

## **Editorial: *Transdisciplinary Ecopedagogies***

Guest Editors: Professor Victoria de Rijke, Professor Jayne Osgood and Dr. Abele Longo



Fig. 1. The mattering of ecopedagogies

This Special Issue critically and collectively considers what transdisciplinary ecopedagogy might mean in the context of children's education in a time of planetary crisis. Inspired by Angela Antunes and Moacir Gadotti's (2005) conviction that ecopedagogies are the pedagogies needed to meet the Earth Charter,<sup>1</sup> this Special Issue proposes ways to pursue a new set of pedagogies that are not solely shaped by or founded upon western imaginaries of education, curricula, teaching and learning, and are inclusive of diverse perspectives, including those of the Global South, drawing on an international diversity of ecopedagogic thinking applied to curriculum, teaching, educational and thoughtful practice. Global warming and the climate crisis threaten our very existence in myriad urgent ways and

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<sup>1</sup>[1] 'Ecopedagogy' began its use in a Latin American educational context, out of discussions at the second Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 influenced by the philosopher-educator Paulo Freire. In 1999, the Instituto Paulo Freire under the direction of Moacir Gadotti, along with the Earth Council and UNESCO, organised the First International Symposium on the Earth Charter in the Perspective of Education, which was then followed by the First International Forum on Ecopedagogy.

therefore merits an intense focus on pedagogic practices. 'Ecopedagogies' is a term in use since the twentieth century, but it is in the twenty-first that the need to consider it has become crucial. Teaching ecocritically, to understand and take issue with human exceptionalism and the complex aspects of environmental issues from local to global perspectives and knowledges, as well as through the scholarship of multiple disciplines, is essential to determine actions for lasting changes toward environmental wellbeing and planetary survival.

Ecopedagogies emphasise the necessity of praxis alongside theory. Richard Kahn (2010) highlighted how many of the "environmental education" models in place are generally uncritical of society. An anthropocentric worldview prevails, based on the sense that nature is a substance of dominion that human beings use to satisfy their needs. Thus, a credible ecopedagogy must necessarily be rooted in a critique of such a system. Ecopedagogy is not only experiential education composed of activities in contact with nature; it identifies, instead, the main tools available to challenge systems of domination. The main purpose of ecopedagogy, argues Kahn, is to educate children to engage with the difficulties they face in today's world with action, creativity and dialogue in order to move towards sustainable growth, based on respect for nature, the rights of all, justice and a culture of peace. He proposed ecopedagogies that focus on critical thinking for the promotion in the child of active and responsible citizenship and that are sustaining of a life and creativity 'firmly grounded in a material and social understanding of our interconnected organic existence, as a starting place for classroom practice and political strategies for reinventing the world' (Kahn, 2010:15).

While Kahn held that ecopedagogies are the only route to decolonised, sustainable futures for education, Greta Gaard (2009) argued for not just teaching *about* the natural environment but *in* and *through* it. This collection critically and creatively interrogates ecopedagogy from multiple material perspectives from classroom-based picturebooks, lessons, poetry and song to elemental ones of sand and sea, river, bridging the gap of scholarly work and educational praxis and hopefully instigating crucial dialogue in light of the planetary crisis. This collection captures some inspiring practices of eco 'literacy' (Freire's term for 'critical literacy about the world) that may be part of what Payne (2014) terms 'vagabonding slow ecopedagogy,' which include processes of becoming, deconstructing and destabilising

through being outdoors. Ecopedagogic methods across highly varied contexts have been considered. Rather than focusing upon subject specific knowledge, how the ecopedagogies used encourage *transferable* skill development and sensory, imaginative engagement with human and non-human others, settings and materials are explored, toward a holistic interdisciplinary ecopedagogy.

We invited contributions to this Special Issue that would offer diverse international perspectives concerning the potential for ecopedagogies to critically address climate change, global warming and environmental crisis through creativity and innovation. Traditional manuscripts as well as educational practice contributions were welcomed. It appears that the timeliness and urgency of the topic resulted in an overwhelming interest, and resulted in such a rich abundance that a double special issue was generated in response. The contributions are notable for their transdisciplinary collaborations across non-academic voices and disciplines towards holistic thinking, plus how they interrogate 'ecopedagogy's meanings from diverse perspectives, questioning normative, policy-driven approaches to childhood pedagogy and practices, presenting challenge to conventional readings of ecopedagogy through models of feminist new materialist critical action, practice, re-readings and creative pieces, addressing the absence of seldom heard 'voices' (including the non and more-than-human), majority world and marginalised communities, engaging with the mobilisation and implementation of ecopedagogies across practitioners, subject disciplines and settings.

Consequently, - and to avoid a totalising humanist perspective for more lively relationalities- this editorial takes an arts-based approach to explore where, how and with what speculative practices the collection engaged in world-making practices in pursuit of more live-able worlds on a damaged planet (Tsing et al 2017; Haraway 2016), rather than the more traditional summarising of papers and their stances. As authors took up the invitation in such diverse ways, focussing on their specificities (local, political, cultural) and on what got generated by thinking with relationally entangled materialities, we invite attention to how their insights might shift the ground rather than offer new orthodoxies, models or templates, to critically explore the imperative to take seriously human induced devastation of planet earth. Given 'estrangement from our natural environment is the cultural context wherein violence against the earth is accepted and normalized' (hooks, 2009) and Haraway's

‘natureculture’ cannot be separated, authors have deliberately dug themselves in deep with the land and sand on the beach, the currents of the river and the river’s rights (Strang 2023), the feel of plastic, the ‘taste’ of poetry, the presence of memory- as active participants and agential forces for their research and thinking. As ecoactants, “the doing is the change”, as Duhn & Morse point out in their article (2025).

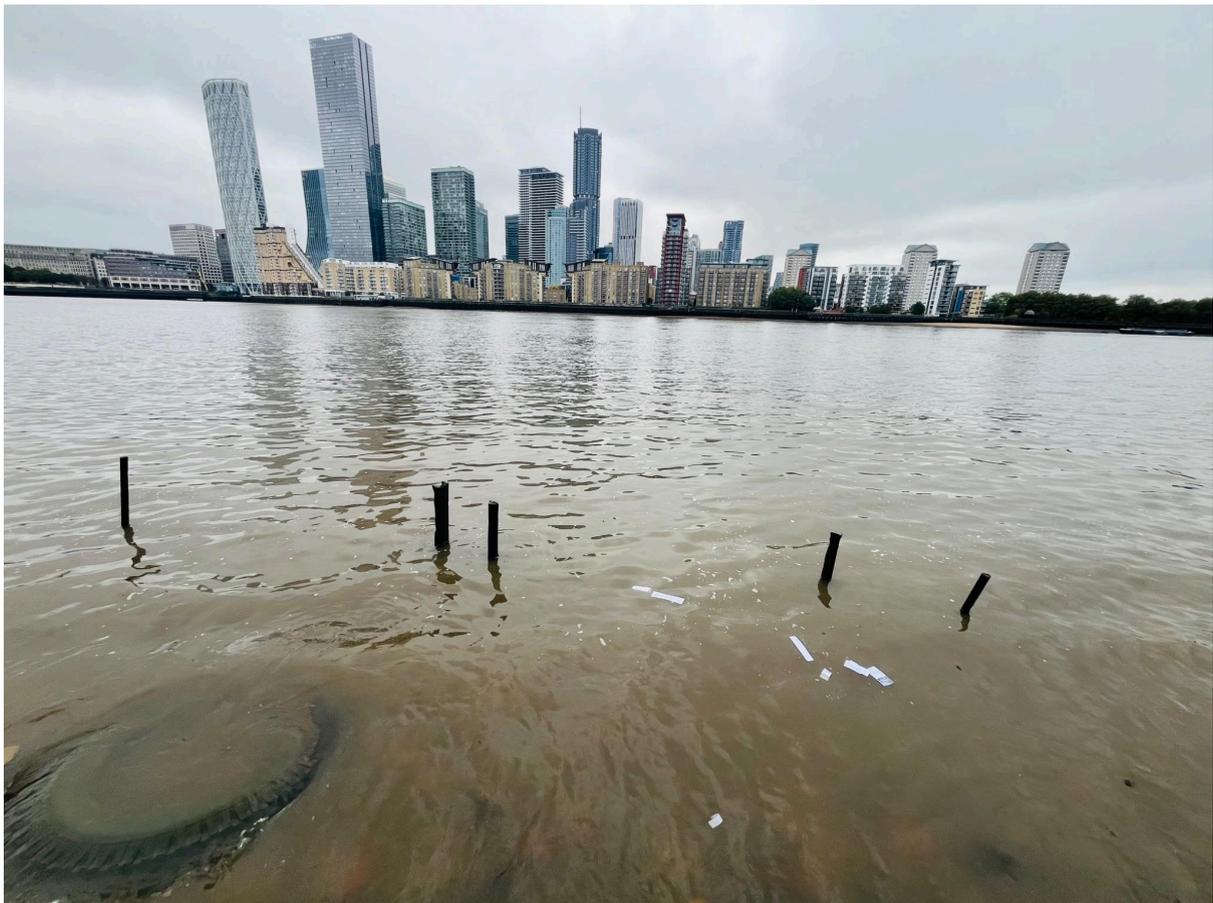


Fig. 2. “Ecotone: wayfaring at the margins<sup>2</sup>”: article fragments setting out on the Thames

**Where?** “Outside, inside and beyond”. Using the raw materials of the papers, these images enact the acknowledgement of outdoor space and spatial learning, inner, emotional space and going “beyond boundary fences to nature presented on its own terms” (Warden 2022). The collection offers a kind of ecomapping spatially, geographically, politically and culturally, working on multiple scales, modalities and doings. Its settings span from Early Years and Primary to Higher and Teacher Education. Volume 1 crosses the spaces of rivers, the beach,

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<sup>2</sup> From teacher, naturalist, and feminist Florence R. Krall’s book *Ecotone: Wayfaring at the Margins* (1994) which uses the metaphor of the biological ecotone as the boundary of transitional spaces.

university pavilion and school playground, feminist sci-fi, childing, absence, colonialism and memory, walking and doing outdoors, and Volume 2 the places and ecoactivism related to poetry, bread, biodiverse digital games and radioactivist cats, plastic bags, knitting and landgrabs. It suggests an “unlearning of anthropocentrism” (Malone et al. 2020:115) for a pedagogy of walking, noticing and attuning as pedagogical practice that, by paying attention to situated perspectives, offers opportunities to become ecoliterate about place.



Fig. 3. Childing poem in the shallows amongst sunken Thames bricks

**How?** by childing, worlding, sensing, singing, mushrooming, mapping, doing, always binding life into relation (Sheldrake, 2020). Images evoke the playful imbrication of material, cultural and natural resources observed as moving closer in times of crisis (Potter et al. 2024).

Authors question what eco/pedagogy, environment or learning are through reflective, speculative practices, such as Braidotti's (2008) 'nomad-as-figuration' embedded in histories and connected with others, Tsing's (2015) 'shared precarity' acknowledging our shared vulnerability and lack of control, and Haraway's (2016) 'compost-its' sympoesis allied to cross-species relation, generation and continuity.

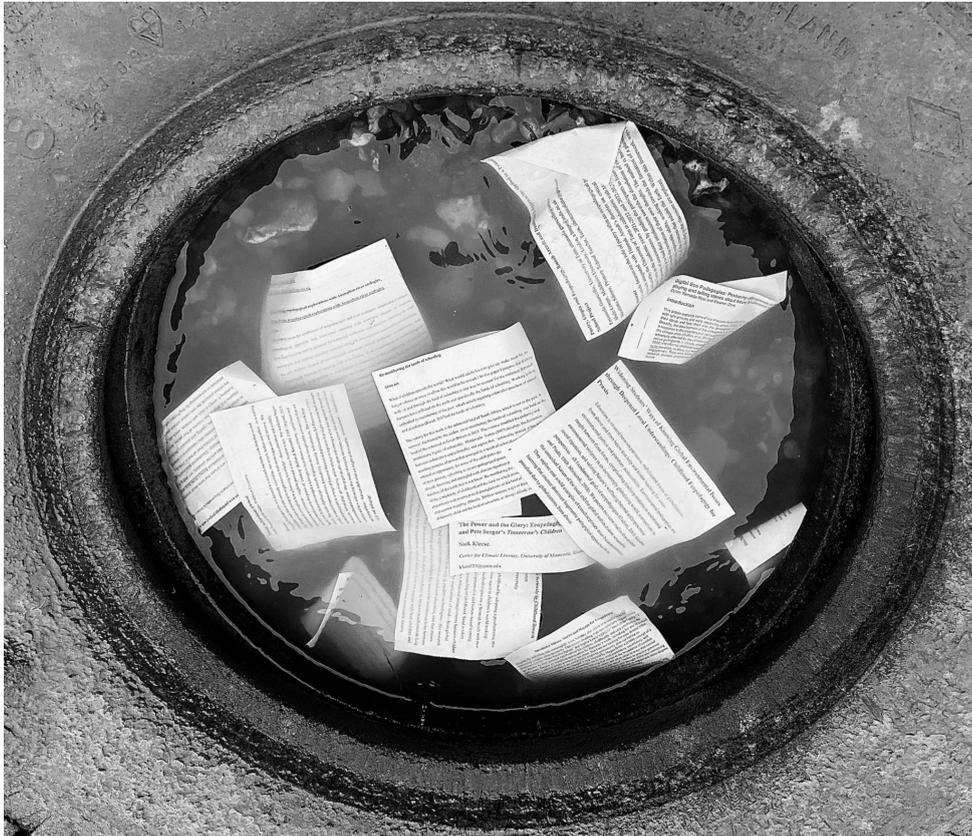


Fig. 4. Abstracts floating in an abandoned tyre, Thames riverside.



Fig. 5. Abstract afterlives: squeezed, pulped.



knowledges drawn from the source and practices of de-distancing nature, including in urban environments. Hopefully and optimistically, authors propose that attention to the matterings, thinking with and through materials -as vehicles for engagement- can animate response-able relationships with the living world. Their inspiring perspectives on ecopedagogies share the conviction that we have efficacy and can do things in the service of environmental justice, towards a collective stewardship of soil, water, air, and kin, plus learning to live with culturally, socially and biodiverse difference on a shared planet: a clean sheet of paper for children to make their plans.



Fig. 7. Conservation through creation: a blank sheet from recycled, reused, reformed draft papers, which by the serendipity of chance only retains the readable words 'the eds'.

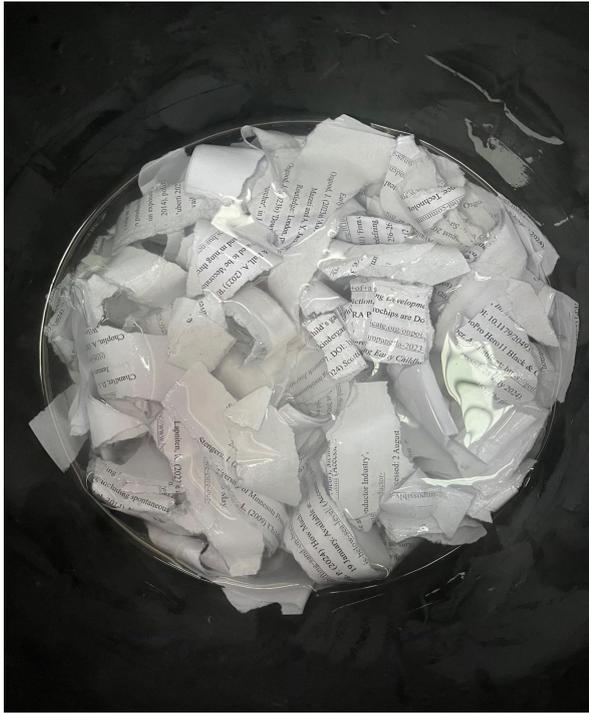


Fig. 8. Finally, a bucket of references

All photographs and artworks made by VdR 2024, for this editorial.

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