

Ecologizing *Bildung*: Educating for the eco-social-cultural challenges of the twenty-first century

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Abstract

This paper has two main purposes. The first, more informational, is to introduce, re-introduce, the German-Nordic concept of Bildung to Canadian environmental education. This includes a brief attempt to define, a short overview of its history which stretches back to the Eighteenth century at least, and then an exploration of why and whether Bildung might still have some relevance and value in a post-modern, post-humanist, world filled with social crises and myriad human injustices that need attending to. The second purpose, is more theoretically expansive and experimental, wherein we explore ways this modern humanist concept of Bildung might not only be updated as an educational response to today's human problems but might even be ecologized. Our reading shows that some of the former has already been considered but that there has been almost no work done on the latter. Finally, as a way to consider practice, we very briefly turn to Klafki's five Bildung inspired questions for didactical analysis in order to illuminate implications for environmental education. This allows possibilities to emerge in spite of the need for further development.

Résumé

L'article a deux visées principales. La première est de présenter (pour une première ou une nouvelle fois) le concept germano-scandinave de Bildung au milieu canadien de l'éducation à l'environnement. On y définit brièvement le concept tout en donnant un aperçu de son histoire (qui remonte au 18e siècle); on y explore également les raisons expliquant la pertinence et la valeur, toujours d'actualité, de la notion de Bildung dans un monde post-moderne et post-humaniste frappé de crises sociales et d'une myriade d'injustices auxquelles il faut porter attention. La seconde visée est à la fois une tentative de repousser les limites de la théorie et une application expérimentale de cette même théorie; le but est de trouver comment adapter le concept humaniste moderne de Bildung à la manière dont l'enseignement répond aux problèmes humains, afin de l'écologiser encore davantage. En lisant sur le sujet, on voit que des solutions ont été envisagées pour adapter le concept en éducation, mais qu'on a peu, voire pas du tout, tenté de l'écologiser. Enfin, une analyse didactique, à l'aide des cinq questions de Klafki (qui s'inspirent de la notion de Bildung), permettra de mettre en lumière les éventuelles ramifications du concept dans l'éducation à l'environnement, ainsi que sa mise en pratique globale. Cela permettra de laisser émerger les possibles et soulignera la nécessité de pousser la démarche plus loin.

Key-words: Bildung, social justice, ecological justice, Gadamer, Klafki

Mots-clés : Bildung, justice sociale, justice écologique, Gadamer, Klafki

Part 1: Defining and historicizing *Bildung*

Defining *Bildung* is an ambiguous (Bohlin, 2009) and elusive (Tahirsylaj & Werler, 2021) task. Part of the challenge is that the definition has changed over time and that *Bildung* is, oddly, both noun and verb, product and process. And because *Bildung* is in part shaped by the problem/s, cultural justice issue/s, to which it is responding, by the context within which it is working, and by the envisioned improved aimed for state of things that those same problems/injustices are impeding.

For example, the envisioned, enacted, even pedagogical *Bildung* offered by Von Humboldt, the first serious educational thinker to propose it in the late eighteenth century, focused on the emancipation of humans (read: males) from the imaginatively limited dominion of the church. Thus, Von Humboldt's response to this challenge was to seek a form of individual freedom that wasn't subsumed by the homogeneity of church dogma. And with this end in mind, this goal towards which education might aim, Von Humboldt then backfilled the how and what of education to reach it. Thus, an education filled with discussion, critical study, science, and the advancement of ideas and a moral frame of one's right to one's own opinions particularly if well considered and supported. And, a sense that one was both creating oneself but also offering a panoply of ways of being human so others might also consider escaping the ecclesiastical yolk. But also, an education where the content becomes a curriculum of big ideas, of reasoned scientific thinking, of seeking important role models (including Christ), and of working upon oneself in light of all this. As such, for Humboldt, *Bildung* is a process of becoming, of lifelong learning, of creating oneself in light of what is "scientifically" known. It is important here to note that scientific knowledge was not understood as objective, unassailable, 'solid' knowledge that could be fully achieved (SOU 1992:94).

Whereas by the time Gadamer was exploring, and defining, *Bildung*, in the mid-twentieth century, the challenge was no longer the restrictive presence of the church but the corruption of capital, the alienation of many people from themselves and others, and the injustices of a patriarchal and colonial world. Thus, the why of Gadamer's *Bildung* though still carrying an emancipatory, self-creative, culturally transformative vision has flexed to that contemporary context. And as such, the how and what that makes up Gadamer's *Bildung* involve encountering diverse horizons of being, expanding one's critical range and reckonings with varying others, and undoing some of the shacklings of the meta-narrative.

The point, although hard to define categorically given changing context and content, is that *Bildung* is about the creation of self, community, even culture in response to a set of challenges that appear, at any given historical time, to be restricting the mutually beneficial flourishing of the group and its members under consideration at said time. It is, at least in part, as Klafki writes, about the learner's ability to be aware of the historical dimension of today's societal problems, to recognize the problems for what they are, and to assess them into the future as far it could be predictable, but also about one's co-responsibility for them and for overcoming them. (Kvamme, 2021) As such, *Bildung* is both about the why, the aims, of education and the how and what of education in relation to that why. And it involves the creation of both the aimed for individuals and communities but also the deeper more interconnected relationship with the wider world that allows said vision to become and to prosper. It is about process, product, and conditions.

The literature relating to *Bildung* in environmental education is fairly sparse and hasn't really picked up on this justice oriented contextual community responsive thread we are seeking to develop here. Sauvé (2005) positions *Bildung* in the "current" which focuses on eco-education and on personal development in light of the fact that we live not only as personal actors in social environments but also in a larger natural ecology which, often quite subtly, shapes us as well. Drawing on Pineau's (2000) concept of eco-formation Sauvé sees *Bildung* as enacted by environmental educators, as necessarily, and perhaps more thoughtfully, including the more-than-human as a part of the project self-development in good ways. The work below extends this discussion while at the same bursting the banks of the proposed current through the addition of currents related to eco-justice and community change. After Sauvé things go quite silent on the *Bildung* front until it is briefly mentioned in the context of bringing together Wild Pedagogies and *friluftsliv* by Jorgensen-Vitterso *et al* in 2022.

And with that frame we return to the larger *Bildung* literature for further nuancing and, sadly, complexifying of the definition:

Bildung as an educational practice, tradition and set of aims focuses on the creation of and relationship between the individual and society and is in that sense fundamentally democratic in its orientation. By the mid-twentieth century German educational theorist Klafki was "operationalizing" the more theoretical, less pragmatic, definitions into an educational space that fostered self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity (Tahirsylaj & Werler, 2021; Klafki, 1995; Klafki, 2010). Historically, as interest grew in the democratization of society, the earlier enlightenment *Bildung*, focused on the "formation or cultivation, in education or otherwise, of human moral virtues and other capacities" (Bohlin, 2009), with a particular interest on "spiritual formation" (Ryen, 2020, 215) began to change. This early form of *Bildung* had a marked focus on the emancipation of the individual from centralized control. It included

having individuals become the creators and authorities of/on themselves and tended to run into trouble when it veered into self-centeredness. The move by *Bildung* theorists in search of a greater democratization of society expanded its purview beyond just the individual and worked to protect against the potential for self-centeredness (Blanketz, 1985; Klafki, 2010). Varkoy describes this as the distinction between adaptation, where one just accepts the boundaries of one's situation/context/culture vs acculturation where one recognizes the presence of a cultural framing, its accompanying propaganda, and has the wherewithal to critique and even to change it, or at least change oneself in light of it. (Varkoy, 2010) Thus giving one the opportunity to be something different in the world. In some of the reading one gets the sense that 'education' tends to be seen by the advocates of *Bildung* as being so stuck on the how and what of the process and that this often leads to learners who are adapters rather than including the why, to what ends, as the driver of the how and what and thereby offering the possibility of individual freedom and cultural critique, Varkoy's acculturation.

Further to this, proponents of *Bildung* are critical of traditional education for sliding into a why that focuses on preparing and qualifying people for the labor market or a narrow form of content knowledge. (Bohlin, 2009) This in turn leads to an over-specialization, instrumentalization, and fragmentation of knowing (Nordenbo, 2002), and likely the learner themselves, and contributes to alienation from self, knowing, and the possibility for freedom (Gur-ze'ev, 2002). *Bildung* prioritizes a lifelong process where individuals are prepared to find, ethically and socially, and even create themselves, their places in the world, and the world itself (Biesta, 2008). As such, *Bildung* becomes more open, democratic, and philosophically inclined to ongoing conversations with regard to the purpose of education. Other theorists push these ideas further suggesting that the heart of *Bildung* is about interplay – the “linking of the self to the world” (Bohlin, 2009, 2) – and openness where “cultivation is here the dynamic between an object that insists on its independence and authority, and an individual who cancels his or her [sic] prejudices by suspending closure.” (Lovlie, 2002, 475). This “double openness” to self and other is not solely about mastering a subject or the pedagogical and curricular processes of doing so but about recognizing the future as unknown and developing resilience (Herranen et al, 2021), attitude, and wherewithal to handle and respond to uncertainty, incompleteness, and change.

Not long after Von Humboldt and others began to formulate this idea of *Bildung* and the search for one's freedom and the good life (Herranen et al, 2021). These ideas began to be co-opted by the bourgeoisie and *Bildung* slid away from its more radical and transformative roots and into an elitist education that involved becoming part of the “high” culture through self-development and immersion in a life of privilege. Components of *Bildung* like the search for shared justice, self and cultural transformation, and the dynamism and discombobulation of life and change were shed in a search for the idea of harmony (Nordenbo, 2002).

But even during this period not all *Bildung* was lost for as the powerful were defining it in terms that appeared to return it to mere adaptation others were taking it up in a “counter” pedagogical fashion (Gur-ze’ev, 2002). This included the folk-*Bildung* movement of in Scandinavia (Andersen, no date; Burman & Sundgren, 2010) with its desire to expand educational opportunity, switch focus from a narrow band of cultural knowledge to include a much larger range of what might count (e.g. including agricultural, home-making, and craft knowledges). This form of *Bildung* was a return to some of Von Humboldt’s roots but also added a desire to redefine ‘citizen’, emancipate not only individual minds but also bodies (Madsen & Aggerholm, 2020), and expand democracy. Intriguingly for education this move also included a shift away from teacher-centredness (Ryen, 2020) and opened space for more informal de-institutionalized learning opportunities. Away from teacher- as- expert and arbiter of knowledge to a more inclusive and dynamic epistemology. As such, *Bildung* was able to contribute to more democratic institutions and counteract unequal conditions in society at the same time as dealing with questions about how to motivate students to learn (Arfwedson, 1998). In this process students were not simply absorbing all the truths of their culture as determined by their educators and the elite but were asked to develop their own critical interests, and their capacities for critical questioning, and link these to their own lives. Educators were then asked to find ways to reflect these objectives in practice (Klafki, 2004).

At a similar time *Bildung* was being recreated by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. Here education was positioned as a change project, a necessary means – an activist orientation (Hu, 2015) even – in the fight to respond to meta-narratives and what might now be called the neo-liberal agenda. The sense was of *Bildung* as seeking critical, yet inclusive, aims and the idea of education for/as transformation appears most fully. *Bildung* is seen as an educational project that overcomes injustices, allows for difference in its many human forms (note: there is no ecological discussion at this point), and rather than aiming for harmony, prioritizes openness, and equity (Herranen et al, 2021), criticality, worthy suffering (Gur-ze’ev, 2002), and comfort with the messiness of it all. Disturbance is welcome and the desire for resolution – often framed as progress (Gur-ze’ev, 2002) – is viewed with suspicion. So, although *Bildung* as influencing of practice is often seen to be about lifelong learning and a moving away from instrumental thinking when developing skills and competencies. The discussion about educational purpose in *Bildung* now also includes being allowed educationally to encounter, enter into dialogue with, (oneself, others, and society so that one might take the space and the opportunities provided to find/create themselves while not impinging on the projects of those around Madsen & Aggerholm, 2020; Lovlie, 2002).

The engagement of the Frankfurt school with *Bildung* led to a bit of a renaissance and a significant change in its presence, at all the levels of why, how, and what in schools. Prior to being influenced by the Frankfurt school

Klafki developed, what he called his categorical *Bildung* theory which sought to offer didactical frames particularly around content that would help educators in the day-to-day work of teaching. By the 1970s, influenced by the critical social agenda of Gadamer, Adorno, and Horkheimer the categorical had become the critical-constructive. *Bildung* had moved from focusing primarily on process to include questions of ends, values, and changing the existing culture (Klafki, 2000). Klafki created 5 questions for didactical analysis which highlight the importance of reflection in teaching. Klafki's questions focus on the what, why, and who in relation to the content and how it can contribute to meaning-making for the students. Thereby bringing the process and goal components of *Bildung* more explicitly into the hands of practitioners. These five questions are still used in today's teacher education and for teachers in schools (Wahlström, 2019). We will return to them at the end and spend a bit of time starting the project of "ecologizing" (Blenkinsop and Kuchta, 2024) them.

By now the reader has a sense of *Bildung* as both process and product, noun and verb, means and ends, and a set of practices/pedagogies and curricular content that are created and delivered towards expressed aims. An end that is often about seeking ways to allow individuals to flourish while creating a context and culture where all can do so. Also, it can be seen that the ends change as the context out of which the *Bildung* is arising changes. This then means that the transformative activist spirit of *Bildung* stays present even when the particular to be overcome appears to change. Whether it be the hegemony of the church, the control of elites, the malfeasance of the capitalist economic system, or the injustice of the colonial/patriarchal structure *Bildung* is the educational project that takes these seriously, seeks to overcome them, and actively works to bring practice in line with these goals. As such, given the historical arc, it has been possible for the professed *Bildung* of one age to become either the problem of, or a quaint throwback for, the next. And yet, because it is not dogmatic or committed to any particular content, time or context it has been able to flex into transformative usefulness over the course of the last almost 300 years. The modern concept of *Bildung* is not subordinated to current political, religious or economic interests. Instead, it is capturing the present as unfinished and the importance to prepare for an open unknown future (Uljens, 2006). In this sense, *Bildung* and its willingness to examine questions of values, to critically engage with the day's political and practical inequities, and to create constructive frameworks for active practice means it can contribute to supporting the different goals and ideals of education that emerge in any particular teaching practice. This is important not only in examining goals of practice but also when it comes to questions of democracy and power (see eg. Eriksson, 2019). It is to that question of its flexibility that we turn our attention now for we are interested in whether or not there might be the possibility of a *Bildung* for our current context. A *Bildung* that might be ecologized and in turn help us respond to the eco-social cultural crises of the day and the troublesome educational hows and whats that appear to aide and abet their continuance.

Part 2: Updating *Bildung*

As has already been pointed out *Bildung* has changed quite dramatically over time. In fact, it might be thought of as a container concept into which current educators/educational theorists place the contextual cultural problems of the day that need overcoming together with both the envisioned aims and the proposed educational hows and whats for achieving those ends. *Bildung* is rather like the Dread Pirate Roberts in the tale *The Princess Bride*, the name persists for generations while the physical person inhabiting the character changes periodically. For the sake of brevity and because this argument likely doesn't need too much more we are going to focus on three key problems, given today's environmental challenges, that might need inclusion in that *Bildung* container mentioned above – anthropocentrism, self as individual, and species elitism with particular reference to those desirous of voice and flourishing. All currently appear to exist in the assumptions undergirding *Bildung*, even the most recent forms thereof. The hope is that in naming, removing, and replacing these we might begin to consider a *Bildung* for today and tomorrow. An *Eco-Bildung* perhaps. We should note that all three of these challenges have long been recognized as problems in environmental education and that change has not been quick nor easy.

Part 2 (A): Challenging anthropocentrism

Placing the human at the center of things was at the heart of Von Humboldt's early work. For him the anthropocentric thesis (Luth, 1998) was a necessary political move in order to counteract the oppression of the church which kept humans at the margins and placed God and a chosen few at the center. Now in Von Humboldt's context this move towards equity for all men, for it was indeed men, was a transformative and rebellious act in the face of God's power and yet today the anthropocentric thesis, even if it does include all genders, can be seen as problematic with regard to the environmental crisis. Myriad environmental thinkers (Plumwood, 2002; Weston, 2004) have named this placing of humans at the center and its accompanying assumptions of superiority and dominion over the rest of the planet to be one of the stickiest and most troublesome assumptions particularly if the goal is the continuance of human life and creating a world that is more ecologically and socially just.

Within the *Bildung* discussions it was Klafki who began to suggest that environmental challenges needed to be included as part of the 'problems faced' discussion and yet as Kvamme (2021) points out that response was unreservedly anthropocentric focusing primarily on humans as adequate problem solvers and the lone agential beings. It worries Kvamme, that in these early days of the Anthropocene Klafki's educational theory still positions humans "as a species entitled to a solely instrumental relationship with the

complex and manifold webs of life that constitute the biosphere of Earth.” And he claims “that this imaginary is inadequate ... because it maintains the very structure that conceals the interests of other species.” (Kvamme, 2021, 6). And it is in this question of undoing this structural challenge that we think work can be done to ecologize *Bildung*.

In the last 30 years there has been quite a lot of discussion regarding the options that might exist beyond anthropocentrism. Some have suggested a move to ecocentrism and putting the Earth itself into the centre. Others, worrying about the hierarchy that tends to appear when any group is “centred” have offered a multicentric worldview that is more pluralistic and dynamic. Still others have suggested an ontological change where humans are lowered, or all other objects are raised, to a shared, equal but different, ontological status as objects. And more recently there have been attempts to rid ourselves of the center altogether and use imaginaries that recognize relationality and the processional nature of comings together. Here arisings, assemblages, situatedness, and rhizomes are all given metaphorical life in ways that seek to recognize the concerns of other species and, for some, honour their voices, rights, vitalities, and agencies.

So how might an environmental educator choose amongst this plethora of possibility or even make sense of what it might mean to educate rhizomatically or ecocentrically? We are not sure but that is part of the wonder of *Bildung* as an active and changing educational practice. It allows the educator to name the problems, in this case anthropocentrism in educational practice, and then try something out with learners, say positioning nature as having agency and rights. This could include something simple such as seeking to encounter the natural world in ways that are not just instrumental. Or, more complex like naming nature as an active and agential co-teacher (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2010) that deserves the space and possibility to be part of the educative process in whatever way it might. All this is followed by reflection on what was done and what actually happened and then a rigorous reflective questioning to see if there was some success in de-centering the human and the implications thereof. Then, in good experiential ways, to reflect and rework not only the whats and hows of this experience but also to refine the aim itself. For as we try to teach in less anthropocentric ways we get more insight into what anthropocentrism is, how it manifests in teaching and learning, and things that appear to work in response. Critical constructive didactics foster the relationship between theory and practice and encourages there to be continuous work such that both can be developed and visualized in didactical models (Eriksson, 2019, Wilhelmsson & Damber, 2022).

Part 2 (B): Overcoming the limits of self as individual

An interesting and ongoing component of *Bildung* has had to do with the human self. Von Humboldt suggested this project of creating oneself, of placing that

creation into the world as both offering and possibility, and of experiencing the freedom to do this according to one's own desires and realities. There was a kind of becomingness, fluidity, and choice of the self postulated right from the get-go in *Bildung*. Over time the sense of what the self is has changed, been redefined (Klafki, 2010), and it has moved from a clearly individualistic – autonomous human – form to a more relation – immersed in/shaped and influenced by context and community – being that is dynamically engaged with the world around in its becomingness (Biesta, 2008). This process of change has then had an influence on *Bildung* as the educator is challenged to focus not just on each separate learner but also on the community of learners and on the histories and cultures each one brings with them to any learning experience. And yet, there is still a clear sense of an “I”, as having a kind of independence often contained by the boundaries of skin, even in this more relational sense of self.

So, while we have moved away from the individualistic assumptions of early *Bildung* we wonder if that needs to go further with the undoing of the self as singular human. Beyond even that self that is acknowledged as interdependent, always and already in the world, and in myriad relations all the time. We postulate that the self being assumed in the current *Bildung* conversations is not yet an ontological shift to a self that includes these proximal others (such that they are not separate others so much as differing constellations within the boundaries of this more expansive self), the land (such that self is lesser than or even incomprehensible when encountered in its human component form separate from the rest), or one's ancestors (such that self includes those who have come before in a way that the detached merely present form is misunderstood or not fully encountered). This kind of self as shared space (in time, place, and expanse) might be described as ecological. And the kind of self that we see arising in work with trees (Simard, 2021) and lichen (Sheldrake, 2020). And, we think that postulating this geographically, historically, and communally situated self might open new possibilities for a more eco-socially inclusive and just culture. What happens if we acknowledge that we are all ecologically intertwined with the more-than-human in both body and mind? In educational contexts this would at the very least require a more present awareness of situatedness and all our relations. For as Klafki, in quoting Kant, suggests, “children must be brought up not in accordance with the present-day condition of the human race but rather with a future and possibly better one ...” (Kant as cited Klafki, 1999) and maybe that better future is asking the humanistic self to step into a more ecological post-humanist form. This expands the question of what it means to be a self. For we are in the world together with others both human and more-than-human, and all these beings might want the same opportunities for selfhood.

For the environmental educator this move to working towards a more expansive self is a challenge indeed because the ripples of trying to consider oneself and one's learners in a different ontological mode are quite significant. Not only does this question what knowing is, where it is located, and how it might

be assessed but it also pushes back against some of the basic assumptions of modern Canadian education. For example, are we actually teaching towards an autonomous, independent self-sufficient and self-creating citizen in a modern democracy or something much more situated, relational, and inclusive in a post-human eco-democracy? And yet there are hints with regard to places to start. Immersing learners in the natural world with lots of time to explore and connect, recognizing where one's own educational assumptions are re-enforcing particularly restrictive notions of the self, and even finding ways to assess that are more focused on shared knowledge, what has been created together, and whether the work furthers the possibilities of all-our-relations and not just a singular human learner. An education for, with, and through the world around.

Part 2 (C): Expanding the who that 'deserves' to flourish

In some ways our suggestions for A & B above are really just extensions of good, rich, work that has already been done and that might be a good way to think about part C as well. *Bildung* has in fact changed overtime in terms of who is considered as an individual, as deserving of freedom, and as having the right to flourish. And this trajectory has in turn influenced *Bildung* both as practice, for the hows and whats of education must change if you are not simply focused on the kinds of individual freedoms that work for just privileged white males. In terms of aims there has been an expansion of criticality with regards to the rights of all humans to create themselves and this has wildly expanded the range of what it means to be human as individuals, communities, and cultures. Particularly as these groups come into contact, conversation, conflict, and communion with each other. The step we are proposing, which likely doesn't come as a shock, is to expand this commitment to freedom, to flourishing, to each being having the room to become in its best possible form without getting in the way of others, to the more-than-human world as well. Our sense is that just like previous moves the possibilities that arise in terms of what it means to be human, even if the space is seeking to include willows, newts, and ermines, and how that is made manifest are expanded enormously.

We have two quick ways that we think environmental educators might begin to consider this move to expand flourishing as a right beyond humans. The first goes into *Bildung's* commitment to the political, to recognize that education has a political dimension to it no matter the choices being made and that there is a politics to committing to aims of eco-social cultural change (Blenkinsop & Fettes, 2021) and/or mutually beneficial flourishing (Blenkinsop & Morse, 2017). Historically this idea of freedom and creating the self has been tied to social responsibility and a sense of also creating community where the self can actually be created and heard. For many theorists this has mapped directly onto a conversation about democracy, creating the kind of political environment where all voices are heard and honoured, no matter how small or unusual.

And educators have been asked to think about this in terms of their learning spaces. We wonder then whether this might be a leverage spot from which to think about the possibility of an eco-democracy. Creating spaces where more voices than just humans are heard and where that range of needs might be considered as decisions are made. One example of this from the bio-regionalist movement of the late twentieth century would be the Council for All Beings (an ostensibly democratic gathering that seeks to bring in diverse voices across nature's spectrum). The second consideration we offer here is to ask teachers to consider what might happen to their teaching practice if they recognize nature as colonized (Blenkinsop *et al*, 2017). Thus, in parallel to reconsidering practice through critical race or anti-patriarchal or reconciliatory or inclusive lenses educators could develop a reflective awareness and responsiveness to how their language, their activities, and their interactions with learners and place might be furthering a troublesome colonial orientation towards all those kin of the other-than-human kind.

For the environmental educator questions that might appear in their planning and teaching include: What does dialogue that includes the more-than-human look like? How can different perspectives be included? What does it mean to listen to the more-than-human, to actually hear those voices (what they are saying, understand their meaning, recognize their perspectives) without making assumptions that further the colonization? And, once heard, what changes or new relations are possible in this social, cultural learning context? What does it feel like to listen *for* their voice and focus on the opportunities for learning therein without falling into an extractive position that assumes knowledge is there for the taking and that the form that knowledge takes doesn't matter even if it instrumentalizes or backgrounds the natural world as teacher? What does mutual flourishing look like and what is mutual when thinking of moss, raven, or caterpillar? What kinds of activities allow for shared learning/knowing to appear and be recognized? And how do I respond to knowledge and self-structures that appear to act in the opposite direction of an eco-democracy and potentially further the colonization? Finally, given this how can we hold difference, as a necessary part of a thriving democracy and avoid the desire to force agreement?

Part 3: By Way of a Conclusion: Educating for, with, and through *Eco-Bildung*

Educating *for, with, and through Eco-Bildung* is, the reader will notice, a play on the idea of educating for, with, and through nature and in many ways these ideas are overlapping. But what does *eco-Bildung* look like in practice? How might an interested environmental educator engage with ideas and aims of *eco-Bildung*? For some, these offerings might be brand new but for many there are likely some familiar themes appearing in the above discussion.

In this admittedly short final concluding section we will try and draw in the *for* (the focus on the “why” -- the aims of an *eco-bildung* -- in this essay named as mutually beneficial flourishing), the *with* (focus on the “what” of the curricular content in light of the “why”), and the *through* (focus on the “how” of a pedagogy that aligns itself to the “why” rather than undermining it as it so often does even when the best content has been chosen). To do this we return to Klafki and offer an *eco-bildung* re-reading of his well-known five questions for teachers/educators to align content to aims. The questions are introduced and then modified through a lens that seeks to honour our three critiques from above. For first-timers it should be noted that the five questions are mutually interdependent, they are not necessarily answered in order and the answers to each question are only understandable in the light of the other four answers (Klafki, 1995). The questions are:

- a) What wider or general sense or reality do these contents exemplify and open up to the learner? What basic phenomenon or fundamental principle, what law, criterion, problem, method, technique, or attitude can be grasped by dealing with these contents as ‘examples’?

As can be seen this question is very much directed towards bringing the particular and the general into conversation with each other. Thus, for environmental educators the question is always about how does this particular activity, encounter, lesson arise out of and potentially offer insights into the larger aims and problems to be addressed. Both of the “subject” but also of the larger cultural problem, aim, in focus.

Intriguingly, in our first ecologizing Klafki move there is not much to change in the question at all. By selecting the aim, say responding to alienation and a desire to be less anthropocentric the educator frames the range of potential curricular and pedagogical responses that might be available to them. Taking such a process seriously in terms of seeking to co-plan, leaving space for learners to encounter the more-than-human, and actively positioning the natural world as equal in an educational sense the role and acts of the human teacher must necessarily change in a more ecological direction. The most important difference might be the openness for change in the practice itself which is a precondition because of nature’s unpredictability. This also asks the human teacher to release some of their control as expert/evaluator and sole creator of content and experiences. A second change is that teachers, students and the more-than-human become equal actors on the stage of learning and knowing which in turn allows the aims of education to be reconsidered, thickening the ideas of *eco-bildung*.

- b) What significance does the content in question or the experience, knowledge, ability, or skill to be acquired through this topic already possess in the minds of the children in my class? What significance should it have from a pedagogical point of view?

Here Klafki is reaching towards a more progressive educational position that both considers the child as knower and having experience concerning the topic at hand but also that content must be relevant to the learner in their immediate context.

We have two recommendations regarding ecologizing this question. The first is to consider carefully how to include the student but also the natural world. And while this idea may sound initially odd, we have found that in considering almost any topic there are clear connections to, and positions to be found across, the more-than-human world. The second recommendation we have here is to notice the language of significance. It is pretty clear in the literature that interprets Klafki that this tends to be interpreted in relation to significance for the human (learner, teacher, community) and we would suggest expanding the considerations here to include the natural world. Expanding the consideration of significance can have quite dramatic effects on the curricular decisions being made while at the same time undercutting anthropocentrism and human elitism. This consideration coupled with the more expansive sense of self – with its intertwined ecological body and mind – can be wonderful fodder for a more radical practice.

c) What constitutes the topic's significance for the children's future?

Here Klafki is expressly asking educators to think through how they are preparing students for the future and since the beginning of *Bildung* there has been an express critique of educational projects that are simply trying to recapitulate and further the *status quo*.

Our eco additions are actually quite significant here as it appears that public education in Canada, although filled with preparatory language relating to future citizenship, is not really readying students either for the rapidly changing and uncertain world we are moving into or for a more expansive sense of citizen that not only genuinely includes all of humanity but also is leaving space for the myriad denizens of the more-than-human world to be considered and, even better, to have a voice. Here we see environmental educators finding ways to take a lead in both role-modelling a nascent eco-democracy in their educational spaces and in offering the skills that might be useful as we enter the Anthropocene. That is comfort with change and uncertainty, building community/alliances, building deeper relationships with the more-than-human, and comfort in doing the hard work of change towards undoing explicit, implicit, assumed, and institutional injustices.

d) How is the content structured? {which has been placed in a specifically, pedagogical perspective by questions I, II, and III)?

This is Klafki at his most practical as he asks the teacher to consider the order and organization of the content, the what and through, itself. Particularly considering the aims being posited.

Here the eco-additions head in two directions. The first involves the active inclusion of the pedagogy, the how, by naming it as important – How is the pedagogy aligning with the content and the aims? This is important because our research experience suggests that often the best intentions, even of environmental education, of say building relations or undercutting anthropocentrism can be undermined by the pedagogy employed by the educator. Imagine the educator walking through the forest and naming every plant and then telling the learners the uses for each in turn as a kind of mobile lecture. In spite of themselves the teacher is re-enforcing themselves as the centre of knowing, reifying a particular utilitarian orientation to nature, and centralizing a particular scientific way of knowing. The second direction for consideration here is the question of who is doing the “structuring” and then what are the implicit assumptions of that structure. If part of the work of *eco-bildung* is about allowing myriad perspectives and ways of being into the mix to better support and challenge the learners in their self-creation and about including nature as a co-teacher then narrowing both the epistemological and ontological frames too much is troublesome.

- e) What is the body of knowledge which must be retained (‘minimum knowledge’) if the content determined by these questions is to be considered ‘acquired’, as a ‘vital’, ‘working’ human possession?

Here Klafki is partially interested in the idea of the “central” ideas, or “core curriculum” but also underneath this question is the challenge of assessment. How do we know as educators what the learner knows? What is landing and staying?

In our research into eco-schools over the years the question of assessment has long been an incredible challenge. What are the implications of individualistic, competitive, hierarchical, and focused on particular kinds of knowing for testing and assessing? How might these be changed to become more inclusive, relational, cooperative, and in support of a more eco-socially justice culture where there is space for mutually beneficial flourishing? The trouble is we don’t have a clear answer. At the very least we think it is important to reconsider assessment in light of these ideas. To potentially add in other ways of knowing that gives the educator a sense of how the learner is becoming and behaving in community. To consider including nature as co-evaluator, as having a stake in what and how human learners know, and maybe even to look for those educational spaces that allow for students to enact themselves in more fullness. But also, to acknowledge that sometimes the educator actually doesn’t know what has been learned and to be ok with that.

And with that we have definitely reached the end of our space for this paper. There is much more to explore in relation to *eco-Bildung*, eco-democracy, and the implications of all this for environmental education. But at this point we think that drawing out and building upon the cultural change and justice

traditions of *Bildung* offers a potential entrée to developing rich pedagogy for our current times. And by aligning this work with an explicit naming of 3 key environmentally problematic assumptions of modernist education our goal has been to make the educational work or interpreting this theorizing more explicit. Our hope is that all this has opened some interesting conversations for human environmental educators to take forward in rich ways in spite of our inability to have complete and easily adoptable answers. But maybe that is the eco-point.

Notes on Contributors

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