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THE LIMITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS' FASHIONING OF 'INDIVIDUALIZED' ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I reflect on a key challenge facing the field as we move into the next 50 years, that of our prioritising of the individual over the social or the common. Through examining a number of environmental education activities, a discussion of their effects in shaping individuals as environmental citizens is undertaken. While this is necessary work, it is limited in scope. I conclude by arguing for a new way forward for the field, one that is more clearly and explicitly focussed on the complex functioning of power and the mechanisms of power, including the State, and how we might educate our students to facilitate political and social change. Without this, we will not be able to achieve the rapid social and environmental change required if we are to mitigate against and adapt to the effects of climate change.

KEYWORDS

Behaviour change; futures; post-structuralism; Foucault

Introduction

Turn on the morning news or look at an online newspaper and you will be confronted by images of polar bears stranded on ice floes; collapsing ice shelves in Antarctica; permafrost on fire in Siberia; the Amazon forest ablaze; people dealing with floods from Bangladesh to Venice; and wildlife, houses and humans lost in Californian and Australian wildfires. These images, and their attendant stories, mean you cannot avoid thinking about climate change. These are not good news stories (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020; Kann, 2020). In contrast, however, generally positive stories about a solitary schoolgirl, Greta Thunberg (who, if reports are to be believed (Woodward, 2019; Alter, Haynes & Worland, 2019) has started a revolution of environmentally engaged young people around the planet), abound. Less flattering stories about the activities of another group of environmentally engaged people - Extinction Rebellion - are also everywhere (Spicer, 2019; Lewis, 2019). While environmental educators may be breathing a sigh of 'finally!' because what we have known and cared about for many decades, and has been researched and reflected in the pages of this Journal, is suddenly being talked about everywhere. The generally positive views of an individual (Greta Thunberg) versus the generally negative

views of a collective (Extinction Rebellion) raises some questions, however, for the field of environmental/sustainability education about the focus of our education efforts, and whether or not we should continue down the path we have been following for much of the previous 50 years.

In this paper, I seek to examine what the effects are of our focus in the field on changing the behaviour of individuals, rather than on transforming whole societies. I ponder why. Is this because it is easier to change individuals than it is to change whole communities and to re-orient whole societies? Is this because the social mechanisms we primarily choose to educate through – schools – are focussed on the individual? Is it because we unquestioningly accept the rampant individualism that supports neoliberalism in our economies and in our societies? The question of why we continue with our focus on changing individual behaviour is not a new question for field and has been asked most notably by environmental educators who take what can be termed a socio-critical stance (see, for example, Fien, 1993; Gough, A., 1997; Hart, 2003; Jickling, 1992; Payne, 2006; Robottom, 1987; Robottom & Hart, 1995; Stevenson, 2007). However, a scan of any of the environmental education journals reveals that research on social change – be this through community-oriented initiatives, political mechanisms or policy changes – is in the minority, with the bulk of research in the field focussed on changing individuals' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

This focus on changing the behaviour of individuals has, of course, morphed and developed over time (see, for example, Hines, Hungerford & Tomera, 1987; Goldberg, Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1997; Jensen, 2002; Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002; Heimlich & Ardoin, 2008; Barr, 2018), with a current focus on educating for environmental citizenship through ecologies of learning (Wals, 2019; Schild, 2016). However, being a good citizen is no longer simply about voting regularly and obeying the law, it is now also about being a better person, environmentally, and about learning to work collectively with one another. But how are we to *become* environmental citizens? Is this simply a matter of individual behaviour changes such as changing our light bulbs, using renewable sources of energy, flying less, driving electric vehicles or becoming vegan? Or is something else required? Is a whole new type of moral person – the environmental citizen – required? And what might this person look like? Will they look like Greta Thunberg –

powerful, influential individuals – or will they look like one of the nameless Extinction Rebellion movement members?

In this paper I focus on the ways in which particular sorts of contemporary environmental education practices seen in schools and in environmental education centres work to fashion particular sorts of environmental identities from learners. I discuss the nature, potential and limits of such activities, so that we might come to think about our practices - and their effects on us and our students - more critically. This leads me to argue, for example, that environmental educators *govern* learners' conduct by teaching them how to fashion for themselves new 'individualised' environmental personas. In order to develop this argument, I begin by examining the ways in which we think about our "self" and the ways in which we in Western societies are shaped and shape ourselves. I then discuss a number of teaching activities commonly used in environmental education, to show how these activities have effects at the level of governing conduct, indeed, at shaping individuals as whole environmental persons, capable of governing their own environmental conduct. I conclude by reflecting on the benefits and limits of such approaches for effecting environmental (and social) change and propose key implications and questions for the field as we work to find a way forward, towards enhancing and protecting both our natural and social environments.

Understanding the self

In the last 5 decades, there has been much thinking influenced by what is now referred to as 'post-humanism' (for example, Braidotti, 2013; Butler, 1990; Deleuze, 1995; Foucault, 2005; Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993; Soper, 2012) and others in this Special Issue have addressed how this has influenced theory and practice in environmental education. At the core of such thinking is a questioning of the nature of our human nature. For post-humanists, we may not be as self-contained, as individual, as unique, as we think we are. Indeed, as I will show, our environmental selves or identities are not pre-ordained, waiting to be discovered under a thick layer of socialisation, but instead can be shaped in particular ways. To understand how our environmental identity can be shaped, we need to begin by examining a key component of identity – our "self" - and the ways in which we understand our "self".

In the West, given or strong Christian roots, the self is commonly thought of as a being with an essential nature and fundamental characteristics. As Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans & Peter Redman (2000) note, our self has traditionally been understood as essential, true and transcendent of social and cultural contexts. Indeed, our self is understood ‘as an individual subject, ... as a given entity, the author of its own acts and centred in a unitary, reflexive and directive consciousness’ (Du Gay *et al.*, 2000: 2) – in a unique “me”. This “humanist” understanding of our selves – of our identity – has been remarkably resilient. So embedded is this sense of “our” self that we have no problem in thinking of ourselves as, for example, psychologised beings who need to work on “getting in touch” with our “true” selves or as essentially “environmental” beings who need simply to “reconnect” with the natural world that culture or society has supposedly alienated us from. This humanist view of the self is predominant in environmental education also. For example, Mitchell Thomashow, whose work has influenced many now everyday environmental education activities, states in *Ecological Identity*:

Despite our diverse experiences and backgrounds, we are *called* to environmentalism not only because we want to make the world a better place or because we are interested in the subject matter but because the ideas of environmentalism *speak to something deep inside us*. I reveal to the class that I am here for the same reasons they are. I want to explore why I consider myself an environmentalist, what this means in terms of my personal and professional choices, how I use my environmental values to construct a personal identity. This class is a phase of a life-long search to understand my place in the ecosystem, my role and purpose as a human being. (1995: xi) (My emphases)

Two assumptions underpinning Thomashow’s work are immediately evident. The first is that being an environmentalist is a life-long commitment – indeed a quasi-religious “calling”. Even the teacher is still on the path to enlightenment and we learn that acquiring the attributes of an environmentalist is a life-long quest. The second assumption underpinning Thomashow’s work is his humanist understanding of self, seen in his view that learners are connecting with “something” residing naturally “deep inside”. It is clear that here, our true selves are understood to be innate and, like truth, beyond the reach of our historical, geographical, cultural or political circumstances – that is, something innate and unique to us.

In the last century, however, three broad theoretical debates have challenged this understanding of our self as an individualised, unified, reflexive and purposeful subject, now sometimes

referred to under the umbrella term of “post-humanism” (Ferrando, 2013). These provide accounts of what it is to be human that challenge humanist understandings. They are what du Gay *et al.* (2000) termed the social theoretical ‘subject-of-language’ account; the psychoanalytic ‘individual’ account; and the historical ‘persons’ account of identity. The social theoretical ‘subject-of-language’ account of identity ‘shift(s) away from a notion of identity as the property of a purposeful human agent, to a notion of the subject as an effect of language’ (Redman 2000: 11). It is presumed in this account of identity that there is a “thin” human material on which this subject is built. The argument put forward here is that our identity can only be ‘constituted or “performatively” enacted in and through the subject positions made available in language and wider cultural codes’ (Redman, 2000: 10). The psychoanalytic ‘individual’ account of identity finds the subject-of-language account problematic as the relationship between the subject and language ‘leads to an omission of the dimension of feelings, the defences of the unconscious and the dynamics of intersubjectivity’ (Du Gay *et al.*, 2000: 3). Thus, the psychoanalytic account presumes that there is a “thick” human material – an individualised ‘entity which has evolved over time and has a structural depth’ (Evans, 2000: 122) through and on which identity is created or destroyed.

The historical ‘persons’ account of identity differs markedly from the previous two accounts not least because it presumes a very “weak”, almost insignificant human material as the basis of identity. It is this account that has influenced post-humanist thinking. The historical readings used to support this account of identity

involve a distinct movement away from (and problematization of) the concerns and assumptions of both the “subject-of-language” approach ... and the psychoanalytic accounts ... towards a “thin”, historically and contextually informed understanding of the limited and specific forms of personhood that individuals acquire in their passage through social institutions. (Du Gay *et al.*, 2000: 4)

An historical ‘persons’ account of our subjectivity helps to substantiate the claim I make here, that is, that environmental educators are engaged not in liberating learners from the constraints imposed by culture or language, nor in reconnecting them to their true inner self, but rather in shaping their conduct. This is achieved, I argue, by teaching learners’ how to fashion for themselves a limited but specific form of personhood called the environmental citizen.

These ideas - about who we are - are challenging, given how resilient the humanist sense of the self is. However, these ideas do not exist only in the realms of theory. A range of historical and anthropological studies (see, for example, Weber, 1958; Elias, 2000; Mauss, 1979; Foucault, 1985; Rose, 1989) allow us to question our taken-for-granted humanist understandings of the self by providing insights that suggest that our selves are *made up* in limited but specific ways because of particular cultural, political and temporal circumstances and practices. These studies allow us to see that our personas are not purely biological, social or psychological but are rather the *product* of quite particular organizations of our biological capacities and quite particular collections of cultural beliefs and practices. Rather than having “natural” selves, our selves may instead be inseparable from their historical circumstances and cultural and institutional interactions. These studies show instead that our selves are *ascribed* through very specific social and governmental techniques and practices. The studies referred to above can be understood as “genealogies of subjectification”. Though different, all share a common concern with describing ‘the social relations, techniques and forms of training and practice through which human beings have acquired definite capacities and attributes for social existence as particular sorts of persons’ (Du Gay *et al.*, 2000: 4).

The idea that even what we consider to be the very essence of our selves may be historically and culturally cultivated and circumstantial is a crucial element of the argument I am proposing here. In the field of environmental education, for example, educators work hard to empower learners to “reconnect” to their “true” or “purer” environmental selves - that is, to recover the primal liberty of what is assumed to be their pre-formed and morally pure selves. If, as I am arguing, such a pre-formed and morally pure self does not exist, then questions can be raised about what the work of environmental educators is actually doing.

Could it be instead, that environmental educators are engaged in the work of governing rather than reconnecting or liberating? For this to be the case, we would need to rethink how we understand the “nature” and functioning of power, and of the State. For environmental educators to be understood as engaging in governing conduct, we need to begin by seeing power as not simply held by the State, but rather as dispersed through, outside and alongside what we would traditionally think of as “the government”. In this conceptualization of power, power is not a

singular (mostly repressive) force exercised only by “the State” but rather a force that is made up of relations of power such as those that exist, for example, between parent and child or teacher and learner. Here, power is not understood as a simply repressive State power but is understood instead as a *technical practice* through which certain effects – indeed, as I will show next, certain forms of persons – come to be produced (Dean, 2017). As Foucault demonstrated, the neoliberal forms of rule evident today have a unique rationality – or govern-mentality – of rule; a rationality that sees the exercise of power as productive. Not only is this power productive of new things – capacities, desires, personas – it also functions with and through the material and the physical, including our bodies and our sense of self. Indeed, Foucault’s extensive historical investigations led him to argue that ‘nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power’ (1980: 57-8). We can see this exercise of power in the fashioning of populations as quite particular types of persons, with concerns, interests and capacities that match governmental goals for the effective and efficient functioning of a country, without the need for rule through repression. This liberal exercise of power is possible, Foucault argues, because

it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but ... it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (1980: 118)

For these reasons, then, are we able to be governed without feeling that we are being repressed. Indeed, it is precisely through the successful linking of the goals of government to the desires and aspirations of populations, what Foucault refers to as the ‘irrigation by effects of power [of] the whole social body down to its smallest particles’ (1980: 156), that modern liberal regimes are able to govern without resorting constantly to repressive means. Foucault does not deny that initially the technical and strategic exercise of power within modern liberal modes of rule was ‘heavy, ponderous, meticulous and constant’ (1980: 58), hence the corrective regimens implemented through schools, hospitals, prisons, and families. Despite this, he argues, these regimented systems of management and habituation were productive in new and unexpected ways. For example, the corrective regimens of the school made children, and their bodies, not only the objects of State (and earlier Church) power but also, more importantly, the bearers of totally new personas who were increasingly able to manage and govern their own conduct without resort to repressive means or religious injunctions of the sort that were used in the past

(Hunter, 1994). Thus, even though early attempts to “conduct conduct” (Foucault, 1991) were often “heavy”, this exercise of power was nonetheless productive – producing from school children adults with particular personas – most notably, that of the self-regulating citizen. These power relations are thus productive of our subjectivity because they are able to generate new forms of being, shape conduct, and instil new interests and new ways of relating to one’s self (Dean, 2013). These understandings of, and insights into, the exercise of power in modern liberal states underpins the key idea in this paper: that government in modern liberal modes of rule is an artful activity of “conducting conduct” (Foucault, 1991) in which environmental educators are actively engaged.

How are environmental citizens fashioned?

How then are environmental educators engaged/implicated in this exercise of power? As I show below, this occurs through instilling new orders of living (Weber 1958) which work to govern environmental conduct and shape environmental identity. In brief, environmental education emerged in the 1960s in the West, as part of the social shifts that were occurring at the time. The field endeavours to empower individuals to become informed, responsible and active environmental citizens (Crowe, 2013) through building awareness of environmental issues and problems, developing an attitude of respect and care for the natural environment, and building capacities to care for and take action to enhance and protect the environment (Kopnina, 2012). What is important to note is that these goals are not simply about improving knowledge or skills but also about changing or “transforming” individuals so that they become active citizens who care for the environment. This is not achieved through instrumental means or the enforcement of rules but instead through a quasi-spiritual self-work process of “reconnecting with one’s true inner being”. This is possible because, as has been noted above, many environmental educators have a resolutely humanist understanding of the self. Given this, environmental educators tend to favour experiential¹ approaches to learning and teaching.

A range of experiential learning activities are used by environmental educators, in schools and the broader community, to help individuals to transform themselves into environmental citizens.

¹ Experiential education is sometimes referred to as “learning through action”. Learners are engaged in direct experiences and in reflecting on these experiences. See, for example, Kolb and Fry (1975).

I describe some of these activities below, illustrating why I am arguing that such activities are not transforming beings through rediscovering, reconnecting with, or liberating their “true inner selves”; or joining together a self that has been cruelly rent asunder by an inauthentic culture. Rather, I argue that such activities can be understood as techniques or technologies of government that work to constitute new types of personas, in this instance, beings who are so “environmental” that they have very specific concerns, interests and capacities that allow them to become environmental citizens. I illustrate how such activities teach learners to be environmental by, for example, constantly reflecting on their obligations to the environment and by overcoming and mastering certain desires, such as the desire to consume beyond their needs or the planet’s capacity. I argue that learners are taught how to be environmental by becoming skilled at constantly checking and modifying their own conduct against the conduct of other, “purer”, environmentalists. Through the analysis to follow, I show how such constant alertness to, and care for, their conduct enables learners to become environmental citizens.

I briefly describe each activity and then illustrate *how* such an activity fashions from individuals persons who are not only capable of governing their own environmental conduct but who also have whole new – in this case, environmental – identities - and can thus be understood as governmental techniques for conducting the environmental conduct of individuals. The following activities are described: connection with nature activities; environmental values activities; rethinking consumption activities; and reflecting on the impacts of everyday life activities.

Nature connections

A number of environmental education programs use immersion in natural places to help learners regain a sense of connection to nature. Magic Spots, as they are called in *Earth Education*, are ‘very special place[s] to be alone and bask in the richness of nature’ (van Matre and Johnson 1987: 77). In a sense of place meditation (*Ecological Identity*) learners go on a bush walk to ‘allow them to focus on their senses in relation to the landscape. Feeling the air as it moves through our bodies, we contemplate the prevailing weather system. Listening to the sounds of the insects and birds, we become acquainted with the animal species’ (Thomashow 1995: 15). The stated intent here is for learners ‘to make the connection between problems of the entire planet

and this one special place they have begun to value. The more they get to know this place, the more they will respect and remember one small piece of the natural systems of our preeminent home: Earth' (van Matre and Johnson 1987: 79). In *Ecological Identity*, 'the point is simply to cultivate an awareness of ourselves in this wild place, to slow down for a while and cherish the surroundings. Even those who are uncomfortable with the idea of meditation come to appreciate the experience' (Thomashow 1995: 15). The influence of such ideas on contemporary practice can also be seen in "place-based" approaches to environmental education, and in outdoor environmental education activities.

What is being learnt through such place-based meditations is that we are all intimately connected to the environment – so intimately, that when we breathe in and feel the air moving through our bodies, it is claimed we can understand something about weather systems. An assumption underpinning these activities is that learners can let go of a false consciousness, that is, the overly abstract and rational way of thinking believed to be imposed by Western culture, and recover an innate and timeless emotional connection to the environment. Viewing this activity through a governmentality lens allows us to understand what Foucault means when he says that power is corporeal. Even very physical, seemingly natural acts such as breathing provide an opportunity for us to fashion or cultivate ourselves in particular ways, in this instance as persons who are intimately and physically connected to the environment. It is evident from this example then that even how we physically interact with the environment can be governed through environmental education.

Meditation itself, be it in the form of silence or focussed reflection in a journal or diary, both of which are commonly used in environmental education programs (Ferreira, Keliher and Blomfield 2013), is a very old religious technique for reflecting on how one is made up and how one would rather be made up, that is, how one wishes to fashion oneself. As Max Weber explained, diaries were used by Protestants to help to ensure that their lives were 'subjected to a consistent method for conduct as a whole' (1958: 117). Such meditative and reflective activities help to reinforce the lesson that an environmental citizen is a person who reflects on their place in the world and actively seeks opportunities to be "nourished" and to reconnect with the natural environment. The message is clear: in order to become a "whole" environmental person, this is the type of

work one must undertake. Principally, this involves learning how to become dissatisfied with being “back in our heads”.

Environmental values

Values continua activities are also very common in environmental education. Here, learners physically map out a range of environmental positions (often in relation to contentious environmental issues) along a continuum, for example, from eco-centric to anthropocentric, preservation to conservation, or radical to normative. The continuum is mapped out over a physical space, for example, along a wall or on the floor. Learners reflect on where they are positioned on the continuum, for example, in relation to hunting elephants, and then physically place themselves at a point that reflects their beliefs and/or values.

In practising this activity, learners employ a corporeal technique to see and feel where they “stand” through literally placing their bodies on a line. This physical assessment works to fashion an environmental self by showing where you stand in relation to the norm. If most learners are on the eco-centric or radical side of the spectrum and you are on the anthropocentric or normative side of the spectrum, you will start to reflect on what you must do to bring yourself closer to the norm of eco-centrism. Part of what governs here is a threshold of embarrassment and guilt (Elias 1978, 2000).

Consumption practices

A number of environmental education activities are focussed on how we consume natural resources. We see this most clearly in educational activities focussed on water and energy use, and on waste management such as school and household water, energy and waste audits. It is no surprise that such activities are popular, given that much of the debate about “being environmental” centres on changing lifestyles, in particular, our “consumer culture” and on encouraging a shift towards ethical consumption and simple living. As an example, there is an environmental education activity that asks learners to create an inventory of all their possessions. While spending several hours cataloguing everything they own, learners are also asked to reflect on where their possessions have come from and how they have been produced and, importantly, why they possess these items. According to Thomashow,

[t]hrough the process of organizing this list, [learners] learn a great deal about themselves, for they are compelled to focus exclusively on how their identity is reflected in their possessions. Of course, this is more than a narcissistic activity, or a review of one's financial worth. It is a long look at the implications of property ownership. Our possessions have symbolic meaning and lend insight to many aspects of personal identity. (1995: 70)

In addition to reflecting on one's own consumption habits and practices, learners are also asked to think of themselves in relation to the broader community. As Thomashow states, '[t]he point of this property list activity is not to coordinate a collective orgy of environmental guilt. Rather, it is to reflect deeply on the inner meaning of property as a tool for connecting ecological identity with perceptions of the commons²' (1995: 73). By understanding one's own consumption, along with an understanding of where one's possessions come from, how they are manufactured and distributed, and so on, one is able to see one's collection of possessions – and the sense of self one derives from and through them – in relation to the environmental commons and one's impact on the environmental commons.

The fashioning of the self that takes place through such activities is clear. Individuals undertake the process of cataloguing their possessions – or their energy or water consumption - not with a positive frame of mind but with a negative one. The aim of the activity is not to see one's possessions as evidence of divine blessing and one's success in life, as Weber tells us the Protestants did in the 16th & 17th centuries, but rather as an indication of how far down the wrong path one has travelled. While Thomashow says the activity is not about “environmental guilt”, this will be difficult if not impossible for most apprentice-environmentalists to avoid. Likewise, audits of one's energy or water consumption also work to provide ways for learners to reflect on how environmental - or not - they are.

Another effect of such activities is that they show that in order to “be good”, one must be an integrated person – that is, all aspects of one's life must reflect one's commitment to the principles of environmentalism. Such activities remind learners that everything in one's life provides an indication of who one is – of how environmental one “truly” is – even the bowl from

² The commons here refers to natural resources available to all in society, that is, resources held “in common” or together (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 1990).

which one eats or the seat on which one sits. Here, one's entire life becomes open to scrutiny – no doubt to be found wanting and in need of work.

Everyday impacts

In these sorts of environmental education activities, learners are encouraged to find learning in everyday or ordinary experiences such as visiting the supermarket, sorting and recycling waste, or even washing the dishes:

[I]f you consider the deeper implications of dishwashing, whether it's attending more consciously to the actual dishwashing process, or by thinking about the wider ramifications of your actions – energy use, the watershed, food wastes, and so forth – then dishwashing becomes a reflective activity. If I ask a class to keep a journal about dishwashing as it relates to ecological identity and to read those journals at the next class session, then dishwashing becomes a focussed learning activity. (Thomashow 1995: 184)

These activities, similar to the energy or water audits mentioned above, work to fashion new personas by turning everything – every minute, mundane detail of one's life – into an opportunity for finetuning one's persona. This is a fine example of how power, just as Foucault (1980) alerted us, exercises itself in a capillary fashion through multiple activities or relays. Power is brought to bear on the self by the self - through reflection - and by others - through their responses in class sessions. Conduct is here shaped and governed through constant reflection on how to *be* a better environmentalist.

Fashioning a self

What the environmental education activities discussed above make visible, then, is the ways in which we as environmental educators work to shape and govern learners conduct in order to make them engaged and active environmental citizens. The key lesson of such environmental education is that to have a special kind of relationship with the environment, you need to have a special kind of relationship with your self also. I argue here that these activities do not transform individuals by reconnecting them with their true, pre-formed environmental selves but instead work to actually fashion new – in this case environmental – selves. It is clear that the activities discussed above work to embed a new range of habits for living as an environmentalist and behaving as a good environmental citizen.

These sorts of activities can thus be understood as training regimes through which new environmental selves come to be fashioned. Each of the activities seeks to govern an aspect of environmental conduct, be this ways of thinking, ways of doing, or ways of being and acting. They seek to “empower” learners with a sense that they can, and should want to, live their lives as environmental citizens. It is the combination of these sorts of activities, used in an ongoing, lifelong manner, that leads not to the recovery of an instinct – a reconnection with one’s true self or with the planet – but to the fashioning of a new type of self: the informed and active environmental citizen. These are orders of living – they govern environmental conduct by fashioning persons who are able to govern their own environmental conduct. In empowering learners to live in new ways, and in teaching new orders of living, these sorts of activities “govern” through fashioning certain types of personas who are able to live – freely and willingly – according to certain types of norms.

We can thus understand these activities as governmental technologies of citizenship, as techniques for fashioning new types of environmentally self-regulating, self-governing individuals who are environmental citizens. This is not to say that empowerment or environmental education is “bad” or something that we should avoid doing. Perhaps all that is achievable, within the limits of this world, is a fashioning of individuals with new sets of habits, habits that are ‘a daily practical mechanism of conduct’ (Hirst and Woolley 1982: 138). This is not a simple achievement. The complexity of the mutual engagement between power, knowledge and the self is what enables power to reach ‘into the very grain of individuals, [touch] their bodies and [insert itself] into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’ (Foucault 1980: 39). We need to understand just how remarkable the achievement of small changes in environmental conduct is. If we do, we may be able to be more successful at instilling new sets of habits and techniques of environmental self-governance that allow individuals to *be* “good” environmental citizens.

Thinking ways forward

What is evident in the examples I have used above, is that these activities all focus on shaping individuals as informed, responsible and active environmental citizens. This is absolutely

necessary work for the field to be engaging in. My concern, however, is that after 50 years of this sort of environmental education, we still do not have populations who are active environmental citizens. If we did, we might not be facing the dire environmental consequences we are. The reasons why this is the case will be complex, of course, and is not simply the fault of environmental educators as we do not undertake our work in a vacuum and feel the effects of our social and political circumstances.

Nonetheless, it may also be that we have been focussed too heavily on one type of work – individual behaviour change – and on one type of setting – the school and its attendant organisations like environmental education centres. Perhaps we have not been cognisant enough of our social and political contexts. One has to really search through the environmental education literature, and environmental education programs and practices, to find the sorts of activities that shape our students as citizens who are not only responsible for regulating their own environmental conduct, but who actively engaged in shaping their community or city, socially and politically. Unfortunately, even when we do see activities focussed on collective approaches to social and political change, these tend to be activities that do not politically confront or challenge, such as making posters for their peers on environmental issues or writing letters to politicians. These are not activities that “rock the boat”.

What may be needed from us is a new type of bravery, such as that exhibited by Greta Thunberg who directly challenges and calls out the poor environmental policies of world leaders, or the bravery of Extinction Rebellion activists to confront, challenge and cause discomfort. Perhaps we have been too risk-averse in environmental education, taking the safe, known road of educating children in schools, and focussing on activities that will not confront or cause upset. Right now, when the effects of climate change are every day more evident, is the time for us to stand up, and to challenge. With governments increasingly beholden to corporations, with a diminishing of citizens’ rights, and with the health of the economy trumping all other forms of health – human, ecological – we have to begin to challenge our political structures and processes. This is happening socially, with increasing dissatisfaction with politicians and political systems. How might we too engage in a radical – political – environmental education that enables our students to not only have “good” environmental habits, but to be politically engaged and active

environmental citizens. These are, I believe, key questions for the field to grapple with as we move into our next 50 years.

The question thus remains for environmental educators: what is the type of citizen we want to fashion? The Greta Thunberg type, which continues to promote the power of the individual over the community, or the Extinction Rebellion type, less comfortable for society, but possibly more powerful in facilitating widespread social, political and environmental change? And how do we do this, within and through institutions that seek to govern our conduct? Finding a way to answer these questions may also be our only hope at addressing the environmental and social challenges we are likely to face in the near future as a result of climate change.

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