

# Place-Based Care Ethics: A Field Philosophy Pedagogy

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## **Abstract**

*In this paper we argue for the need for a thoughtful and intentional pedagogy in experiential environmental learning that educates for empathetic relationships with humans, nonhuman others, and natural systems, or field philosophy. After discussing the tensions in various ecofeminist perspectives, we highlight relevant ecofeminist ideas and thread them with the intentions and goals of field philosophy. Drawing on ecofeminism, environmental ethics, environmental education, and place-based learning, we develop a place-based care ethics pedagogical framework. We then provide an example of a field philosophy course designed around an environmental pedagogy of care to demonstrate the transformative potential of this approach to experiential environmental humanities learning.*

## **Résumé**

*Cet article considère qu'il est nécessaire d'avoir une pédagogie réfléchie et intentionnelle dans le contexte d'un apprentissage à l'environnement qui éduque pour favoriser les relations d'empathie avec l'humain, le non-humain, et les systèmes naturels. En s'inspirant de l'écoféminisme, de la philosophie de terrain en éthique environnementale, de l'éducation à l'environnement, et de l'enseignement basé sur le lieu, un cadre pédagogique est mis en place. Les tensions entre diverses perspectives écoféministes sont discutées et reliées avec les buts et les intentions de la philosophie de terrain. Un exemple tiré d'un cours de philosophie de terrain en pédagogie de l'environnement est fourni afin de souligner le potentiel transformateur lorsqu'on s'ouvre à la diversité dans ce domaine.*

**Keywords:** ecofeminism, experiential learning, ethic of care, field philosophy, curriculum

## Introduction

Experiential environmental philosophy, or field philosophy, is fieldwork in the environmental humanities. It responds to moves in environmental philosophy that suggest physical experience in the natural world enhances environmental learning by enabling connections to, and the development of, empathetic relationships with the natural world (Brady, Holland, & Rawles, 2004; Moore, 2004; Preston, 1999; UNT, 2014). Arguably, the type of community, personal, and ethical relationships discussed in the literature requires more than just contact with nonhuman nature. Curriculum and course planning need also

emerge from and be driven by an appropriate environmental ethic, one that bridges relationships, focuses on connections, and applies simultaneously to the human and nonhuman world. Field philosophy—and similar relationship-focused, experiential environmental learning—needs a thoughtful and intentional pedagogy.

Ecofeminism, the theoretical philosophy and activism that seeks to understand and address cultural dualisms many scholars believe lie at the root of a problematic relationship with the natural world, offers a viable pedagogical framework for this kind of learning. But the multiple and splintered interpretations of ecofeminism—spiritual, essentialist, materialist, and critical—create tensions that complicate the development of a cohesive teaching and learning philosophy. One element of ecofeminism, though, the ethic of care, especially as it is rooted in critical ecofeminism, offers great promise as a conceptual pedagogy for field philosophy.

The ethic of care originated in feminist social psychology (Gilligan, 1982) to describe feminine moral development rooted in networks of caring relationships, compared to the more linear, principle-driven male process. It has since evolved into a theoretical philosophical ethic, integrally tied to ecofeminism, in which context and relationships lie at the core of morality. With an intellectual lineage tied to the philosophy and practice of education (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002a, 2002b, 2006) and environmental philosophy (Kheel, 2008; Warren, 1990, 2000), the ethic of care reflects both the teaching and learning focus, and the environmental philosophical content of field philosophy: connections that ground its potential as a theoretical foundation for this kind of environmental field-based education. This association between ecofeminism and environmental education works two ways: ecofeminism serves environmental education by providing a philosophical learning framework, while environmental education provides ecofeminism an opportunity to link two of its primary scholarly contributions—environmental philosophy and education—in a way that highlights its relevance for a relatively new audience: environmental educators.

To illuminate the pedagogical potential of ecofeminism for experiential environmental humanities, we first root field philosophy in environmental ethics, environmental education, and place-based learning scholarship to frame its purpose. After tying this purpose to ecofeminism, we summarize different ecofeminist perspectives to explore tensions between them and illuminate how critical ecofeminism, especially in its use of the ethic of care, best serves the philosophical and content goals of field philosophy. Finally, we provide an example of a field philosophy course designed around an environmental pedagogy of care (Goralnik, Millenbah, Nelson, & Thorp, 2012), to discuss the challenges and benefits of applying a theoretical pedagogy in the field.

Field philosophy is a particular kind of environmental education—in the environmental humanities, with college-aged learners, interdisciplinary, with both personal and intellectual objectives—on which little research has been done. Establishing a viable theoretical pedagogy for this kind of environmental

education will provide a framework for future course development and research. While our approach focuses on college-aged audiences and humanities learning, an environmental pedagogy of care can be extended to different environmental education audiences and curricula that share our commitment to affective (personal development, values-based, relational) learning variables, field experience, and community development.

### Foundations in Environmental Philosophy

To understand and articulate appropriate relationships with the natural world, environmental philosophy responds to and incorporates concepts from ecology, environmental science, and policy. While this interdisciplinary engagement is meaningful, environmental philosophy has primarily remained an exercise of scholars thinking about, not necessarily interacting with, nonhuman nature. This is also how it has been taught. Recently, though, scholars (Brady et al., 2004; Moore, 2004) and programs (UNT, 2014) have taken their courses outdoors. This work responds to an idea of environmental ethics as rooted in dynamic, personal relationships with the land (Leopold, 1949); it draws on a conception of ethics both rational and emotional (Hume, 2000; Smith, 2010). As Leopold (1949) explains: “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (p. 214). If a goal of environmental philosophical learning is to cultivate a thoughtful ethic about the natural world (nonhuman others, natural systems, and human interdependence with them) and a nuanced understanding of the human/nature relationship—which many argue it is—and if an ethic about the natural world requires broad physical and affective knowledge about that world, as Leopold (1949) suggests, then educators ought to provide learning spaces in which these intellectual, physical, and emotional relationships can develop. Field philosophy responds to this need.

### Environmental Pedagogy

Environmental philosophical educators seem to understand their purpose in one of two ways: continued attention to theoretical questions and argumentation, or an interdisciplinary approach utilizing the tools of philosophy to inform environmental decision-making and dialogue. While both approaches are valuable—and likely complementary—field philosophy aims for the latter. Toward this end, objectives include personal awareness and environmental citizenship or community-membership, as well as intellectual and backcountry skill development. We hope students learn to care more about each other, the land, and the course ideas, and that this caring carries into their lifestyle choices beyond the course. These outcomes are both affective and cognitive; they are aimed at preparing students to care about and participate in environmental decision-making on the personal or community level.

Similar participatory goals permeate environmental education research and practice. Many studies focus on the knowledge gained, skills developed, and behaviours changed as a result of environmental learning. Scholars (Hsu, 2004; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Marcinkowski, 1998) emphasize responsible environmental behaviour as a primary goal of environmental education and point to a series of cognitive and affective shifts that enable these behaviours to develop. This is primarily a consequentialist approach; effective learning is determined by an end result: changed behaviour. Empirical work to facilitate and assess these outcomes has characterized much environmental education scholarship.

While this focus on observable action might not align with the more critical awareness- and analytically-focused goals of environmental philosophical learning, the affective elements of the responsible environmental behaviour approach do address the objectives of field philosophy. These include background (attitudes, sensitivity to environmental issues), ownership (personal investment in issues), and empowerment (intention to act and an internal locus of control) variables. Empowerment variables are generally understood to be the higher-level affective shifts necessary for responsible environmental behaviour. While behaviour change still drives these objectives in the longer term, these behaviours are not necessarily environmental in nature, though their impact may be. Rather, the behaviours field philosophy intends to affect relate to citizenship (Dewey, 1938; Orr, 1991) and deliberative virtues (Ferkany & Whyte, 2012), commitments that inform all behaviours, whether obviously environmental or not.

This association with experiential education scholarship (Dewey, 1938; Ferkany & Whyte, 2012) ties these higher-level affective shifts directly to experiential learning, while the focus on personal development and values links them to ethics learning (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1973). These connections reflect the multiple goals of field philosophy. But these are challenging outcomes to assess. Empirical research on the internal locus of control and environmental attitudes provides insight into the impact of educational interventions on affective environmental learning outcomes (Hwang, Kim, & Jeng, 2000; Smith-Sebasto 1995; Smith-Sebasto & Fortner, 1994). The scope of this research is limited, but it can be strengthened when viewed alongside the personally—and politically—engaged context of place-based environmental learning. It also creates an opening for the development of affective assessment tools for field philosophy and similar environmental education courses in the future.

Place-based approaches to experiential environmental learning (Gruenwald, 2003; Orr, 1992; Sobel, 2004) emphasize the nested environmental, political, and social dimensions of place. The idea is that explicit attention to the intersection of human and nonhuman elements of place re-connects students to place as a personal and specific entity central to the learning process, identity, and relationship formation, thus providing the emotional connection necessary to extend these feelings to other places. By moving learning into the community, built and natural, we shift awareness and drive change by making issues personal.

But mere experience in the community will not stimulate this motivation for change. Russell (1999) explains: “[N]ature experience is often seen to automatically contribute to environmental awareness, commitment, and action...[W]hat might constitute an educative nature experience is rarely interrogated” (p. 124). This concern is also reflected in environmental education (Marcinkowski, 1998) and behavioural psychology literature (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). While experiential education theory responds to this critique with several methodologies (Kolb, 1984), generalized models cannot replace thoughtful and critical pedagogy.

Russell and Bell (1996) suggest a critical ecofeminist pedagogy associated with Merchant’s (1990) socialist ecofeminism for environmental education. They do not explain why and how this thread of ecofeminism—versus the other threads—specifically serves their purpose, but they do identify the ethic of care, as it arises in ecofeminism, as a meaningful conceptual core. We agree that the ethic of care offers an effective theoretical pedagogy for place-based experiential environmental education, or field philosophy in our case, but teasing out why and how this particular ecofeminist thread serves the content and intent of the learning, then understanding what an environmental pedagogy of care might look like in practice, is important. Therefore, Russell and Bell (1996) initiate a discussion we further develop by exploring tensions between the threads of ecofeminism, and evaluating each thread alongside the intentions and goals of field philosophy.

### Ecofeminism Foundations

Ecofeminism is a theoretical philosophy and activism that addresses problematic culturally-held beliefs associating the feminine with emotion and nature, and the masculine with rationality and progress. These confluences and the associated value judgments—femininity, emotion, and nature are bad; masculinity, rationality, and technological progress are good—allow for a twin oppression of women and nature by patriarchal culture. The explanations for the association between women and nature vary from the biological to the material, and the proposed actions to remedy these dualisms differ accordingly. But most ecofeminists agree that environmental degradation and gender discrimination are related by a shared logic (Warren, 1990) that enables the oppression of one group by a more powerful group. Ecofeminism seeks to address these problematic hierarchical relationships at the core of all forms of discrimination. Disagreement within the field has persisted, though, about the root of the relationship between women and nature and, thus, how to describe and nurture it. A review of different ecofeminisms unveils some of these distinctions and demonstrates how particular elements of ecofeminism best support the learning and content goals of field philosophy.

## Spiritual and Essentialist Ecofeminism

Early ecofeminism sought to recapture what many believed was a lost relationship with nature rooted in the feminine empowerment of Paganism and both Native American and early Celtic beliefs (Orenstein, n.d.; Starhawk, 1999). By embracing Mother Earth or Gaia, spiritual ecofeminists argue, we become more attentive to the rhythms and needs of the natural world, which is embodied as female, nurturing, and life-bearing. This thread of ecofeminism was foundational in the field (Spretnak, 1982) and is still embraced in some circles, though it is often critiqued for essentializing women, femininity, or nature.

Biological, metaphysical, and cultural essentialisms rely on often-problematic generalizations. Some argue that generalizations, such as allegiance around the shared identity of *woman*, regardless of individuals' multiple identities, are necessary for collective progress (Sturgeon, 1997). But the criticisms against essentialism are myriad and pointed; many scholars fear the perception of ecofeminism as essentialist threatens its validity for diverse, critical audiences (Biehl, 1991; Gaard, 2011; Merchant, 1990).

Beyond these concerns, essentialist ecofeminisms are problematic as field philosophy pedagogy. If biology or child-bearing ability determine one's opportunity to develop a close relationship with nature, then the experience is exclusive. If access to a relationship with nature becomes exclusive, we invert rather than transcend hierarchies. Thus biological—or indigeneous, racial, class-based, or other—essentialisms cannot serve field philosophy, which focuses on equitable, personal, and ecological relationships within human and nonhuman communities.

As well, spiritual ecofeminism's valorization of particular religious traditions is challenging. While there is a strong literary tradition characterizing nature experiences as sacred (Emerson, 1849; Muir, 1901; Sanders, 2008), and while experiential environmental learning often encourages students to cultivate emotive and aesthetic connections to the natural world (Johnson & Frederickson, 2000; Knapp, 2005; Lawrence, 2008), associating these experiences with particular traditions is exclusive. Experience is no longer filtered through personal or community awareness of place, meaning, and beauty, and this kind of awareness is important for the field philosophy learning process (Goralnik et al., 2012).

### *Lived Lives and Materialist Perspectives*

As ecofeminism evolved, arguments about the material aspects of women's lives that foster oppressive conditions, which parallel exploitation of the natural world by patriarchal culture, gained prominence. This material existence forces some women to bear the burden of environmental degradation more severely than men, so often material ecofeminism parallels concerns of environmental justice. Merchant's (1990) socialist ecofeminism, which Russell and Bell (1996) adopt, aligns with materialist ecofeminism. For Merchant (1983, 1990) and

others (Mellor, 2000; Salleh, 1997), the transformation of nature by science and technology, filtered through patriarchal institutions, drives a problematic valuation of women and nature reliant solely on their roles in reproduction and production. To liberate both women and nature from these exploitative constraints, socialist ecofeminists argue for a re-envisioning of economic and social hierarchies by supporting decentralized communities that respect the constraints of ecology. This requires at the very least a critical approach to existing norms and a commitment to work toward a world informed by these values.

Materialist ecofeminist arguments contend that ameliorating unjust conditions for women requires attention to degraded natural systems; conversely, healing natural systems requires attention to socialized gender roles and the experiences of women. These concerns are place-specific. Therefore solutions are also localized. This approach resonates with place-based learning, though the grounded focus of materialist ecofeminism does not easily suggest locating local problems in a global context, which is an important element of transferring field learning to the home environment. This transference is in turn a central piece of the field philosophy experience. But the same contextual emphasis also characterizes critical ecofeminism, which more effectively addresses scalar extension in a way that serves field philosophy's goals.

### *Critical Ecofeminism, Care, and Relationships*

Critical ecofeminism focuses on the logic that enables hierarchical relationships; the religious, cultural, and intellectual worldviews that foster power-laden relationships; and the cultivation of less harmful, more caring relationships, guided by the enactment of an ethic of care. This is an unfinished project, as power dynamics are nested in social, cultural, and institutional structures, but the process of this focused attention is an important commitment that mirrors the goals of field philosophy. Attending to specific relationships in place, critical ecofeminists argue, can stimulate empathetic understanding of all relationships. Plumwood (1991) explains: "Care and responsibility for particular animals, trees, and rivers that are known well, loved, and appropriately connected to the self are an important basis for acquiring a wider, more generalized concern" (p. 7). This is exactly what field philosophy hopes to facilitate.

Rather than essentialize identities, critical ecofeminism recognizes the complex and contested character of both gender and nature. This critical engagement reflects the discerning approach to environmental learning Russell (1999) promotes. As well, "ecofeminism makes a central place for values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity" (Warren, 1990, p. 143). Critical ecofeminism's emphasis on emotional awareness and expression in ethical relationships, rooted in an ethic of care, aligns with work in: educational philosophy (Noddings, 2006), experiential education (Johnson & Frederickson, 2000), ethical learning and brain science (Greene, 2009; McCuen & Shah,

2007), evolutionary theory (Darwin, 1981), some traditional ethics (Hume, 2000; Smith, 2010), and environmental ethics (Leopold, 1949; Moore 2004). This interdisciplinary impact and affective emphasis grounds the pedagogical potential of the ethic of care for field philosophy.

### *A Pedagogy of Care*

While ecofeminist branches coincide in their desire to bridge feminism and environmentalism to address persistent cultural dualisms, their contradictory ontologies create tension. Critical ecofeminism shares with other ecofeminisms the goal of creating non-hierarchical care-based relationships with human and nonhuman others, but it also commits to the interrogation of *all* potential drivers of injustice and inequity. Ultimately the intent is to use this understanding in action for change. Critical ecofeminism's coupled intellectual and participatory approach echoes White Jr's (1967) recognition of a worldview crisis in need of address, which lies at the heart of environmental ethics discourse, and serves the critical intellectual intention of field philosophy.

The material focus of critical ecofeminism is place-, time-, and actor-specific, which asks students to understand how concepts—including ideas about nature, science, and human nature—reflect the values and wisdom of a particular place and time, and thus how these values may appear problematic or shift as culture, knowledge, or one's perspective changes. This historical awareness can encourage a complex understanding of, and responsibility for, present manifestations of these ideas. As well, the contextual grounding and broad telescoping of critical ecofeminism aligns with an educational ethic of care (Curtin, 1991; Noddings, 2002b; Slote, 1998), which argues that care begins at home, in our daily relationships, just as place-based learning starts in the local community or learning context (Sobel, 1999). We understand community and right action concretely, then use these experiences to stimulate empathetic understanding of more distant communities, human and natural, which can then inform our actions as well (Plumwood 1991). Therefore this place-based, relationship- and care-focused, critically-engaged lens—with links between academic and real world problems—theoretically allies critical ecofeminism and the ethic of care with the goals of field philosophy.

This conceptual grounding of the ethic of care as it emerges in critical ecofeminism and aligns with the goals and practice of experiential, environmental, and place-based education provides a unique contribution to environmental education scholarship. It offers a pedagogical framework that fosters: attentive relationships, critical engagement with concepts and place, personal and community awareness, and responsibility for mindful participation in the world (built and natural). This framework can inform curriculum development, assessment, and dialogue about the purpose and execution of environmental philosophical learning and interdisciplinary environmental education. In practice, an environmental pedagogy of care may take many forms. But a brief



look at one example can provide insight into how these theoretical ideas might manifest in the field.

### Care in the Field: Isle Royale Field Philosophy

We teach a field philosophy course in Isle Royale National Park—a 98% wilderness island in northwest Lake Superior—developed around our conception of an environmental pedagogy of care (Goralnik et al., 2012). On this course we read literary, philosophical, ecological, Native American, and historical ideas about wilderness and the natural world, both inclusive of and problematically exclusive of humans, while exploring the specific wilderness up close and at a distance. We move through the landscape on foot and in canoe, absorb natural history with park rangers, engage historical species and human stories, and participate in local ecological stories with field biologists. Through discussion about wilderness, conservation, and community at multiple scales—the immediate on-island context, real world examples, and as abstract concepts—we aim to stimulate empathetic leaps from the known to the unknown, from immediate to distant relationships.

An integral element of any manifestation of a care-based environmental pedagogy would likely include the course setting not just as background, but as an active member of the learning community. While we cannot presume to understand the voice of place *per se*, attempting to know places through multiple lenses, which can illuminate the power dynamics enacted by a limited perspective and develop empathy for other points of view, is a good start. This means attending not only to theoretical obligations to place, but also to stories of the land through time, including present experience: natural science, human impacts, historical presence, natural history, literature, myth, art, and relevant others. We want to observe the place in different weather, times-of-day, and scales; we want to experience it in different moods and conditions.

But relationships with place, nonhuman others, and natural systems pose particular problems, both in theory and in practice. Care ethics (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002a, 2002b, 2006) emphasizes a dynamic relationship between *carer* and *cared-for*, in which one responds and adapts to the needs of the other, guided by dialogue, attentiveness, self-awareness, and context. But this notion of dialogue enacted with nonhuman or distant *cared-fors* can be challenging to conceptualize. Listening to the stories of the land—and understanding them as a shared conversation rather than something known—helps to make sense of this idea.

Still, the challenge of creating relationships with distant others hints at a persistent critique of the ethic of care. Some argue that a developed ethic of care only operates when reciprocated (Card, 1990; Houston, 1990), and that only concrete human-human relationships reciprocate appropriately. Beings and sys-

tems in the natural world—as well as distant humans—cannot reciprocate in the same ways, and relationships with these entities can threaten *carers*, who may over-give in a relationship while receiving no reciprocation or indication that the care has been received (Hoagland, 1991; Houston, 1990; Merchant, 1992).

One can imagine how encouraging this kind of one-sided ethical care relationship might be problematic. Facilitating students in the development of balanced and sustainable relationships is critical. To prevent a *carer* from putting the needs of an other before one's own needs, Curtin (1991) contends care ethics must be located in a radical political agenda attentive to the development of contexts in which nonabusive care can thrive, a contention echoed by Russell and Bell (1996). This agenda allows for caring to extend beyond the self-circle of immediate relationships to form communities of care with those in shared contexts across time and space. Without this public extension of care, Curtin worries, care becomes overly privatized, limiting its scope and the responsibility to care about and for distant others in exploitive or oppressive relationships. Curtin makes a distinction between caring-for (an active expression) and caring-about (an indirect, affective expression) that enables these empathetic leaps. In his explanation, caring-for is localized and tangible, while caring-about is an abstract relationship with distant others, through which one might develop a more active caring expression.

Separating types of care in this way is perhaps a mis-step, though, for dual caring-for and caring-about relations are necessary within *all* care relationships. Joint affective and active expressions of care may, when applied together, prevent the martyr-like relationships that concern critics. For reciprocated care can be similarly problematic as un-reciprocated care; unhealthy actions may continue in response to eager reception, and unreflective caring action is not necessarily driven by an ethical caring attitude. Care in action, near or far, ought to reflect an awareness and protection of oneself as a partner in the relationship, a step that requires critical affective reflection. To approach care ethically, one must attend to her own abilities, boundaries, and needs, or be in relationship with herself.

This is a skill likely taught as hidden curriculum in some environmental education experiences, but it is not often an explicit environmental learning objective. In field philosophy it is. For when one ignores her own needs, the relationship does not honour the needs of both parties. Without the attention to the self, one cannot fully imagine and enact caring relationships with others, human or natural (Goralnik & Nelson, 2014). Therefore, care behaviour might not always look like commonly evoked caring relationships, e.g., a mother's or a teacher's, especially when enacted with distant communities or nonhuman nature. Ethically motivated care might even take the form of doing nothing, rather than doing something that endangers the *carer*, which is an interesting lesson in responsible environmental behaviour. Assuming the ethic of care manifests only in expected ways misses the focus on contextuality, and concerns about self-

sacrifice dismiss the role of the self-relationship. A nuanced understanding and application of care contributes to a pedagogy built around self-awareness, reflection, attentiveness, and critical engagement. This is an opportunity for ecofeminism to impact environmental education scholarship in new ways by drawing attention to the important affective elements of the learning process and providing a framework for meaningful relationships within the learning community that can extend to relationships with the learning environment, nonhuman others, and natural systems, both concrete and distant. It is also a new, specifically environmental way to consider reciprocity in care-based relationships.

But students need to learn what it means to be in relationship and community practically, before they can reasonably understand these concepts morally. Field philosophy offers them an opportunity to practice relationship-building and maintenance with oneself, learning community, and place as an environmental, social, and political entity. On our Isle Royale course we make room for interpersonal relationships to develop in the in-between spaces of living, cooking, learning, and exploring together. Conflict resolution and collaborative skills, personal reactions to texts, emotional responses to beauty and nonhuman others, reflection time, and animal and landscape observations are all meaningful pieces of the curriculum; they are ripe places for the exploration of moral obligation to each other and nonhuman nature. Including the natural world in this community by being attentive to the impacts we have on it and the impacts it reciprocally has on us, we learn better how to understand it as a relational other, as well as how to transfer our responsibilities from this environment to our home environments, thus making affective and moral leaps across boundaries of place, circumstance, and experience. Understanding reciprocity in caring relationships with unlike others is a skill that requires practice, and field philosophy provides the space to grow this knowledge and moral capacity.

### Theory to Praxis: A Challenge

How we camp on our Isle Royale course is as important as the content of our academic dialogue, for our actions as members of the Isle Royale community enact our ideas about community membership, personal and collective responsibility, and the role lifestyle plays in environmental degradation. In 2009 our students camped terribly, but their grades on the written assignments suggested they were learning and engaged. This disjuncture between the physical learning objectives—which express students’ integration of intellectual course content—and the cognitive objectives illuminated one challenge of applying theoretical pedagogy in the field.

As a group of eleven students and two instructors, we spent seven nights in a designated wilderness group campsite with very full days of hiking, literary and ethical discussion, and place exploration. The student group was thoughtful and eager for wilderness experience. They were science and social science majors,

mostly juniors and seniors. Many were accustomed to community living, so we thought the concept of community as an academic element of our course would come easily for this group compared to younger groups in previous years. The students seemed critically engaged; they voiced strong opinions about activities, readings, and land management strategies. For the most part they enjoyed each other and the course, evidenced in their course journals and our observations.

Despite reminders and reprimand from the instructors every morning, though, they stayed up late talking loudly and playing drums. Their activity impacted wildlife, other campers, and park staff, who, despite living a quarter-mile away up a forested hill, were wakened by the noise. The ground around our picnic table was littered with micro-trash and food bits. While often invoking concepts of community, love, and respect when describing their relationships with each other and their ideas about environmental action, the group was petty, exclusive, and sometimes harsh to one another, which they expressed in their daily journal reflections. Many students clung to a romanticized notion of wilderness and nature, frequently complaining about the impacted nature of the Isle Royale wilderness, which was somehow different than the wilderness of their imagination, even as they actively contributed to this impact with their sloppy camping. At the same time they discussed the problematic implications of untrammelled or pristine nature during course activities with ease. Their academic grades—based on reading responses, class activity journals, short classes each student taught, and final projects—were quite high.

But the students' actions showed they weren't learning the way we hoped. This is an important element of the experiential nature of the course. We live alongside the students; their success is not just determined by academic metrics, but by the way they interpret and apply the social, ethical, environmental, and ecological curriculum. The ability to invoke concepts, critically engage texts, make connections, and present material to others is one level of the environmental ethics and environmental education knowledge we hope they develop. The other piece, equally important, lies in their ability to understand moral obligations through the lens of relationships, act in ways that respond to their professed values, and transfer their learning about living in this place to living in all places. This requires the environmental educator to record field notes and observations (or something similar) as part of the grading strategy, so feedback about personal and community development can be rooted in specific example. Developing fair and transparent assessment techniques for affective learning objectives is one of the challenges of enacting a care-based pedagogy in the field, but also a benefit, because the instructor has to engage each student and each group in relationship, and this process is rewarding.

In this case, we decided the group size precluded the right kinds of relationships—between students, with instructors, with the park inhabitants, and with the land—from forming. So we changed the course. We took seven students and one instructor into the field, which enabled more time on trail and less time in the impacted areas of the park, where backcountry travel is limited

to eight-person parties. The group no longer split for day hikes to regroup for shared classes. Instead we spent our days as a single group, joined on trail by our guest educators. We cooked together on a single stove, ate collective meals, collaborated on chores, and learned to rely on each other for comfort, help, fun, and idea development. We required the students to spend more solo time observing the landscape. We encouraged more stillness.

And we have not had the same camping or group dynamics problems since. Of course, a smaller group has an inevitably smaller impact, and no group is perfect. But for the last several years students have instigated camp sweeps on their own. They grab a partner to trek to the waterspout to re-fill our camp jugs without waiting for camp to be dry. They organize food bags, keep the cooler clean, check each other's blisters and fill each other's water bottles; they listen when their peers share ideas, then respectfully disagree when the ideas conflict with their own. The community-focused, care-based pedagogy guided the development *and* modification of the course format. It provides a measure against which we can understand success.

The benefit of working with a care-based pedagogy is that the educator builds relational objectives into the course objectives, activities, and assessment strategy. In this way we hold ourselves and our students accountable for the personal and social growth we often hope for or expect with field learning. If our execution of the theory in the field precludes the achievement of course objectives, it is our job as instructors to adapt. In this way we set our students up for success and increase the chance they will effectively transfer course learning to their home environments. A theoretical environmental pedagogy of care provides educators with a starting place to think about building relational and ethical outcomes into their environmental education curriculum without necessarily re-vamping or abandoning already-developed content. While our audience and research have been focused on higher education humanities curriculum, the conceptual framework provided by an environmental pedagogy of care can serve any environmental education experience interested in affective learning objectives and community development.

## Conclusion

Field philosophy educates for empathetic relationships with humans, nonhuman others, and natural systems by drawing on its foundations in environmental ethics, experiential and environmental education, and place-based learning. The shared goals of these fields include critical engagement with people, place, and ideas; the development of a nuanced and scientifically-relevant conception of community, both human and biotic; and attention to the roles of humans within the ecological community. These goals are best served by a learning philosophy that shares these ecological, social, and relational emphases. The ethic of care, with its foundation in a critical ecofeminism, fits this need.

Critical ecofeminism addresses domination and exploitation in all forms, attends to the development of equitable and loving relationships, and promotes relationships with the natural world informed by ecological and social realities. Important commonalities resonate between field philosophy and ecofeminism—specifically an interdisciplinary interpretation of the ethic of care—most apparent in their shared focus on relationships, critical engagement, and context. A pedagogy of care that attends to our relationships near and far, our moral commitments to each other and our places, and the social and ecological inequities of our world honours our roles as philosophers, educators, and humans in relationship.

While this particular environmental pedagogy of care emerged from our work with field philosophy as an experiential environmental humanities program for undergraduate learners, it is appropriate for a wide range of environmental education experiences in its emphases on: environmental education affective learning variables, relationships with the learning community and the learning context, and responsibility for environmental decision-making participation. These personal and community learning objectives, as grounded in the theoretical pedagogy, exist within or beneath the content curriculum of many environmental education courses. They are enabled by thoughtful activity planning, between-activity transitions, togetherness, and reflection; they are fostered by dialogue about the learning experience, community development, responsibility, and place. In its focus on care, relationships, and attentiveness, an environmental pedagogy of care can, as Hallen (2000) writes, “nurture wonder,” which is central to the environmental education experience. This is offered as a starting place for future curriculum development and new research on affective learning variables in environmental education.

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