the prejudice of human superiority over place that lies at the heart of many Western ethical theories and pedagogies (Hyde 2014). Grounding education in place has the potential not only to address assumptions of human superiority over place, but also of Western philosophy over other knowledge systems. To bring out the hidden assumptions of superiority in Western conceptions of philosophy we turn to the Community of Inquiry (COI) as a starting point for a wider rethinking of education, before arguing for the need to rethink our understanding of place from within place (as specific places of embodied learning). We will conclude by discussing implications for teacher education. But first we turn to the ongoing role of empire in the perpetuation of placeless education.

Empire

In a recent study by Jennifer Bleazby et al. (2023), the findings suggest that most of the teachers interviewed believe they are morally obligated to raise awareness about climate change, to actively encourage students to be environmentally responsible, and to make connections between climate change and related natural disasters. However, they also acknowledged the sensitive nature of these topics and how they can be challenging to teach. Some of the challenges they encountered include: (1) 'push back' from students, parents, and other staff, (2) policies and curriculum documents that do not explicitly encourage or, worse, actively impede climate change education, (3) concerns about being 'too political', (4) apathy, ambivalence or lack of support from students/staff, and (5) lack of resources, including time and training. While most of

the teachers were committed to teaching such topics and thought they should be more widely taught in schools, other research indicates that these sorts of challenges and concerns result in some teachers avoiding such controversial topics altogether or using potentially problematic pedagogies (Hess 2009).

The problematic delivery of controversial curriculum topics compounds the problem of lack of political will mentioned earlier, which further compounds problems of delivery; a cycle that makes changing both education and political will challenging. It is a cycle that John Dewey flagged back in the early 1900s. To change education, he thought, requires changing the ethical, social, and political landscapes, as those who educate are, in turn, educated by the multitude of habitats they both create and inherit. Put another way, our shared ethical, social, and political belief-habits shape the way education systems are structured, including teacher preparation programs, curriculum content, and pedagogy.

In Australia, the foundations that shape present day education have a colonial past which, far from being confined to the past, persist and continue to dominate much of its structure, content, and pedagogy, for as Patrick Wolfe (2006) put it, 'settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event' (p. 388). These circumstances are, of course, not peculiar to Australia. As a result of imperialism, conquest, and settlement, Western nation-states (Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and other European countries) colonised lands and expanded throughout the world, creating empires that spread European culture and institutions to the Americas and Australia, most of Africa, and substantial parts of Asia. It is these institutions, such as education, that perpetuate empire. This leads us to re-ask the question: 'Will there ever be a use-by date for Empire? Or will Empire simply dominate behind another face?' (see Graham 2014, p. 22). There are many different and important ways to respond to this question. When referring to empire, perhaps the environment is not the first thing to spring to mind, but as the Australian environmental philosopher Val Plumwood (2003) wrote:

> It is usually now acknowledged that in this process of Eurocentric colonization, the lands of the colonized and the non-human populations who inhabit those lands were often plundered and damaged, as an indirect result of the colonization of the people. What we are less accustomed to acknowledging is the idea that the concept of colonization can be applied directly to non-human nature itself, and that the relationship between humans, or certain groups of them, and the

more-than-human world might be aptly characterized as one of colonization. (p. 52)

Colonialism ushered in a structure (see Wolfe 2006) that is largely at odds with natural ecosystems. Environmental problems, therefore, are 'the result not merely of faulty policies and technologies but of underlying attitudes to the natural world that were built into the very foundations of Western thought' (Mathews, Rigby & Rose 2012, p. ix). A need to rethink relationships with the world, and the ethical, legal, industrial, socio-cultural, educational, and political structures that shape them, has formed the conclusion of much of the work of Indigenous and environmental philosophers, and the severe, escalating threat of climate change raises the stakes even higher (Rose 2004; Smith 2012; Watson 2014; Whyte 2020). Policies and governance that emerge from the same theoretical foundations, which, to a large extent, have driven our current crises, are often ecologically irrational. The same thinking that has contributed to ecological destruction is unlikely to halt ecological destruction. For education to play its part in rethinking our relationships to the world it must first rethink itself. Hence, we turn in the next section to the philosophy for children movement as an exemplar of philosophical education. However, before we do so, it is important to note that philosophy is not a singular pursuit, as different cultures from all over the world have different conceptions of philosophy, which must be recognised and included in inquiry. For example, Eastern philosophy, which is rooted in ancient practices from cultures such as India, China, and Japan, emphasises mindfulness, meditation, and spiritual growth to achieve personal transformation. Other philosophical traditions (e.g. Latin American philosophy, African philosophy, Islamic philosophy, Indigenous philosophy) are underscored by a variety of methodologies and practices that have their own cultural roots. In this sense, the substantive content (i.e. the range of beliefs, values, and conceptions of identity in relation to the world that have originated in different cultures) and philosophical methodology are inextricably entwined. A robust conception of philosophy, then, cannot be reduced to its cognitive or logical functions, or to Western philosophy alone, as doing so denies the value of other philosophies and 'marginalises the social, ethical, aesthetic, affective and political components that are as integral to the teaching of thinking as the skills themselves' (Splitter & Sharp 1995, p. 3).

Learning from experience

Matthew Lipman, along with Ann Margaret Sharp, developed the COI as a pedagogy for the classroom, together with a curriculum, comprising a series of purpose-written

philosophical stories-as-text (or novels) and accompanying instruction manuals for teachers, which form the core of the philosophy for children approach to education. Lipman was influenced by Dewey's theory of inquiry that emphasises active, experiential learning, and the testing and application of ideas, or put simply practicality (Lipman 2004; Lipman & Sharp 1978). Given that, at least theoretically, Lipman agrees with Dewey that practicality is essential to inquiry, '[i]t seems strange then that he would exclude it from the classroom, especially since Dewey embraced it' (Bleazby 2004, p. 39). Dewey's attention was on experimental, scientific inquiry, and experiential learning, which he practised in his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago to test ideas and teach children (see Dewey 1936; Tanner 1991, 1997). Lipman, on the other hand, gave prominence to philosophy as the methodology of education and not, as Dewey thought, as the general theory of education, and, therefore, placed emphasis on philosophical inquiry and philosophical stories-as-text rather than hands-on activities that directly relate to students' lives.

Bleazby's (2013) social reconstruction learning collapses the theory/practice dualism, as it is underpinned by Dewey's theory of education as an ongoing reconstruction or re-organisation of experience, which he argues increases students' ability to direct and control their lives, rather than preparing students for something else (e.g. being job-ready or a citizen). It reconstructs philosophy for children by incorporating social justice or critical approaches to service learning, that is, students undertake hands-on community service activities aimed at critiquing and transforming social justice issues. These approaches to service learning are often influenced by critical pedagogy, as well as Dewey's ideas. Social reconstruction learning is essentially a Deweyan social justice approach to experiential learning that draws on feminist pragmatism, ecofeminism, and the COI pedagogy to engage students in 'philosophical inquiries with their local community with the purpose of reconstructing actual social problems, in order to facilitate independent thinking, imaginativeness, emotional intelligence, autonomy, and active and informed citizenship' (Bleazby 2013, p. 3). Reconstruction, therefore, occurs not only in the students, but in the society and the citizens with which they engage.

For such experience to occur, attention to place is essential, for, as Dewey acknowledged, belief-habits are formed from interactions with the habitat (the organism's environment). Recently, the importance to education of Indigenous conceptions of place has been increasingly supported by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars around the world (Graham 1999, 2014; Moreton-Robinson 2015). For Indigenous Peoples, place is integral to a particular language, social or nation

group's ways of knowing, being, and doing, especially their ontological relationship (i.e. the ways in which entities are associated) to land. In Australia, the Aboriginal relationship with place

> emerges from an ancient reciprocal relationship with nature; an ethic of looking after, stewardship, caring for, and the obligation to look after Land that nurtures. The result is a well-known term which is both an Australian Aboriginal form of protest and philosophical worldview: *The Land is the Law*. (Graham 2013, p. 2)

Humans, ethics, knowledge, all arise from place. According to this philosophy, place provides the blueprint for all human endeavours. This understanding of place not only informs us of where we are at any time, but also who we are. The centring of such Indigenous concepts of place in schooling is essential for re-placing education back into the physical and mitigating the epistemic marginalisation or exclusion brought about by the domination of Western colonial institutions and practices (Thornton 2024; Thornton, Graham & Burgh 2019, 2021). Centring Indigenous notions of land as part of experiential learning has implications for facilitating the multi-voiced inquiry necessary for discussing controversial topics, wherein relations to land and 'care for Country' provide crucial ways of understanding environmental and sustainable practices.

At its best, philosophy for children's COI pedagogy draws on a robust understanding of philosophy, taking inquiry to be a social process, a dialogic interplay between critical and creative thinking that lends itself naturally to classroom discussion elicited from students' experiences and curiosity, thereby defining the classroom as a learning community which focuses on 'questioning, reasoning, connecting, deliberating, challenging, and developing problem-solving techniques' (Lipman 2003, pp. 20–21). And a growing number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the COI (for an analysis see García Moriyón, Robello & Colom 2005; Millett & Tapper 2012). However, the question of whether the COI can ethically and effectively engage students in discussions on controversial topics remains. For it to do so, we argue that the COI must be grounded in both experience and place, so that it can provide students with educational and practical opportunities to explore the notion of a 'sense of place'—how they perceive a place—which includes obligations to place, place attachment and place meaning (Kudryavtsev, Stedman & Krasny 2012).

Place-responsive learning

It should be noted that what Indigenous peoples around the world have in common is a historical continuity with a specific region prior to colonisation and continuing connections to their lands, which is integral to distinct social, economic, and political ordering, but they also have distinct languages, cultures, beliefs, knowledge systems, and worldviews. For Aboriginal peoples in Australia, all political concepts 'are grounded in "Country", with implications for how we think about place and territory' (Brigg & Graham 2021, n.p.). Country (with an uppercase 'C') does not refer to a nation with its own government that occupies a particular territory which can be viewed on a map. It is also more than a word to describe a particular landscape outside of urban settings. The term is used to describe the complexity of ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family, and identity which connect the lands, waterways, skies, and seas. Country, therefore, is a sentient landscape inscribed with wisdom, knowledge, and all its features, which are the result of the ancestral beings who have travelled the country and created it. To be connected to Country is to stay knowledgeable; hence the importance of caring for Country, which is not merely a physical activity, such as maintaining clean waterways, but acknowledging the relationship between the complexity of ideas mentioned above and their relations to the materiality of the land to provide the knowledge and wisdom to be Custodians of the Land.

The dominant Western epistemic framework that was imposed by British rule in Australia and perpetuated and maintained by its social and political institutions and structures has epistemically hidden County from view, allowing land to be treated as a commodity, a resource for human ends, which has led to the appropriation and diminishment of Country. However, although colonial destruction and imposition have attenuated over 60,000 years of relations with Country, at the same time 'Country and its processes persist, whether in active practices or as patterns etched in the landscape by tens of thousands of years of human occupation that are available for recovery and revival in face of colonisation' (Brigg & Graham 2021, n.p.). As mentioned previously, this is so because, for Aboriginal peoples, place not only informs us of where we are at any time, but also who we are. In other words, place and being are inextricably connected; '[w]here we dwell can be used like an ontological compass, a calibrating mechanism for regulating connections with the beings and relations that link to and radiate from where we take our grounding' (n.p.).

Place-responsive pedagogies are attuned to Country and offer a rich experiential conception of education and a starting point for rethinking our relationships to place. They are two-way modes of learning, 'through the relational activity of the body in place—through walking, touching, shaping, smelling, hearing, sensing in place' (Redshaw & Tooth 2018, p. 12). Such pedagogies have the potential for recalibrating the epistemic landscape to develop a 'sense of place' so that such recovery and revival of Country can occur. They can broaden both students' experiences beyond the classroom and the standardised knowledge and testing that permeates education policy. The embodied nature of place-responsive pedagogies also reflects Dewey's emphasis on experiential learning. Dewey (1916) favoured the coordination of perception between the child and the world, between their belief-habits and their habitat which act in concert, so that they experience being-in-the-world. Such experiences cannot be gained through philosophical dialogue on the experiences of fictional characters in texts alone, such as those in Lipman's philosophical stories-as text.

The connection between human activity and the ecological systems in which they are embedded is not a 'fixed' relation, as 'places are not bounded and stable but continually constructed through relational activities between people across time and space' (Renshaw & Tooth 2018, p. 3). On this account, place is 'an unfolding event with overlapping and intersecting stories' which 'conveys openness to both the past and the future, and frames place as a site of ongoing negotiation between related unfolding and perhaps incompatible stories' (p. 3). These 'unfinished stories' are contestable and can open dialogue on a collective understanding of place, including possible relationships to place, such as places for recreational and physical activity, meditation, contemplation, or scientific inquiry, but above all caring for place and the needs of nature. In other words, '[a] pedagogy of place based on storying opens up a myriad of ways of relating to and understanding place' (Renshaw & Tooth 2018, p. 13).

Such an account of place-based education is best described as a critical place-based pedagogy that is both place-conscious and place-responsive (Renshaw & Tooth 2018, pp. 12–14). It is place-conscious because it is committed to understanding 'the cultural and material complexity of place and the ethical responsibility we share to care for local places in order to address global challenges' (p. 2), and place-responsive because it conveys a sustained consciousness and awareness of place that depends on a relational ontology of place-making through a composite of 'learners, places, stories and all kinds of entities' (Mannion & Lynch 2016, p. 90). In this sense, place is not

neutral, nor is it an object made knowable 'through a union between the knower and the known concerned narrowly with the study of natural ecology' (Burgh & Thornton 2022, p. 171). Instead, place is epistemically inhabited, filled with stories of the past and future imaginings, including the ancient stories of Indigenous peoples, such as the Dreamtime creation stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples passed down from generation to generation through storytelling for over 60,000 years. As teachers, we must teach for and from place, otherwise we fail to interrupt the assumed superiority of humans over nature and those who care for nature. However, this does not mean teachers should advocate substantive values, that is, the universal acceptance of specific ethical prescriptions or environmental values. Rather, it is to advocate procedures, requiring teachers to provide opportunities through practical place-responsive activities for other voices to be understood, to allow for the reconstruction of place, and, in the case of controversial issues such as climate change, to understand the impact on and contributions made by place, starting with the local community. Place-responsive pedagogies, therefore, find a natural place in social reconstruction learning as experiential education. In turn, social reconstruction learning can be ecologically embedded through place-responsive approaches to place-based education, all of which require new forms of teacher preparation.

Implications for teacher preparation

Our proposal for a place-responsive, experiential account of the COI (and more broadly, of educational philosophy) raises questions for pre-service and in-service teacher preparation (see also Thornton et al. 2023). We argue that the COI infused with a greater understanding of place, and our relationship with place, can be used to bring about Lipman's and Dewey's aim of reconstructing education more broadly, and that teachers should be trained with this goal in mind. Education is the culmination of the efforts of all those involved over time. A grass roots approach to changing education, while not the only approach that is needed, is important for disrupting the epistemic chains of superiority at their point of educational renewal. If we account for what seems like 'insurmountable problems with democracy, it would be foolish to believe that the capacity of education as a catalyst for change will fast ensure any significant changes' (Burgh & Thornton 2022, p. 187). However, so too would it be foolish if the extent of socio-political and ecological crises were to continue to elicit citizen apathy because we 'have come to the conclusion that it is simply unprofitable and unproductive to engage in reflection about things that cannot be changed anyhow' (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980, p. 31).

To explore the implications a place-responsive, experiential account of the COI carries for teacher training, we start this section with a brief history of ideals for teacher training amongst those who practice philosophy for children and its iterations. Broadly speaking, within the philosophy for children movement, there is contention between those who think that philosophical stories-as-text are integral to teacher education and professional development, as Lipman and Sharp did, and others who think that the quality of programs for teachers is the most important factor and that effective stimuli can be found in a range of existing picture books, children's stories or other appropriate material, provided they can provoke philosophical discussion (see Burgh & Thornton 2017; Cam 2015; De Marzio 2011; Glaser 2019; Lipman 2014, 2017; Sharp 2017a, 2017b; Splitter 2003, 2019; Wilks 2019).

Lipman and Sharp favoured extensive teacher training programs and stressed the importance of the philosophical stories-as-text and discussion plans and exercises in the teacher manuals, which they thought should be used in conjunction with teachers immersing themselves in COIs, mediated by a philosopher (Lipman 1987, 1988, pp. 151–159; Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980, pp. 207–215). Some commentators insist that teachers should be required to have a background in philosophy, while others argue that they should undertake in-service professional development led by teacher educators who, themselves, have had no formal qualifications in philosophy, except for minimal in-service training (see Çayır 2019; Daniel 1998; Davey Chesters & Hinton 2017; Gazzard 2012; Gregory 2008; Splitter 2014). Many of these programs, however, lack the pedagogical emphasis on pragmatist epistemology, which underpins the theory of the COI as previously mentioned and which, we argue, holds the greatest potential for addressing controversial topics such as climate change, while working towards the reconstruction of education.

Historically, in-service professional development for teachers and teacher-educators, and the lack of attention to educational philosophy in pre-service teacher education courses in tertiary institutions, 'has meant that teachers' understanding is usually limited to procedural knowledge and ability, without a thorough understanding of the epistemological and pedagogical principles that characterise the pragmatism of the COI necessary for the reconstruction of education' (Burgh & Thornton 2022, p. 100). Consequently, teachers can lack confidence in facilitating inquiry or becoming co-inquirers as the COI calls for, and, therefore, may not be fully prepared to convert the classroom into a COI.

The pragmatist epistemology that informs the COI rests on fallibilism—the rejection of certainty and absolute conceptions of truth and reality, thereby relying on doubt as the acceptance of theories that are provisional and subject to further investigation and revision. What Peirce calls 'genuine doubt' is essential for recognising prejudice (those beliefs and assumptions we do not think to question), which inhibit the fallibility required for open inquiry. For Pierce, if we accept the concept of fallibilism and maintain an attitude of fallibility, then reliable knowledge can only arise from a rational, scientific process of inquiry, which includes all disciplinary-based inquiry (e.g. science, history, mathematics, philosophy). Peirce's notion of a community of inquirers (scholars and experts who engage in disciplinary inquiry), by virtue of its logic and method of investigation, sets the standards and the justification for the construction of reliable knowledge. 'It is the actual community whose members accept the logic and method of investigation that acts as a deliberative jury between doubt and belief about ideas or hypotheses' (Burgh & Thornton 2022, p. 103). When a conclusion is reached it is provisional only, always open to revision should new information give rise to new doubts. Lipman and Sharp adapted Peirce's pragmatist epistemology to education, with the aim of converting classrooms into communities of inquiry to reconstruct education. To achieve this, students engage in the kind of genuine communicative practices Dewey (1916) spoke of, wherein education is the constant 'reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience' (p. 76), and, in turn, develops students' capacities for active and informed citizenship. In this way, the reconstruction of education fosters social reconstruction.

To convert the classroom into a COI requires an understanding of the philosophical and pedagogical components of philosophy for children that can provide insight into Lipman's larger aims for the COI. Teachers, therefore, need more than a *procedural knowledge* of Lipman's (1991) five stages of inquiry, namely (i) the offering of the text, (ii) the construction of the agenda, (iii) solidifying the community, (iv) using exercises and discussion plans, and (v) encouraging further responses (pp. 241–243). They need to have *pedagogical knowledge*; an understanding of the theory and practice of learning that underpins the COI. Attention should, therefore, be given to the relationship between the theoretical framework of the COI, which provides pedagogical principles and guidelines for the wider aim of reconstructing education, along with the specific classroom method of stages of inquiry for fostering philosophical discussion and critical discourse, to bring about that aim. Tim Sprod (2001) refers to the former as the wide-sense conception and the latter as the narrow-sense conception of the COI. A

teacher versed only in the practice of the narrow-sense conception of inquiry is unable to engage in effective inquiry as they lack a full understanding of the theory and practice of learning in a COI. In addition, without a thorough understanding of the potential blocks to inquiry that prevent deliberative communication (e.g. controversial topics, epistemic bias, silence and domination), teachers will be ill-equipped to undertake the reconstruction of education that the wide-sense conception calls for.

To convert the classroom into a COI, the practice of the narrow-sense COI must be driven by the pedagogical principles that were derived from the scholarly, discipline-based communities of inquiry described by Peirce and later adapted to education by Lipman and Sharp. That is, teachers should have a procedural understanding of how to facilitate philosophical inquiry, along with understanding their dual role as co-inquirers to mediate between the wide-sense and narrow-sense conceptions of the COI (Burgh 2021, p. 20). Mediating between the two COIs is important because 'converting the classroom into a community of inquiry as the reconstruction of education is also the impetus for social reconstruction—it is, as Lipman says, an exemplar of democracy in action' (Burgh & Thornton 2022, p. 112). In practice, this means that teacher preparation courses (both pre-service and in-service) should include components on the relationship between pragmatist theory, social reconstruction, and the practice of the wide and narrow-sense COI. To this end, the focus should be on praxis (the practical application of theory) by immersing participants in the COI pedagogy, place-responsive pedagogy, social reconstructionist pedagogies, and Indigenous pedagogies including notions of place, in conjunction with developing an understanding of the educational theory and epistemology that underpins them. A lack of such understanding is particularly problematic when it comes to engaging with Indigenous pedagogies, as the potential to perpetuate assimilation or appropriation is high, especially if educators do not recognise any incommensurable assumptions of their own culture, whatever that culture may be. For example, the COI can provoke questions regarding our habit-of-being in place—our identity as individuals and members of various social and political communities—to develop new place-responsive habits-of-being that are not premised on what Sharon Stein (2019) calls the three orienting denials that characterise the dominant habit-of-being: denial of colonial violence, denial of ecological unsustainability, and denial of our condition of metabolic entanglement with the earth itself (see also Shotwell 2016). The last two points emerge not only as a product of colonisation but of unstainable economic systems which are dominant the world over.

Moreover, when designing courses, teacher educators cannot assume pre-service teachers have a good understanding of controversial topics or that they even recognise them as controversial. By introducing controversial topics as stimuli for discussion, participants encounter actual problems that affect them alongside other members of their local community, including non-human agents. Such an understanding further opens the possibility of the reconstruction of both habit and habitat. Reconstructing education, then, is not merely a matter of outcome, but of ethics. Our understanding of our impact on the environment is now such that we know with very little room for doubt that our actions have deleterious impacts on other people and other forms of life, as well as ecosystems in shadow places—those places that our material existence is tied to, but which are dematerialised. Dematerialisation 'is the process of becoming more and more out of touch with the material conditions (including ecological conditions) that support or enable our lives' (Plumwood 2008, n.p.). Dematerialisation carries with it an ethical imperative to uncover these processes and pay greater educational attention to the ways in which our habits and habitats contribute to the suffering of human and non-human others, both locally and globally.

To undo both colonial narratives and domineering relationships with the Land the inclusion of Indigenous philosophical perspectives and worldviews is vital, not just as a matter of equality but to mitigate epistemic exclusion and marginalisation 'against Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, and ecological reproduction that permeates dominant logic and philosophy itself' (Thornton 2024, p. 153). This requires engagement with Indigenous communities, co-creation with Indigenous educators, an understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, using empirical research that draws on Indigenous research methodologies (see Martin 2008; Smith 2012), and 'support for more Indigenous input into curriculum development and resource materials' (Thornton 2024, p. 153).

Using the COI as a method of inquiry for interfacing Indigenous with non-Indigenous philosophy aims at understanding and improving human-environment relations by providing opportunities (i) for students to develop a much greater epistemic understanding of being in the world and the reciprocal relationship between their belief-habits and the construction of the habitat, that is, a much greater understanding of their identity in relation to nature, (ii) to facilitate an understanding of the role of experience in relation to personal identity as well as community identity, and (iii) to foster ontological relationships to place to develop a 'sense of place' essential for understanding the relationships between human activity and ecological impacts that affect sustainability, both locally and globally.

Conclusion

How we understand place affects how we approach and solve social and ecological problems, the kinds of political decisions we make, and how we teach. As 'the dominant discourse consists mostly of Western conceptions of place (somewhere upon which to participate in activities) and land (as an economic asset, property belonging to someone, either the state or private ownership)' (Thornton 2024, p. 150), we have argued that the COI, and by extension teacher preparation programs, require emphasis on both epistemic inclusion and experiential learning to synthesise curriculum, pedagogy, and practical learning activities. The inclusion of Indigenous and place-responsive pedagogies is essential for developing a critical awareness of place, which is necessary for ecological thinking and political action in a democracy. Education reform is no easy task, especially as it is driven by neoliberal educational structuring that seeks to further expand privatisation, standardised testing, and a monoculture of knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogy. However, it is a challenge we must face if we are to disrupt the epistemic links that contribute to environmental degradation and dematerialisation. We have intentionally not provided a blueprint for teacher education, as the weight of rethinking education is one that needs to be carried individually and collectively in community and in place.

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