Drawing on the theories of author and conservationist Wendell Berry for the field of EcoJustice Education, this book articulates a pedagogy of responsibility as a three-pronged approach grounded in the recognition that our planet balances an essential and fragile interdependence between all living creatures. Examining the deep cultural roots of social and ecological problems perpetuated by schools and institutions, Martusewicz identifies practices, relationships, beliefs, and traditions that contribute to healthier communities. She calls for an imaginative re-thinking of education as an ethical process based in a vision of healthy, just, and sustainable communities. Using a critical analytical process, Martusewicz reveals how values of exploitation, mastery, and dispossession of land and people have taken hold in our educational system and communities, and employs Berry’s philosophy and wisdom to interrogate and develop a pedagogy of responsibility as an antidote to such harmful ideologies, structures, and patterns. Berry’s critical work and the author’s relatable storytelling challenge taken-for-granted perspectives and open new ways of thinking about teaching for democratic and sustainable communities.

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“Martusewicz’s celebrations of Wendell Berry in this book offer us priceless gifts and essential insights for healing all the damages of our destructive era. This book challenges us to put into practice Berry’s philosophy of living and learning inside as well as outside the confines of classrooms across the world.”

—Madhu Suri Prakash, The Pennsylvania State University, USA

“This book is long overdue. Berry is one of the ‘greats’; his writings still reverberate throughout all fields of education. This book contextualizes Berry’s writings in contemporary yet unsustainable times.”

—Amy Cutter-Mackenzie, Southern Cross University, Australia

“This volume invites educators into a conversation with the work of Wendell Berry, one of America’s most revered writers on the themes of environment, culture, community, place, and what it means to be responsibly alive in the world. With careful attention to Berry’s novels, essays, and poems, Martusewicz shows how Berry’s work can inspire us to re-imagine our place in the world and to inhabit our roles as educators more responsibly.”

—David A. Greenwood, Lakehead University, Canada
A PEDAGOGY OF RESPONSIBILITY

Wendell Berry for EcoJustice Education

Rebecca A. Martusewicz
For Gary
This book has been a long time in the making and many people have contributed to its possibility. Chet Bowers was the first to introduce me to Berry’s work and it remained an important resource for both of us during the years we worked closely together. My friend Madhu Suri Prakash was also very influential. Our conversations about Berry began from the first day we met and have never abated. She teases me about our mutual love affair with his writing. Another dear friend, Jeff Edmundson and I collaborated over several years to develop what a pedagogy of responsibility could mean within the EcoJustice framework, and I am especially grateful to him for our work together on Berry’s contributions to that concept.

A whole slew of my students have been introduced to Berry because of that initial offering from Chet, and they have been among the strongest advocates for my decision to pull together my thinking about, and love for, Berry’s ideas: John Lupinacci, Kristi Wilson, Nigora Erkaeva, Monica Shields, Erin Stanley, Cristal Nicols, and Fabayo Manzira all took a course with me that focused specifically on Berry’s fiction, essays, and poetry as sources of educational philosophy. That was a fun semester! For Erin Stanley it turned into a Master’s thesis. For Kristi Wilson it turned into a dissertation. Monica Shields worked side by side with me, researching secondary sources and thinking through ideas in the early stages. John Mullen came to this project a bit later but also helped with gathering together and combing through Berry’s huge oeuvre to trace the patterned ideas that have been brought to bear in this book. For John it will also culminate in a dissertation. Katy Adams stepped up in the last few months to take on the STEM chapter, despite some initial reservations about Berry’s critique of science. I am most grateful for her courage and persistence in writing that chapter under not a small amount of pressure. And, Agnes Krynski has read
and edited several chapters for me. Her suggestions have made a huge difference in refining this work.

Eastern Michigan University offered me a semester-long research fellowship that got the ball rolling back in the winter of 2015. And, in the fall of that year I was awarded a sabbatical and a Fulbright fellowship that took me to the University of Tampere in Finland where I had the pleasure to teach and write about Berry, under the influence of a wonderful cadre of colleagues and friends: Veli-Matti Värrri, Raisa Foster, Jussi Mäkelä, Jani Pulkki, Olli-Jukka Jokisaari, Vesa Jaaksi, Antii Saari, Taina Repo, Merja Kuisma, and Marikki Arnikil. Ongoing conversations in Telakka and beyond over all sorts of ideas—love, care, competition, posthumanism, embodiment, dialogue, recognition, ethics, neoliberalism, art, phenomenology—have surely found their way into these chapters. Along with the Finns, Derek Rasmussen, my Canadian Buddhist meditation teacher, activist, friend, and collaborator has opened many interesting connections for me between Berry’s notion of settling and unsettling and other land-based cultural traditions. Not to mention what I have learned about the four immeasurables as a foundation for EcoJustice. I look forward to those connections and this friendship deepening.

Just a couple months before leaving for Finland, I made my way to Northern Kentucky, to spend a summer afternoon at Lanes Landing Farm, talking with Wendell and Tanya Berry. We sat on their porch and three hours flew by in a heartbeat. I am most grateful for their warm welcome, and lively conversation. I learned a lot from both of them that day and from a series of letters from Wendell responding to my questions that followed. What a gift.

Naomi Silverman stewarded this book from the get go, and as always was a stalwart supporter. I would never have jumped into such a complex project if she had not urged me forward. I am forever thankful for her editorial advice and friendship. I was sad and worried when she announced her retirement, but her replacement has been a godsend as well. I thank Karen Adler and Emmalee Ortega for their patience and kind support as I struggled over some difficult bumps in the last push to completion.

Finally, there is no way to measure the love and encouragement that comes day by day from my family. Beckie and Ben, life has become so much richer, so filled with laughter and amazing discoveries with you two in it. Sweet Pea, Olive, Lady Bug, and Leona you are my daily dose of wiggly joy and sunshine. And Gary, well, there just aren’t words. Besides the invaluable scholarly contributions you’ve made throughout this manuscript, you teach me love every day. This book would not have been written without you.
The primary goal of this book is to explore the influence of author/conservationist Wendell Berry for the field of EcoJustice Education, and to expose educators to his insights as they contribute to the foundations of what Jeff Edmundson and I have referred to in previous work as a “pedagogy of responsibility” (Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2005; Edmundson & Martusewicz, 2013; Martusewicz, Edmundson & Lupinacci, 2015). In spite of the proclaimed prophetic influence of his work on many interrelated fields of study concerned with environmental sustainability (Moyers and Company, 2013), Wendell Berry’s importance as an educational philosopher has never been addressed in a full-length book. The chapters that follow seek to remedy that by bringing his ideas directly to bear on what we could mean by “a pedagogy of responsibility” as this approach grows out of, and contributes to, EcoJustice Education.

EcoJustice Education is a three-pronged approach that: 1) examines the deep cultural roots of intersecting social and ecological problems, especially as these are perpetuated within educational and other institutions; 2) identifies those practices, relationships, beliefs, and traditions that contribute to healthier communities, human and more than human; and 3) calls for the development of imagination, especially a rethinking of the purposes of education generated from a vision of healthy, just, and sustainable communities. Pedagogies of responsibility emphasize both the critical analytic processes that expose harmful ideologies, structures and patterns, and the qualities contributing to the sorts of responsibility and values (many of these ancient) needed to restore the planet and our communities to healthy balance.

This book is designed as a companion text for the book EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic and Sustainable Communities (Martusewicz et al., 2015), not in terms of chapter by chapter pairings but rather through the primary ideas
presented. Themes of responsibility, leadership, community membership, friendship, “settler colonialism,” racism, human supremacy, consumerism/commodification, scientism, democracy, and agrarianism are brought to bear on education for just and sustainable communities. Thus, it is a book that will be of interest to teachers, teacher educators, philosophers of education, place-based and sustainability educators, and anyone with an interest in Berry’s work. For those who are familiar with his often sharp disapproval of institutionalized education—both K-12 and universities—the approach presented here will be of no surprise. I draw directly on Berry’s critique of professionalism, expert knowledge and the institutions that support those, while digging into the aspects of his work that are directly about the kinds of educational relationships and outcomes that we need, making a clear distinction in my discussion of the difference between schooling and education. That is a difference that Berry does not always tend to, at least not directly.

As I hope to make clear with Berry’s help, pedagogies of responsibility develop competencies needed to engage local practices of care, along with the critical capacities needed to recognize and interrupt our complicity in the exploitive processes at the root of many contemporary social and ecological problems. I discovered Wendell Berry just as I was beginning to wake up to those problems, ten years into my life as an academic. In many ways, his stories, essays and poetry brought me back to myself.

When I was a child, my family lived just a couple miles from my grandfather’s dairy farm. My siblings and I grew up free to roam the fields, woodlands, and streams between our house and that farm. While I was young, I lived with a kind of constant heart ache for the indifference most of the people around me seemed to carry for the other creatures—plants, animals, forests, swamps—in our lives. Not my mother, not my grandfather, but others who liked to tease me that the dead creature by the roadside was “just a woodchuck,” or the wetland being filled in by big box stores or a new highway was “just a swamp.” By the time I was an adolescent I had learned to carefully guard that sensitivity. One day, as a now-tenured professor browsing in a bookstore in Portland, Oregon, I bought a little book of essays by Berry entitled *Another Turn of the Crank* (1995). Reading that book was like coming home.

Little by little, developing confidence in that little girl’s sensibilities, I began to speak, to write and to teach from her voice and memories. I began to tell stories about what I had learned as a child. With other scholars, Berry’s ideas—both sharp critique and loving embrace—began to inform my memories and my developing understanding of what education could mean if engaged from the principles he lays out, and ultimately what sorts of communities we might create. And while I was raised a spiritual agnostic, I found that I relate deeply with much of his interpretation of Christian Gospels, or at least their most earthly elements. I continue to be moved by Berry’s close reading of those ideas, even in my secular skepticism. As Jeff Edmundson and I began to talk and read together, Berry’s novels, poetry and essays put in conversation with many others began to inform
our approach to EcoJustice Education, helping us to articulate both a cultural ecological analysis and a vision of the sorts of commitments and communities that education should seek to create. I decided to write this book in order to pay homage to that little girl and her heart, and to draw together all I had learned from Berry to say something more about education. This book is the result.

Chapter Outline

Nine chapters have emerged in the five years it has taken to develop this book. Obviously there is no way to be comprehensive in terms of Berry’s huge oeuvre, but I have worked to focus on insights, questions and problems that seem particularly important to education presently. Each chapter can be read as a stand-alone essay but readers will also find a thread of intersecting ideas that runs through the book. The primary themes and ideas have been chosen out of Berry’s principles, points of advocacy and analysis in particular as they inform EcoJustice Education and guide a pedagogy of responsibility. Berry is a consummate storyteller, and so I weave his fictional characters in and out of my analysis, along with poetry and his beautiful, often heart-rending prose. Gently chastising me for having written what he considered to be an “ugly word” in a letter I had sent him, he wrote back of the importance of writing that tries to be beautiful. Imagine the experience of being so challenged by Wendell Berry! That comment added months to this project! Still, I have persisted, and one way or another, this collection of essays is the result.

Chapter 1, Introduction: Toward a Pedagogy of Responsibility, provides a brief biography of Wendell Berry and introduces the influence of his work on the field of EcoJustice Education, in particular for developing a pedagogy of responsibility. I introduce in broad strokes the three primary strands—democracy, agriculture and Christianity—that have guided his commitments, and the associated principles that appear throughout his work. I outline his principles of the Great Economy, which emphasize that we are all members of a diverse living order (whether we know it or not), and as such we are responsible for ensuring that our work within it does not cause harm but rather helps it to flourish. We are small within that order and essentially ignorant in the face of its complexity; that is, we will never know or control its mysteries fully, and our illusion that we are somehow outside it has disastrous results. I argue for an understanding of education for eco-ethical becoming that is based on these principles.

Chapter 2, Neoliberalism and the Dis-membering of Community, co-authored with Gary Schnakenberg, examines the emergence of the dominant (for now, anyway) paradigm defining the “little economy,” which stands in contrast to the Great Economy and represents what most would simply refer to as “the economy.” This chapter traces the antecedents and emergence of the “free-market fundamentalism” of neoliberalism in the 1970s, and identifies several characteristics that have particularly pernicious effects on local communities. It introduces two characters that
appear in several of Berry’s fictional works, Troy Chatham and Andy Catlett, as a means of illustrating different approaches to being in the world when that world is increasingly reduced to the operations of an abstracted “market” and quantifiable results on balance sheets. The chapter concludes by pointing to the wisdom of love in “the work of local cultures” (Berry, 2010a, p. 139) as the essential antidote to the violence of industrialism and neoliberal politics.

Chapter 3, The Bonds of Love, takes up this idea, tracing connections between Berry’s analysis of the necessary relationship between earth, body, mind and spirit for healthy communities, and the work of eco-feminists and materialist feminists who draw similar conclusions. Contrasting this vision to Berry’s critique of modern industrial life, the chapter explores what the purposes and definition of education ought to be in order to achieve this vision of healthy communities in a crisis-ridden global context. Berry offers a powerful critique of modern industrial assumptions that naturalize hyper-separated, hierarchized relationships and subjectivities degrading to both body and earth. He offers a metaphysics that is defined by our unavoidable embodiment within a complex living system. Just as microscopic living organisms create the soil in a recursive and generative process of living, reproducing, eating and dying, humans are joined inextricably to the soil as we eat from it to live and reproduce, and return to it in death. For Berry, it is mutuality and affection—love—that joins us together in bonds of protection and care needed to sustain life. Here, Berry’s analysis is read in conversation with feminist critiques of modernist perspectives that exclude the recognition of our embedded embodied existence in favor of a dominating rationalism that encloses life-generating relationships. If a conception of love as connection and care is indeed at the heart of the very possibility of life, then education must be about shaping our relationships and productive capacities toward those ways of being that recognize our embodied dependencies on the well-being and intrinsic intelligence of all creatures.

Chapters 4 and 5 dispel claims that Berry’s focus on the land and agriculture is a sign of his disinterest in questions of racial oppression or in taking responsibility for a fundamental “erasure” of Indigenous peoples’ existence and claims to the land. To the contrary, Berry’s particular ideas relative to these complex issues offer important contributions to EcoJustice scholars’ insistence that we begin with a deep analysis of how we have been created as subjects of these logics of domination ravaging our communities. For Berry, racism is a primary wound to our humanity for both those who have “painted themselves white” (Coates, 2015, p. 151) and those who have been inferiorized by those very claims, and suffer the violence of degradation. Education must include our work to identify the roots of these harmful assumptions, and to recognize our capacities for love and connection across these divides as a matter of necessary healing. In Settler Colonialism and The Unsettling of America (Chapter 4), I review a range of settler colonialism theorists to interrogate processes of degradation, dispossession, and disavowal that continue to rationalize the removal and ideological erasure of Indigenous people.
from their ancestral land and the consciousness of the dominant white culture. Using that lens, I examine what Berry calls a fundamental “unsettling” required by the growth of an extractive and greedy political and economic system at the heart of European contact and plunder of the North American continent and the planet itself.

In Chapter 5, Degraded Bodies, Degraded Earth, I read Berry’s self-reflective essay, The Hidden Wound (2010b) on the legacy of slavery within his own family history, and his analysis of intersecting violence to the human body and spirit as well as to the land via racism. Central to Berry’s analysis of racism is his recognition of the degradation of land via work that is seen as beneath those who would name themselves white. This compounding of degradations is traced north to industrial Detroit via the Great Migration, and into Detroit’s “50-year Rebellion” (Kurashige, 2015). And finally, Berry’s own agrarian values are found in the once abandoned lots and parks, where a growing Black Community Food Security Network is reclaiming the land and the Black body as sites of self-determination and love.

Chapter 6, STEM Education and the Miracle of Life, co-authored with Katy Adams, takes seriously recent critiques of the STEM agenda as philosophically grounded in the rationalist, mechanistic, anthropocentric, and individualistic discourses that reinforce global market measures of success. Wendell Berry’s eloquent prose builds the case for an alternative vision of success, success rooted in how our personal use of the world contributes to its health and therefore our own, a world where we recognize the infinite not as an “enormous quantity” but rather a cycle that renews (Berry, 1996, p. 88). Three ideas are essential to Berry’s argument: (1) Human perspective on the world is limited; science is a human endeavor, therefore science cannot lead to absolute knowledge. (2) Success lies not in progress or our ability to control through technology, but in our capacity to respond appropriately to the real complexities of life in a way that nurtures both natural and human communities. (3) Meaningful knowledge is situated and arises through relationships of affection and action, not the abstract acquisition of more and still more information. Berry’s belief in the nature of learning as a holistic endeavor that cannot divorce body from place without injury (Berry, 2000, 1996) invites closer investigation of how people actually teach, learn, and use STEM for healthy communities.

Chapter 7, Health as Holism, co-authored with Kristi Wilson takes this argument into the world of nursing education. The dominant definition of health is constructed within socioeconomic, political, cultural, and ecological contexts that affect how personnel in the medical and nursing fields practice. For the most part, practicing nurses and nurse educators define health as the absence of illness; thus their practice is caught in a web of individualism and the neoliberal penchant for efficiencies, mechanization, and profit. They do not recognize the essential connection between our bodies and the earth (Berry, 1996), nor do they recognize that health is created within those complex body/earth relationships. In contrast
to the dominant paradigm perspectives of health in nursing and medicine, Berry argues for a definition that emanates from an essential interdependence among all creatures with the earth. As examined in other chapters, Berry makes clear that one cannot be healthy unless one is whole. To be whole is to be aware of the connection of our bodies to other beings that make up existence on this planet (1996). Grounded in Berry’s vision of health as holism, this chapter offers a critique of the current healthcare education system by detailing a case study of seven nurse educator/scholars whose work exemplifies aspects of this broad ecological vision. Drawing from their contributions to an alternative vision of health and education, this chapter outlines several courses that would be a necessary start in reforming nursing education toward a more holistic and sustainable vision.

Chapter 8, Re-membering “the Room of Love” takes Berry’s critique of neoliberalism home to my childhood town in Northern New York. There by my dying mother’s bedside, I remember the membership, the essential teaching and learning, the love that made me who I am today. I let wash over me the sadness of a dying town and the regret of my own leaving as one small thread in its systematic unraveling. I argue for such a painful confrontation as essential to our awakening from the nightmare that has already destroyed so much, and that will be slowed only by love among a membership committed to the flourishing of a place, only by an education that can renew the room of love.

Again emphasizing the wisdom of love, Chapter 9, What is Education For?, summarizes the primary aspects of a pedagogy of responsibility developed in the other chapters, focusing on principles emphasized throughout Berry’s work, and the resulting particularities of character as they define and shape membership in community. As a primary challenge that I pose to my own students, I discuss the question, what is education for? Not, what kind of schools or curriculum should we have: Not what is “good teaching?” Rather what are we aiming to accomplish when we set ourselves to the tasks that we define as education? What sorts of skills, attitudes, virtues are we hoping to develop in the young people that we send out into the world? And, what do we expect them to do with those skills and qualities of character? Berry writes that the ecological crisis is a crisis of character, and the crisis of character is a cultural crisis. Recognizing this we see that we are also talking about a crisis of education. This chapter addresses what a pedagogy of responsibility requires as we face these crises.

**Contributing Authors**

Finally, I have had the benefit of good scholarly help with three of these chapters. Gary Schnakenberg, a human geographer who uses political ecology as a guiding framework, co-authored Chapter 2, Neoliberalism and the Dis-membering of Community. Katy Adams, a science educator who is also the Director of Education at the Ann Arbor Ecology Center, wrote the bulk of Chapter 6, STEM Education and the Miracle of Life. And, Kristi Wilson, a Nurse Practitioner and
educator, co-authored Chapter 7, Health as Holism. Each has encountered Berry’s work in friendship with me, and have been moved in their own diverse ways to think through his influences. They all stepped up to take on these chapters in the last few months before the manuscript was submitted, adding pressure to their already busy lives. The book would not be the same without them, and neither would I.

References

1

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF RESPONSIBILITY

_The Arrival_

Like a tide it comes in,
wave after wave of foliage and fruit,
The nurtured and the wild,
out of the light to this shore.
In its extravagance we shape
the strenuous outline of enough.
(Wendell Berry, 1984)

We are living within a vastly beautiful, diverse, and dangerous world, a sensual, dynamic, “extravagant” world where interactions and connections, cycles and transformations continue to give us a bounty of possibility for life, even while the bling of our consumerist habits blind us to that truth. Those habits—the addiction to buying more and more things, the individualism that produces our greedy consumption, the belief in Eurocentric superiority over the rest of the world, and the inherent “progress” of ever-expanding technologies—are produced within a colonizing industrial legacy that has brought us to great peril. All across this planet, living communities—human and more-than-human—are displaced or destroyed by shortsightedness, greed, and violence. And yet, every day we witness acts of kindness and care on large and small scales. And though it seems to be more and more attenuated, we know at least on some level the connective power of care and affection; we know how to put aside selfish wants in favor of kindness, empathy, compassion, and joy. How do we strengthen those desires for affection and care, those connective ways of being that are at the heart of happiness and collective well-being? How do we identify and challenge the processes and forces that ignore our responsibility to “the strenuous outline of enough”? 
Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer, poet, novelist, and conservationist, has spent the last 50 years writing between the poles of abundance and restraint, grief and love. In a personal letter to me, he proclaims himself “old-fashioned,” a “traditionalist” who prefers to emphasize concepts of forgiveness, kindness, mercy, and affection over rationalist notions of justice that lead us down the path of retribution and a reproduction of hierarchized structures of violence. His life-long study of the historical roots and erosion of virtues, dispositions, and practices that protect the communities and living systems we depend upon trace the roots of our cultural history and our own psyches as saturated with both exploitation and care.

The terms exploitation and nurture … describe a division not only between persons but within persons. We are all to some extent, the products of an exploitive society, and it would be foolish and self-defeating to pretend that we do not bear its stamp … the standard of the exploiter is efficiency; the standard of the nurturer is care. (Berry, 1996, p. 7)

While industrial societies have been built largely on practices and beliefs that define love and care as weak or secondary, often associated with what women do (Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016), I argue with Berry that the relationships, skills and attitudes creating care, affection and mutuality are our most important sources of strength. Throughout this book, using Berry’s stories, poems and essays as primary sources of wisdom, my contributors and I examine how values of exploitation, mastery, and dispossession of land and people have become dominant modes of being in an extractive economic and politically subservient system. Berry challenges the inevitability of these systems by arguing for the identification, cultivation and internalization of ways of being based on primary intangible virtues—gratitude, humility, faith, kindness, forbearance. Relationships built on these intangibles have, he tells us, important tangible effects that mitigate against the violence of selfish individualism, hyper consumerism, and the brutality of profit driven market fundamentalism. But these virtues do not simply appear on their own. They must be part of a community’s commitments and desires for itself, and thus part of intentional and strategic educational processes that actively engage the imagination toward responsibility and the creation of a robust and sustainable alternative. We name this approach EcoJustice Education.

**EcoJustice Education**

The two basic strands that define the theoretical and pedagogical tasks of this work are: 1) the development of a critical analysis of the cultural foundations of the ecological and social crises we face globally; 2) a recognition and identification of the existing and ancient relationships, attitudes, beliefs and practices needed for mutual caretaking of each other and the planet, in short, an ethics for
a sustainable future within the limited carrying capacity of the ecosystems in which we live (Martusewicz, Edmundson & Lupinacci, 2015).

The first strand includes a willingness to examine the complexities of Western industrial culture, as it has developed historically via a set of hierarchized modernist assumptions, deeply imbedded discourses that rationalize specific economic and social policies, as well as day-to-day interactions and psychological conditions that define our sense of the world and our lives together (Martusewicz et al., 2015; Bowers, 1993, 1997, 2012; Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016; Lupinacci & Happel, 2015). EcoJustice Education asks students and teachers to examine the ways a powerful group of historically created assumptions, formed, internalized and exchanged as “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 31), come together to create, rationalize, and maintain these patterns of belief and behavior. Discourses are a closely woven tapestry of exchanged and internalized meanings that are constructed through language and all sorts of other symbolic systems passed on inter-generationally via our institutions and relationships. They have a deeply embedded history in space and time, and function to create and recreate organizing ideas (conceptual maps) via metaphor as a kind of glue for any culture.

Our imaginations—the ways we think, how we see the world and ourselves in it—are scripted according to multiple lines of discursive logic. Thus, our abilities to see differently, to imagine who we are or might be in the world are limited by defined subject positions—by race, class, gender, geography, ability, sexuality and so on—in a logic that rationalizes possession of property and mastery of people and other creatures. Further, we “moderns” believe so fully in our superior knowledge, technology, economic and financial systems that we insist on it being spread to others across the world, whether through religion, capitalism, schooling or a combination of these. As Berry puts it:

... We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world—to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity—our own capacity for life—that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled. (Berry, 2012a, p. 220; emphasis added)

In this part of the work, we insist that if we are to address the crises sweeping the planet and destroying our local communities, we must examine our own capture in the assumptions, ideologies, practices and institutions that create these problems. We must understand that we ourselves are shaped by, and thus complicit in, these processes. Thus, we must examine our own mindsets, and work to shift our relationships, behaviors and the metaphors we use to construct their meaning.
This is not a matter of assigning blame; it is, rather, a matter of understanding how the complex symbolic processes of culture work on us, and thus of accepting the responsibility to change ourselves and the systems and relationships by which we live.

The second strand of EcoJustice Education asks us to reclaim and revitalize the cultural and environmental “commons,” particularly those practices, relations, traditions and beliefs that support mutual aid among humans and between humans and the more-than-human world. In this strand, we work to identify practices in our own day-to-day lives, as well as traditional practices among diverse cultures across the world that are specifically aimed at caretaking, however demeaned they are in our modernist conceptions (Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016; Bowers & Martusewicz, 2006; Bowers, 2012; Esteva & Prakash, 1998). This includes the ideas about who we are in relation to the more-than-human world and what we ought to learn from other creatures if we are to survive. Intersecting with the first strand, it requires that we interrupt those logics of domination, which privilege and prioritize one thing at the expense of another and correspondingly degrade the necessary work of caretaking, which is essential for the flourishing of life.

As I have continued to read and think about the particular influences of Berry’s work on this field, a third important strand emerged, also intersecting with the first two in important ways. This third strand requires that we learn to imagine the places where we dwell, what is needed in those places, what is demanded of us by those communities and the living world with whom we share this planet. As educators, we keep at the forefront of our work the question: What is education for? Whom should we be serving, and towards what end? Our questions, as Berry puts it, should lead us to a kindly and orderly world where creation can flourish. To imagine our role in creating healthy communities is to take responsibility, to actively and carefully respond to the needs expressed in the singularity of a particular place.

For humans to have a responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their places in it. To have a place, to live and belong to a place, to live from a place without destroying it, we must imagine it. By imagination we see it illuminated by its own unique character and by our love for it. By imagination, we recognize with sympathy the fellow members, human and nonhuman, with whom we share our place. (Berry, 2012b, p. 14)

This third strand circulates through the preceding two as a double responsibility: to recognize the damages that we are perpetuating, understanding our complicity, and to identify the good: those practices, values, and relationships within the living world around us that exist as gifts to our communities. “Imagination is a particularizing and a local force, native to the ground underfoot” and “placing the world
and its creatures within a context of sanctity in which their worth is absolute and incalculable” (Berry, 2010b, p. 32).

**Pedagogies of Responsibility**

As we approach the tasks required by each of these intersecting strands in the EcoJustice framework, we bring specific questions that seek to expose and articulate the particular responsibilities we have as members of this industrial culture. Who are we and how have we been shaped by the primary assumptions organizing our society? What mistakes have we made and continue to make that are rationalized by those assumptions? To whom are we ethically responsible? And as part of this last question: What is to be conserved in our traditions, practices, relationships and beliefs that could help us to contribute to the protection and care of a living planet, and what should be changed? That is, what do we need to learn about ourselves, our places and the larger context in order to live well together (Bowers, 2001, 2006; Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2005)?

From these specific questions, an ethic of responsibility and care emerges that impacts our understanding of teaching and learning. A “pedagogy of responsibility” was first coined by Jeff Edmundson (2003) to distinguish this approach from other critical pedagogies that focus on “transformation” or “liberation” but often leave unexamined our relationship and unavoidable interdependence with the more-than-human world. Perspectives in critical pedagogy often overlook what we and other diverse cultures already know that could help us protect those important ecological and community relationships, edging, instead, toward what Derek Rasmussen (2005) identifies as “a rescuer mentality.” Our point is that many of the cultures purported to be in need of liberation or transformation by those who are supposedly “in the know” are already organized by rich cultural traditions and practices that understand what it means to be whole within the patterns of the natural world and larger cosmos. Identifying the skills, values and relationships that continue to exist in our own culture and day-to-day lives, albeit in severely attenuated ways, is an important piece of the EcoJustice approach.

Berry teaches us to look carefully at what works to create healthy living systems in our particular biospheres, regions and communities, reminding us that humans are a small but important part of that complex diverse world. Further, we see the task of transformation to be necessarily directed at ourselves as the members of modern cultures complicit in the systems and thus perpetrating these disasters and oppressions. And this means all of us, those benefitting and those being exploited, which is a mixed bag, for we are all multiple subjects of its representational and material processes. Our desires, assumptions, hopes, and imaginations are shaped and reshaped there.

EcoJustice Education and pedagogies of responsibility begin from the necessity to acknowledge the vast diversity creating both living systems and human cultures. We recognize the ways relationships are, in every way, generative processes.
That is, when different elements in the world—biological, geological, or cultural—come into contact with each other, they create differences that make a difference (Bateson, 1972). As Martusewicz et al. (2015) put it

Diversity is the condition of difference created when there is a relationship between one thing or idea and anything else. When there is a relationship there is also a space of difference between the two things. And that space is very important when it comes to defining what anything means or what its value is in comparison to anything else. ... In this sense, difference isn’t really a thing, or an object, but rather a creative, or generative condition created because of relationships among things. ... Relationships are key to both democracy and sustainability. (p. 26)

As such, we also accept the responsibility of discerning together how to live in mutually supportive ways, even when those ways may not be clear or self-evident. This willingness to make ethical choices even in the face of all sorts of differences and uncertainty is at the heart of what it means to become educated (Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2005; Martusewicz, 2001). With Berry, we see this as requiring attention to our local places and communities first, aiming our work there specifically, even as we work to analyze the larger globalizing economic, political and cultural forces impinging on us and other creatures.

Thus, we begin from a position that defines education as a concept distinct from, although at times present in, schooling. While we work toward schooling that could contain these possibilities, education should be understood as a process that explicitly requires us to become ethical agents of healthy communities, and is therefore not necessarily located in institutionalized settings, or even formally named “education.” Our ethical choices—decisions made about what constitutes the “good” in our lives with and for others—are made as we bear witness to and respond in appropriate ways to both grief and joy, despair and flourishing. These are specific, sometimes paradoxical responsibilities that must be engaged in relations of teaching and learning wherever they take place.

Learning to acknowledge within our own bodies and souls the suffering of others and to use that particular corporal and spiritual experience to propel us into active expressions of mutuality and care is a necessary component of nurturing healthy relationships. Similarly, learning to embrace and rejoice in the happiness of others, allowing joy to bubble up as we witness their happiness and success helps to create the bonds of membership, a sense of belonging and mutuality that is necessary to life. Buddhists name this aspect of love “sympathetic joy.”

As we will lay out in the chapters that follow, these capacities—given shape by the development of specific skills and dispositions, practices and commitments—are what guide a pedagogy of responsibility. Berry insists that we will not address the problems that we face until we address the culture that we live in and
contribute to. And this is our commitment as EcoJustice educators too. Our work must be about examining ourselves as deeply implicated members of our society’s symbolic, material and psychological processes. Creating the sort of community members needed to challenge the problems we face must be intentional, focused and sustained political and ethical work. Educators, no matter what context they work in, whether formal or informal, need to understand how to create the proper conditions—the relationships and the lessons—to encourage our students to examine their unconscious patterns of belief and behavior as the means toward healthier, more responsible ways of living on this planet.

Further, as part of a challenge to ingrained patterns of violence, teachers and their students will need to embrace specific sensibilities related to care and restraint, humility and kindness, to imagine what it could mean to live by these and to help others to live by them. Berry is clear throughout his writing that human beings have specific responsibilities guided by fundamental principles required by life on this planet.

**Berry as a Philosopher of Education**

With this book, we bring Wendell Berry to the fore as an important educational philosopher, a thinker who insists that we understand our necessary immersion in complex and diverse living systems and thus our necessary embodied connections to the land and to each other. Berry’s critique of organizations created outside such a recognition—science, the medical professions, universities and schools, for example—helps us to make important distinctions between schooling as an institution created within the political and economic interests of the corporate controlled state, and education as a much broader set of relations and capacities that must be oriented toward learning from and protecting living systems as the source and sustenance of our own survival.

To make a claim for Berry as an important educational philosopher reminds me of a statement he makes in his preface to *The Way of Ignorance*

> Some people who have written about my essays have honored me by supposing that I am a philosopher or a scholar. I am neither. I have no talent for the abstract thought of philosophers and not much interest in it. My reading in philosophy is scant and unskilled. And though I have been a constant reader for most of my life, I have never read systematically. I own a fair number of useful books, but I don’t live near a good library, and I am in no sense a researcher. (Berry, 2005, p. x)

This understanding of philosophy that Berry uses to differentiate his own work is actually the meaning or the original intent of the word, *philosophia*, as the love of wisdom. Perhaps it would be more accurate to turn this phrase around, as Luce Irigaray (2002) has argued, to *the wisdom of love*. This turn of phrase seems closer
to Berry’s specific approach and commitments: “In my essays I have meant to speak for myself and nobody else. The work that I feel best about I have done as an amateur: for love” (Berry, 2005, p. x). Extending this further, he writes:

But in my essays especially I have been motivated also by fear of our violence to one another and to the world, and by hope that we might do better. If I had not been so reasonably afraid, my essays at least would have been much different and many fewer. (Berry, 2005, p. x)

This double sensibility between violence and love draws us to his work and a definition of education as requiring an ethical struggle toward well-being.

With me, the contributors to this book join a small cadre of educational scholars who have recognized Berry as “a genuinely radical thinker,” as Madhu Prakash (1994) writes, a scholar who challenges the dominant certainties of our modern institutions and instead “teaches us to live and learn on the human scale as communal beings, virtuous and ecologically literate” (p. 136) Similarly in line with our own interpretations, Paul Theobald and Dale Snauwaert (1993) recognize Berry’s important critique of schooling as fundamentally supporting social and ecological exploitation, and his advocacy for a vision of education as leading to virtues unifying nature and community life. “Knowledge” in Berry’s conception is “fundamentally experiential, imaginative relational and interactive with nature” (Theobald & Snauwaert, 1993, p. 3; see also Snauwaert, 1990). Further, as Jane Schreck argues in her dissertation (1990), Berry’s philosophy “centers on love as the best animator of learning: love among those teaching and learning, love for what can be learned, and love of how such learning can be applied in a beloved place on earth” (p. x).

This love is set against a culture of violence, in particular an economic system bent on creating tragedy. Henderson and Hursh (2014) examine Berry’s contributions to a critique of modern economic ideologies and structures. In particular, they expose the implications of neoliberalism for educational practices and policies as these impact social and ecological well-being in our communities drawing directly from Berry’s work. “Wendell Berry … challenges neoliberalism’s privileging of monetary values over all others, and the individual over relationships” (p. 175). Throughout his work Berry exposes “a creeping scientism at the expense of other, more local and embodied ways of knowing” (p. 177) which Henderson and Hursh recognize as linked to the ways national educational policies depend on conceptions of efficiency, “scientific evidence and progress to warrant a program of narrowly prescribed educational reforms” (p. 177).

While Henderson and Hursh focus primarily on K-12 education, others have focused on higher education (Baker & Bilbro, 2017; Bonzo & Stevens, 2008; Bouma-Prediger & Walsh, 2004), on what universities ought to focus on if we are to move toward more sustainable ways. I have been affirmed and informed by all of this work, as have my colleagues contributing to this book. The reader will
see the themes raised by these and many other scholars woven into the conversation that we undertake here to think through Berry’s deeply poignant insights contributing to a philosophy of education.

A Brief Biography: “Kentucky was my fate”

Wendell Berry was born in 1937, and grew up in Port Royal, (Henry County) Kentucky on a farm not far from where he lives today. His father was a lawyer who also farmed, and his grandparents were Depression Era farmers, so Wendell and his brother, John, learned what it meant to love the land through hard work and care from an early age. Writing of his father, a lawyer whose own father and grandfather were farmers and who, in spite of his profession, never turned from “an indissoluble devotion to the life of the earth … to the intricacy and beauty of the lives of things,” Berry remembers important lessons offered when he was a boy:

… he not only kept me within the reach and influence of my native and ancestral ground, he gave me every encouragement up to and including insistence, to learn everything I could about it. He talked and contrived endlessly that I should understand the land not as a commodity, an inert fact to be taken for granted, but as an ultimate value, enduring and alive, useful and beautiful and mysterious and formidable and comforting, beneficent and terribly demanding, worthy of the best of a man’s attention and care. (Berry, 2010a, p. 72)

Berry’s childhood was spent roaming his grandfather’s fields and woodland, where ultimately his soul was rooted. He spent his high school years at a military boarding school, but never lost a sense of deep belonging and longing for his childhood home. Revealing a deeply placed love and imagination that would animate his novels and poetry in particular, he recalls:

… when I was away at school, I could comfort myself by recalling in intricate detail the fields I had worked and played in, and hunted over, and ridden through on horseback—and that were richly associated in my mind with people and stories. I could recall even the casual locations of certain small rocks. I could recall the look of a hundred different kinds of daylight on all those places, the look of animals grazing over them, the postures and attitudes and movements of the men who worked in them … I had come to be aware of it as one is aware of one’s own body … (Berry, 2012a, pp. 193–194)

Pursuing his love of writing, he went on to the University of Kentucky where he earned BA and MA degrees (1956, 1957) in English Literature. In 1957, he
married his UK classmate Tanya Amyx and moved with her to study with renowned novelist Wallace Stegner at Stanford University. Stegner’s deep love of the Western landscape, and his understanding of the kinds of losses endured at the hands of expansionist capitalism was a perfect fit for Berry’s own sensibilities, and so Wendell began to write about life in Henry County, Kentucky, publishing his first novel, *Nathan Coulter* in 1960. Awarded a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1961, he lived with Tanya and their first child in Italy and France for a year and then moved to New York City to take a teaching position at New York University. Berry describes those years as representing a more general cultural milieu where “cosmopolitanism,” leaving home, and becoming ensconced in urban life were the credentials of a successful literary life. In his own words:

… hadn’t I achieved what had become one of the most traditional goals of American writers? I had reached the greatest city in the nation; I had a good job; I was meeting other writers and talking with them and learning from them. I had reason to hope that I might take a still larger part in the literary life of that place. (Berry, 2012a, p. 195)

But, as he goes on to say, he “had not escaped Kentucky” (p. 195). His own literary work, his essays, novels and poetry were already being set in his Kentucky homeplace, examining the demise of rural agricultural life. His deep love of the place, his worry for it, all he had learned as a boy about the soil, the woods, the animals (wild and domesticated), the running of the farms, the relationships with generations of people who had toiled on that particular land, all this and more was working through him. His own writing began to disrupt the whole idea that success or happiness or well-being could be found in the literary world of the city, and in 1962, the Berry family moved back to Kentucky.

Amidst great disappointment and disavowal from colleagues in New York, Berry took a position in the English department at the University of Kentucky (Bonzo & Stevens, 2008). By 1965, he and Tanya made the decision to move with their two children back to Henry County, buying a farm in need of attention on a hillside near the banks of the Kentucky River, and joining six previous generations in Berry’s family to care for this land.

In a beautiful autobiographical essay, called “A Native Hill” (2012a), he reflects on this decision to come home. In this essay, he and his dog take us on a walk up the hill upon which his farm is nestled, and as he walks he recounts the history of this land, the mistakes made that have damaged the soil, the reclaiming of old tobacco fields by the surrounding woods, hollows, and streams. This early essay, written in the late 1960s, reads as a map of the influences of the people and the place on the next 50 years of his life and work. We see emerge here the questions that would shape the rest of his life’s work and that reflect the very character of the man. These are questions that we too embrace as essential articulations of
responsibility in the act of becoming educated as an attached, careful member of a place.

When I have thought of the welfare of the earth, the problems of its health and preservation, the care of its life, I have had this place before me, the part representing the whole more vividly and accurately, making clearer and more pressing demands, than any idea of the whole. When I have thought of kindness or cruelty, weariness or exuberance, devotion or betrayal, carelessness or care, doggedness or awkwardness or grace, I had in my mind’s eye the men and women of this place, their faces and gestures and movements … every day I am confronted by the question of what inheritance I will leave. What do I have that I am using up. (Berry 2012a, pp. 194–195)

And further on in the same essay:

… I have at last arrived at the candor necessary to stand on this part of the earth that is so full of my own history and so much damaged by it and ask: What is this place? What is in it? What is its nature? How should men [sic] live in it? What must I do? … the questions are more important than the answers. They are a part of the necessary enactment of humility, teaching a man what his importance is, what his responsibility is, and what his place is, both on the earth and in the order of things. (p. 223)

The presence of the creation here makes this a holy place, and it is as a pilgrim that I have come. It is the creation that has attracted me, its perfect interfusion of life and design. I have made myself its follower and its apprentice. (Berry, 2012a, p. 226)

From this place and their commitments to it, Tanya and Wendell Berry raised their children, both of whom now live nearby and continue their family legacy as caretakers of the land. For the last 50 years, they have raised sheep on their hillside, used Percheron draft horses to plow and plant fields, grown vegetables in a kitchen garden, and created together a legacy.

We have heard Berry scoffed at for what some academics see as nostalgia for a time gone by, but this is a critical error in interpretation. Berry is not asking us to return to some romantic version of the past (an impossibility); he acknowledges the deeds of his own people on the land, on the people enslaved to work it, and on those who came before his ancestors as steeped in violence. He is deeply ashamed and pained by that history as we will explore further in Chapters 4 and 5 (see, in particular, Berry, 1996, 2010a).

I am forever being crept up on and newly startled by the realization that my people established themselves here by killing or driving out the original
possessors, by the awareness that people were once bought and sold here by my people, by the sense of the violence they have done to their own kind and to each other and to the earth, by the evidence of their persistent failure to serve either the place or their own community in it. I am forced, against all my hopes and inclinations, to regard the history of my people here as the progress of the doom of what I value most in the world: the life and health of the earth, the peacefulness of human communities and households. (Berry, 2012a, p. 200)

With this reflection, Berry admonishes us to struggle against the cultural amnesia that erases from our minds and hearts the violence done to establish our lives in our particular places. He lets such recognition creep up on him, settle in, and push him to consider all that has been lost to expansionist capitalism, and what it requires of us now as we identify and work to remedy the damages done to soil, forests, people and creatures by extraction and dispossession. I will have more to say about the ways settler colonialism works to degrade and dispossess Indigenous peoples in North America across the world in Chapter 4.

Berry has put himself to the task of righting wrongs by educating himself about the history of this land, its people, and its creatures, to become, as he says, its apprentice. He asks us to use that wisdom to imagine what could be possible, what we must learn to look for if we are to stop the demise of our communities, what our deepest commitments must be to the people, the land and other species with whom we share this planet. While there is nothing simple in the practice of love and responsibility, if we abandon the relationships, attractions, and affections that create these as the most practical forms of wisdom, there will be no hope for sustaining life on this planet. Serious business, then, without a doubt, but a commitment that this book takes on by learning through the lessons Berry offers us.

**Agrarianism, Democracy, and Christianity**

In an essay called “Is Life a Miracle?” Berry lays out the general scholarly landscape and inheritances defining his life’s work:

My resources are the things in my cultural inheritance that I have recognized as my own and have tried to live up to: agrarianism, democracy, and Christianity. I believe:

1. That good farming and good forestry are fundamental goods, for those who do the work and for those for whom the work is done.
2. That it is wrong for people to be excluded from decisions that affect their lives.
3. That everything that exists is a divine gift, which places us in a position of extreme danger, solvable only by love for everything that exists including our enemies. (Berry, 2003, pp. 181–182)
This book is about the ways his commitments to these lines of influence help us to define our own work as EcoJustice educators. While the book is not about agrarianism directly, we understand Berry’s attention in this area to be fundamentally about ecological principles, what we ought to mean by “economy” as the essential work of provisioning a household and community, and what values are needed by communities if we are to achieve a healthy and sustainable life. For Berry, the farm is primarily defined by relationships that if operating within a certain principled order will result in balance, care, and well-being not only for humans, but for the other creatures inhabiting a place as well. In his attention to his own place, we learn about Berry’s fidelity to embodied work done well, work that leads to providing for basic needs. He focuses our attention on the sanctity of the body inseparable from the mind or the soul employed with skill to create “enough”—what humans need to live well with other humans and other creatures without abusing the carrying capacity of the land. His views about democracy ground the concept of membership woven through the narrative of his novels in particular, but also the way he defines justice in communitarian terms. For Berry, decisions should be made by those most affected, and community membership must include other living communities and creatures for whom those decisions matter as well. And his reliance on the teachings of Christianity, especially the Gospels, offer what he sees as primary lessons about the values needed to live an orderly life within Creation. His interpretations and questions about these teachings bring him solidly back to the necessity to care for the soil and each other as gifts and as the basis of a spiritually and earthly whole. Indeed, for Berry, while he acknowledges that his questions and these principles are religious, he insists that they are of, and for, the earth. He writes,

… my questions do not aspire beyond the earth. They aspire toward it and into it. Perhaps they aspire through it. They are religious because they are asked at the limit of what I know, they acknowledge mystery and honor its presence in the creation; they are spoken in reverence for the order and grace that I see and that I trust beyond my power to see. (Berry, 2012a, p. 224)

This sensibility runs through everything he writes. And, while I do not identify as a Christian, I do connect strongly with this recognition of the sacred nature of earthly creation and our responsibilities as humans to it.

Berry’s stories, his poems, and his critical essays, all written from this Henry County place, revolve around what it would mean to take these ways of relating seriously as primary guidance for how we should live together in our particular cultural and biological landscapes. Therefore, when we identify these practices, we are aiming at specific forms of teaching and learning embedded in a love of place, in a deep understanding of what the land and its creatures require of us, what it means to make important decisions together, and why our extractive
economic, political and social systems are altogether deadly. Each chapter in this book expands on particular elements of this task. While it is in no way comprehensive, I hope that it will give some indication of the important influence Berry has had on the requirements of a pedagogy of responsibility.

The Kingdom of God as the Great Economy

Berry’s work always begins from a powerful faith in the absolute integrity of the living creatures with whom we share this planet, and their productive, transformative connections with each other and with us. This is the living world—both material and incorporeal—made of actual living bodies and their non-material relations in time and space. For Berry there can be no division between the corporeal material of the living earth and what we call spirit, for both are creative of life’s wheel of becoming.

Yet in this industrial culture we are taught to think and behave as if the world is outside of us and made of resources put there for our own use or entertainment. The institutions, behaviors, desires, and habits created within our taken-for-granted structures of extraction and selfish accumulation are organized by the drive to master, possess, and use others for our own selfish gains. For industrial systems and its members, the value of any creature, human or otherwise (in particular those whose being is inferiorized), is in our ability to be transformed into profit. And yet, other ways of being in relations of exchange exist and have existed for a long time; these other ways attended carefully by Berry beckon us toward life affirming possibilities for our communities.

In an essay entitled “Two Economies” first published in 1988, Berry describes a set of principles at the heart of all living relations, challenging those beliefs, practices and values that currently guide dominant industrialized human economies. He names the system within which these principles operate, the Kingdom of God, then goes on to offer a more general concept, the Great Economy, in order to acknowledge its general lessons within other cultural and religious frameworks. His aim is to teach his readers what is required of us as humans interacting with a complex and vulnerable living world, what our mistakes have been in our construction of what he calls “the little economy” (our human economy), and what our responsibilities ought to be in correcting those mistakes. The principles that he names offer important guidelines for what a responsible and responsive life must attend to, what it means to become educated within relationships defined by an eco-ethical consciousness and its corresponding commitments. I offer them here and we return to them throughout this book.

The first principle is that the Great Economy includes everything and every relationship on the planet Earth and in the universe. We are all members of this extravagant and mysterious system whether we understand it or not, or whether we desire to be in it or not. Thus, “the fall of every sparrow is a significant event” (Berry, 2010a, p. 116). To be human is to be a creature within this given Creation,
not separate or superior, but in it and of it. Everything we do or know is produced within, and a product of, this complex generative system.

The second principle is that there is an order to this set of relationships, and we are part of that order, again whether we know it or not, which means that we have certain responsibilities which must be respected. As Burley Coulter, one of the characters in his Port William stories says, “It’s not who’s in it and who ain’t, but who knows it and who don’t” (Berry, 2004, p. 97). “Knowing it” means that we take our places in it with our particular capacities not as a matter of control or possession, but rather developing relationships that nourish it and help us all to flourish.

The third principle is that we can never know finally all the complexity that this order entails. We will always be limited in what we can know simply by virtue of being human in a complex and ever-changing world; indeed, as Berry puts it, we must accept that we are essentially ignorant even as we work hard to understand what our places in the world require of us. “The way of ignorance” means accepting that there will always be mysteries beyond our reach. Accepting this requires a certain amount of humility while we seek to define and develop our particular abilities. “The order,” he says, “is both greater and more intricate than we can know” (Berry, 2010a, p. 116). This raises a certain unavoidable paradox that defines both ethics and education: while we must seek what it means to live a good life with others, we will never fully know the answer in any final way. We must seek with our questions and offer ourselves to the world, but there will always be more questions as soon as we believe them to be answered.

The fourth principle states that while we cannot know it fully, if we presume to be outside this complex order, or if we endeavor to control it for our own ends only, we do so at our own peril. As Gregory Bateson (2000) put it in Steps to an Ecology of Mind: “Lack of systemic wisdom is always punished” (p. 240). Any creature that imagines itself outside of this system of intelligence and order will wreak havoc upon it and thus upon itself. Again, if we believe we are the ones who know and thus see ourselves as superior to all other life forms, our arrogance will be our own undoing. On the other hand, recognizing ourselves to be members of an order much larger than ourselves, we will act with the requisite care and humility.

Finally, the fifth principle recognizes that we can never be certain about “forever,” the time we have left as a species, or that this Great Economy of the Earth has in the cosmos, and yet we must continue to work to secure a balanced life in the present for ourselves and the earth’s living systems. This fifth principle reminds us that the regenerative nature of creation must be nurtured, protected as our fundamental responsibility. Pleasure, satisfaction and happiness are most valuable in work aimed at the protection and nurture of the lives and relationships that create places and communities. No matter what the future holds, we cannot fully know it, and we must accept our responsibility to the places and people where we live now. That responsibility includes a willingness to identify and challenge those systemic forces that impinge upon the well-being of those places as a part of the love that we develop for them.
Recognizing the ethical, ontological and epistemological implications of these principles requires that we imagine who we ought to be in relation to other living creatures and to each other. Living within the Great Economy, humans are required to organize ourselves in order to acquire what we need to live well together. Like other creatures, we must eat, shelter ourselves, reproduce, care for each other, and so on. And as such we will create, as we have created throughout history, our own particular and diverse ways of producing and exchanging the goods and services needed to live. Everything humans need to live is sourced here, in the Great Economy, and understanding this means that we must learn to take care of those relationships, even while recognizing that we will never know enough. We are, as Wes Jackson implores us to remember, land-based creatures (Berry, Jackson, & Berry, 2016), and to the degree that we do not acknowledge that, we put everything, ourselves included, in peril. Understanding this requires us to honor the gift of life provided by the earth. It requires that we create a little human economy that is in proper relation to the Great Economy.

This question of use invariably introduces an important ethical requirement if we recognize the principles of the Great Economy laid out above.

If we believed that the existence of the world is rooted in mystery and in sanctity, then we would have a different economy. It would still be an economy of use, necessarily, but it would be an economy also of return. The economy would have to accommodate the need to be worthy of the gifts we receive and use, and this would involve a return of propitiation, praise, gratitude, responsibility, good use, good care, and a proper regard for future generations. (Berry, 2003, pp. 146–147)

A human economy will be a good economy, or a “considerate economy” as Berry puts it, if it fits harmoniously within the Great Economy, if it protects it and nurtures it as the very source of its own possibility. It “must correspond to the Great Economy; in certain important ways, it must be an analogue of the Great Economy” (Berry 2010a, p. 120, emphasis added).

And yet, living in such a consumerist and profit-oriented culture, we tend not to notice the Great Economy at all. Instead, we assume that our scientific and technological creativity is what is most important for our survival and continued success as a dominant civilization. With Berry, we are concerned about what is destroyed when our human economy overlooks or ignores the gifts offered by the Great Economy. This critique is developed directly out of embracing the intangible virtues and values that Berry helps us to articulate.

Once we acknowledge the existence of the Great Economy, ... we are astonished and frightened to see how much modern enterprise is the work of hubris, occurring outside the human boundary established by ancient tradition. The industrial economy is based on invasion and pillage of the Great Economy. (Berry, 2010a, p. 126)
As the late Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood (1993, 2002) argued, in modern industrial cultures we learn to homogenize and background those complex ecological processes as “nature,” something separate, “out there,” and thus either invisible or simply not important enough to think much about except as resources to be commodified and used. When discourses of human supremacy are put together with mechanistic ways of thinking—the idea that “nature is like a machine”—we find systematic violence that treats living creatures as commodities, rivers, lakes and oceans as dumping grounds and drains for toxic industrial and domestic waste, and forests valued in measures of board feet called timber. Such practices desecrate the sanctity of our land, our water, and the other creatures that inhabit these regions, and, in the process, we inflict a deep wound upon our own humanity.

Linking human supremacist world views with other intersecting discourses is a central task of EcoJustice Education. Anthropocentrism, or the idea of human-centered attitudes, beliefs and practices has been central to that analysis. In a conversation at his farm one summer afternoon, Berry brought me up short as I began to articulate this critique using the concept of anthropocentrism. Providing a different take, he argued that all species are “centric” beings; that is, all species work toward their own specific survivability and regeneration, including humans, and this is right and good, a part of the world’s order. We humans will never be sparrow-centric, or snake-centric, or dog-centric, or possum-centric, or dragonfly-centric. We are humans with faculties for self-reflectivity and rational decision-making that include the capacity for massive mistakes in relation to the Great Economy, and yet deep love and care for other living creatures as well.

The key for Berry is that we understand the world as created by a complex, mysterious and sacred diversity of life. Each species has its own purpose and integrity, each individual creature its own need, and trajectory. We must thus accept with humility our own particular role in maintaining the “wheel of life,” even while we cannot finally know all its ins and outs. We must recognize our fundamental ignorance, according to Berry, a position that ultimately confronts human supremacy as the right to dominate (Berry, 2016, 2005). As I hope to make clear throughout this book, there is a difference between humble forms of human centeredness and arrogant forms that lead to violence. Again, attending to the principles of the Great Economy, learning to recognize ourselves as fundamentally limited creatures is key to creating more careful, caring relationships that could begin to help heal the wounds of our industrial economy.

**Education for Eco-Ethical Becoming**

Remember back to the poem I shared at the start of this chapter: “… wave after wave of foliage and fruit” and “the strenuous outline of enough.” How do we teach and learn within the limits of our planetary existence and humanness, even as we honor the extravagant beauty, power, and gift that is life on earth? This
book explores this question beginning from a definition of education as a set of relationships committed to developing ethical responses to the world first and foremost, not as a final project, but as an ongoing process of becoming. The practices that guide those relationships, which we name pedagogies of responsibility, are shaped by our acknowledgment of and commitment to the principles of the Great Economy. Value, Berry insists, can only be found in the Great Economy—in the patterns, and productivity, and transformative processes of what we call “nature,” but that includes us, our bodies and minds and our capacities for creative and conserving work. Everything that we need to create the good community is sourced in these complex generative relationships. “A good human economy,” Berry tells us,

would recognize at the same time that it was dealing all along with materials and powers that it did not make. It did not make trees, and it did not make the intelligence and talents of the human workers. What humans have added at every step is artificial, made by art, and though the value of art is critical to human life, it is a secondary value. (Berry, 2010a, p. 122; emphasis added)

Our craft as educators is to pass on these principles, to ask our students to address the specifics of how we could live by them in our specific places. How do we make our lives within the necessary principles of the Great Economy, recognizing both the limits of our capacities to know it in any final way, and the limits imposed by the natural order of diverse living systems? How do we translate those principles into virtues and character traits practicable by individuals to guide us in creating mutually caring relationships with others, and practical contributions as members of living communities?

As we develop throughout the rest of the book, Berry’s answer is love, not as some simple romantic notion, but rather as it is enacted in the forms of devotion and responsibility required by the principles of the Great Economy, that is by life on Earth. Pedagogies of responsibility are characterized by three irreducible aspects: first, they are constructed out of the confluences of place, creaturehood, and community; second, they are enacted through imagination, sympathy and affection; and third, their purpose, as its name suggests, is the promotion of responsibility characterized by forbearance, humility, and care. These aspects, of course, require that, as we enact imagination and move toward responsible action, we begin to see what has gone wrong, what cultural, political and economic forces, relations and assumptions are wreaking havoc on places, creatures, and communities across the world, and what we should do about it.

There is an important tension between what I call eco-ethical becoming and the need to learn to stay home, to become caretakers of a particular place and its creatures. Becoming is part of a specifically generative and affirmative process that is necessarily creative of all sorts of possibilities. When it is engaged as part of a strictly ethical project, as a means of taking care of ourselves, each other and the
land, a set of limits is presented that are defined locally. Thus, eco-ethical becoming is not a universalizing process; it is tuned to place, while attentive to larger contexts and forces affecting those places, specifically the creatures who share those places.

So, we ask with Berry as our guide, what sorts of knowledge are needed by members of communities in the specific ecological and cultural localities where they dwell? What sorts of economic relationships would be appropriate in those places? What would decision-making practices look like if the principles of the Great Economy guided their responsibilities to each other and the earth? With our students we are learning to ask, what does a good human economy in a healthy, that is whole, community look like? What does it require of us? In short, what is education for?

To be so committed does not mean that we must rely only on institutions to do the teaching, and certainly not the government to tell us how to do it, or where, or when. Indeed, as Berry adamantly insists throughout his work, and as we will discuss throughout this book, institutions created by the state to support a globalizing extractive economic system are often the worst places to imagine such possibilities. And yet, schools are where our children and their teachers are for hours each day ten months of the year or more. Thus, as teacher educators, we are faced with a critical opportunity and responsibility.

We honor the teachers in schools or universities who, in spite of the political and curricular limitations they are constrained by, engage such responsibility with their students and in their day-to-day lives. We work with educators across the US, Canada, Finland, Jamaica, Australia, Central Asia and other places who, in a variety of contexts, are seriously committed to challenging the industrial complexes and supporting ideologies currently destroying our communities. We will tell their stories here as often as possible. But we also acknowledge that teachers everywhere are under tremendous pressure to do as state mandates connected to corporate interests bid them to do. The more schools and universities are controlled by market fundamentalism and associated neoliberal political processes, the more teachers are pressed to perform for those interests over the interests of the commonwealth. EcoJustice Education offers a way out of that dilemma and toward a strong community of support.

We choose love in the form of active collective responsibility and meaningful work as an antidote for despair and exhaustion. Let us find strength in the gift of Creation and in the recognition that the economic and political systems we have now are disastrous for all life. We offer this book as a commitment to engage with others in this essential care for the planet as our only home. Let our work together, our pedagogical relationships and ethical commitments be the light we need to guide us out of darkness, a source of courage and hope to those going forward.

It is hard to have hope. It is harder as you grow old, for hope must not depend on feeling good and there is the dream of loneliness at absolute midnight.
You also have withdrawn belief in the present reality of the future, which surely will surprise us, and hope is harder when it cannot come by prediction any more than by wishing. But stop dithering. The young ask the old to hope. What will you tell them? Tell them at least what you say to yourself. Because we have not made our lives to fit our places, the forests are ruined, the fields eroded, the streams polluted, the mountains, overturned. Hope then to belong to your place by your own knowledge of what it is that no other place is, and by your caring for it, as you care for no other place, this knowledge cannot be taken from you by power or by wealth. It will stop your ears to the powerful when they ask for your faith, and to the wealthy when they ask for your land and your work. Be still and listen to the voices that belong to the stream banks and the trees and the open fields. Find your hope, then, on the ground under your feet. Your hope of Heaven, let it rest on the ground underfoot. The world is no better than its places. Its places at last are no better than their people while their people continue in them. When the people make dark the light within them, the world darkens.

(Wendell Berry, 2010b, pp. 91–93)

Note

1 Here I acknowledge the contributions of John Mullen to this particular wording and to this chapter more generally as he read and commented on several drafts.

References


Introduction: Toward a Pedagogy of Responsibility


Neoliberalism and the Dis-membering of Community


The Bonds of Love


Settler Colonialism and The Unsettling of America

Degraded Bodies, Degraded Earth

STEM Education and the Miracle of Life
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Health as Holism


Re-membering the Room of Love


What is Education For?