

Can we move beyond 'Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad' in
thinking about people and the environment?

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Paper for 15th National Outdoor Education Conference

Ballarat – 20 -23 September 2007

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Abstract:

Bucknell & Mannion (2007) commented that student responses in the 2006 VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies (OES) exam could be boiled down to the simple formula of “Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad” (p. 8). They suggest that the subject of OES is too rich for such pat answers. This paper uses this formula of ‘Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad’ as a springboard to explore some of the ways notions of the environment, race and ethnicity intersect and how this is taken up in the OES curriculum. The aim of this paper is to highlight some of the productive tensions of environment, race and ethnicity as a strategy for richer and more complex debates around peoples’ interactions with the environment.

Introduction

In this paper I explore the question of how might outdoor education and environmental education respond to the challenge of incorporating Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge in a meaningful way in these areas of study. The Victorian Outdoor and Environmental Studies (OES) curriculum is used as a context in which to locate this discussion as it explicitly engages with the question of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of relating to natural environments. I would suggest that the Victorian curriculum is not unique in producing a response of ‘Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad’ to the question of the relationships people have with nature. Both the notion of Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad and the silence around this, is one that I have encountered in other contexts. It is expressed in many ways on our program at Monash University. Indigenous history and ways of knowing the land are seen as something the students should come to

know about. When it is spoken of it is presented as both a different way of relating to nature and it is also seen as a 'better' way of relating to nature. Curriculum documents do not stand alone; rather they reflect broader discourses informing race, ethnicity and environment. As such, curriculum documents are a rich site to explore these discourses.

This paper starts with a description of the OES curriculum to provide a context through which to examine the ways in which race, ethnicity and environment intersect. This is further located in the outdoor and environmental education literature. Then I turn to a discussion on some of the ways in which race and environment are written about. This is tied to different ways of knowing that Indigenous and Western knowledge provide. Western knowledge is the dominant way of understanding the world and this has implications for how Indigenous people are seen. I then return to the curriculum documents and look how Indigenous and Australians are portrayed in this curriculum area. The paper finishes with a discussion on colouring in whiteness, foregrounding the unmarked marker of whiteness as a strategy to engage with the questions of race, ethnicity and environment.

Outdoor and Environmental Studies (OES)

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) refers to the final two years of secondary schooling in Victoria. Each study or subject area consists of four units of work. Generally students complete units one and two in Year 11 and units three and four in Year 12. Units three and four are assessed with an external exam. OES is an elective subject. The rationale for OES is as follows:

Outdoor and Environmental Studies is a study of the ways humans interact with and relate to natural environments. Natural environments are understood to include

environments that have minimum influence from humans, but they may also include environments that have been subject to human intervention. Ultimately, the study is directed towards enabling students to make critically informed comment on questions of environmental sustainability and to understand the importance of environmental health, particularly in local contexts.

(VCAA, 2005, p. 7).

The aims of the OES study area to enable students to:

- Develop experience-based relationships with, and knowledge of, natural environments;
- Develop an understanding of the ecological, historical, economic and social factors which have had an impact on and will influence natural environments over time;
- Develop skills and knowledge that promote safe, sustainable interaction with natural environments;
- Develop skills and knowledge to live comfortably for short durations in natural environments;
- Identify and analyse the strategies and rationales used to protect, conserve and manage natural environments in a sustainable manner;
- Understand the implications of trends towards sustainable environmental relationships;
- Critically analyse interactions with natural environments in shaping Australian cultural practices.

(VCAA, 2005, p. 8)

The study is divided into the following four units;

Unit 1: Understanding outdoor experiences

Unit 2: Environmental impacts

Unit 3: Relationships with natural environments

Unit 4: The future of human-nature interactions

It is unit three and four that I will focus on in this paper as these units are primarily concerned with human relationships to natural environments, although the theme does permeate and inform all four units.

Unit 3: Relationships with natural environments is composed of two areas of study. The first is Historical Perspectives. This area focuses on how Australians have understood and interacted with natural environments over time. This area is divided into three time frames beginning with Indigenous cultures, then early non-Indigenous settlers from the gold rush period to Federation, and since Federation. These demarcations have been chosen because of key events occurring at these times. This investigation is supported with practical outdoor experiences.

The second area of study in unit three is contemporary relationships with natural environments. The key knowledge areas include the patterns and types of interaction with natural environments and contemporary views of natural environments.

Unit 4: The future of human-nature interactions is also composed to two areas of study. One is 'Healthy natural environments'. This explores "the contemporary state of environments in Australia and the importance of natural environments to individuals and society. The current and potential impact of damage to natural environments on both individuals and society should be considered" (VCAA, 2005, p. 24). Area two of this unit of study is sustaining environments and focuses on the sustainability of environments,

conflicts of interest between different groups of people and methods and processes commonly used to resolve these conflicts.

The OES is focused on human relationships with natural environments. The way in which the students' responses in the exam could be boiled down to 'Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad', in relation to historical relationships with the environment begs the question of how both humans and the natural environment being conceptualised to make this response seem like coherent and plausible response to the question of human relationships with the natural environment. From this leads another question of how, as a white educator I might engage with the issue of human relationships with the natural environment to enable a richer and more complex debate around peoples' interactions with the environment.

As Bucknell and Mannion (2007) rightly point out exam questions do not lend themselves to full and complex answers. While the pat answer the students gave of 'Indigenous good and non-Indigenous bad' may only represent some of their knowledge it is worthwhile considering why all students boiled their answer down to this simple response. Why does the binary of good / bad appear to be such a useful resource for these students? I now turn to a brief review of outdoor education literature to canvass how race and environment have been engaged with.

Outdoor education literature, race and environment

The broader question of race and ethnicity makes a surprisingly limited appearance in the mainstream outdoor education literature. One strand of this literature is exemplified by Karen Warren's (1998) call for facilitation that is sensitive to race, gender and class or Washington & Roberts (1999) discussion on educating for cultural diversity. Oles (1995) argues that one of the "more pervasive bandwagons [in North American outdoor and experiential education] has been the trend of latching on to rituals and practices of various Native American tribes and other aboriginal groups" (p. 195). In this article he questions some of the ways in which these rituals and practices are misappropriated and not only become meaningless but cause offence. More recently Potter & Henderson (2004) identify a recent acknowledgement of Native people in the practice of outdoor education in Canada today.

While there is extensive literature on the role that outdoor education may or may not play in developing relationships and understandings of nature, it is the literature on outdoor education and place that appears to be paying closer attention to both Indigenous and Western knowledge. Stewart (2004), for example, challenges the reader to consider the different ways of knowing the Murray River that Indigenous and Western knowledge afford. He starts by pointing the ways in which Western knowledge works to colonise nature, where all places are assumed to be "empty of history, both natural and cultural" (p. 46). While the focus of his paper is on connecting with places and with nature, Indigenous knowledge is inextricably entangled in this. Not only does it contribute to the cultural context but he evokes Plumwood's (2003) argument that "individual connections with, or belonging to, the land that are independent of Indigenous understandings would be 'fake'; that any personal understating needs to be in relation to historical and cultural context, of which an individual is a part" (cited in Stewart, 2004, p. 50).

Wattchow (2005) canvasses similar terrain in *Belonging to the proper country: Australian outdoor education as experiencing relationships in place*. He makes the point that much of the Australian writing on the subject of place is concerned with “an exercise in building and challenging national identity, rather than an effort to open up an intimate and reciprocal relationship with local and specific places” (p. 23). Drawing on the work of Peter Reed, Wattchow (2005) makes the point that “reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and the differences of multiple migrant perspectives and experiences in place must co-exist in the aspirations of our educational philosophy and pedagogy” (p. 24).

These writers are grappling with the question of how we develop relationships with the places we visit in outdoor education and whose stories need to be told for those relationships to be meaningful. The question I am interested in exploring is what those stories mean. In this I am particularly interested in what implications do the stories we tell of Indigenous people have in relation to ways we understand ourselves as white people and also how we understand Indigenous people in the world today. It is at this point that I turn to some of the literature that brings together race and environment.

Race and environment

There has been much written about the environment, nature, environmental education and environmental ethics. There has also been a great deal written in many disciplines about race. A number of writers comment that there is limited work that brings the two fields together. Mosley (2006) points out that environmental topics are absent from the debates that occur in social history, even though writers in the field have suggested that ecological catastrophe may be the greatest danger facing humanity in the new millennium. Ignatow

(2005) makes a similar point, stating that “much has been written on multiculturalism and the emergence of identity politics worldwide since the 1970s, while little has been written linking multiculturalism and identity politics to environmental politics” (p. 93). This lack is surprising given that environmental issues both reflect and “cohere along, racial and gender lines, thus demonstrating the importance of ‘intersectional; ways of thinking ‘green’ – with race and racism a critical axis” (Hicks, 2006, p. 203).

The environment in it all of its permutations and race are both difficult subjects. As Raymond Williams (1988) has pointed out, nature may be one of the most complex words in the English language¹. Race is no less complex. Both race and Indigenous knowledge have attracted much definitional energy. Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Luik (2004) suggest that broadly there have been and continue to be three competing ways of interpreting race. These are “as (a) biologically determined, (b) ideologically constructed and (c) socially constituted” (p. 23). Establishing biological criteria was fraught with difficulty. Various tests were conducted to establish the superiority of white people over coloured people. They point to the recent re-emergence of this type of research and argue that this “biologically determinist work...continue[s] to insert fallacious racial signs, symbols and ‘facts’ into social consciousness” (p. 24). While the major debates around race are now concerned with the ways in which race is socially constructed they go on to argue that “because racialized bodies have been historically framed, positioned and pathologised in specifically negative ways, the discourse of biological determinism has been deeply naturalised and legitimized as ‘truth’ and ‘commonsense’ (Dei, et, al 2004, p. 26).

Nayak (2006) reminds the reader that “*there is no such thing as race*” (p. 411, original emphasis) and then goes on to state that the fact there is no such thing as race has not

lessened the impact of race as a form of social organisation. The theorisation of race as socially constituted has not countered the “still voracious appetite for approaches that freeze, objectify and tame ‘race’/ethnicity into unitary categories that can be easily understood and managed” (Gunaratman, 2003, cited in Nayak, 2006, p. 417). While race may be a social construct, Smith (1999) reminds us that “imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly” (p. 19). Race may be a fiction, but it is also invested with ontological value. As such Nayak (2006) argues race has taken on a rarefied status. The challenge for those who write and discuss the topic of race is how to do this in such a way that does not reiterate and reify the very categories that are sought to be dismantled. This is both the part of the dangerous terrain that Semali & Kincheloe (1999) refer to and the site of productive tension that Nayak (2006) uses to explore race politics and theory.

Nayak (2006) makes the point that constructionism has not replaced essentialism as a lens through which to view and understand the operations of race. Rather, he suggests, “essentialism and constructionism overlay one another” (p. 420). While race may be a fiction and socially constituted, the ways in which it can and does get lived can appear as if race were an essential category, as if black and white bodies did exist and certain cultural practices and beliefs were fastened to these bodies. “Black and white are relational and mutually constitutive” (Nayak, 2006, p. 419). Constituting Indigenous as good only makes sense in relation to non-Indigenous as bad. Both the assignment of good and bad and the ways in which good and bad are understood change depending on the needs of the social and cultural context. Depending on the needs of the time – Indigenous are cast as bad – if there is a need to possess land or enhance the notion of civilisation of Western society – or Indigenous is cast as good, as appears to be the case in the VCE curriculum. Berkhofer (1979, cited in Grande, 1999) argues that while the image may shift from ‘good’ to ‘bad’

this is always in relation to the needs of the white population. “So when white civilization is in favour, Indians [Berkhofer was writing about North America] are deemed ignoble, and when white civilization is in disfavour, ‘Indian-ness’ becomes the elixir” (Grande, 1999, p. 309). The need for the elixir is tied to the current environmental challenges and crisis discourses used to frame these.

Semali & Kincheloe (1999) comment that “Indigenous knowledge is an ambiguous topic that immediately places analysts on a dangerous terrain” (p. 3). The ambiguity and danger comes from being unsure as to what exactly Indigenous knowledge is and an uncertainty about who should or could be talking about this knowledge. Given the ambiguity and complexity of both the environment and therefore, environmental education, and of Indigenous knowledge it may be unsurprising that many scholars have been hesitant to explore the ways in which these bodies of knowledge might intersect and the effect this has in what becomes possible to learn at an educational site such as the OES curriculum. It is also unsurprising that both teachers and students undertaking this subject reduce the complexity of race and environment to ‘Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad’. Hicks, (2006) warns those engaged in questions of environment and race need to be aware of essentialism and reductionism that leads to good / bad binaries. One of the ways in which it is tricky to avoid this binary is that it is not only tied to ways of being, it is also tied to ways of producing knowledge.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous and Western knowledge are broadly described through two narratives which define both what it is possible to know and also how it is possible to know. This in turn influences the ways in which Indigenous and Western people relate to and interact with the land. From the period of the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution, the way of understanding the world has been through objective reason, which places the observer outside of the world they are observing (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Building on the Cartesian dualism that separated the mind from the body, the mind was elevated as the vehicle through which the world could be understood. There was a 'real' world out there and this world could be understood if it was dissected to its constituent parts and from this predictions could then be made about the future. Knowledge derived in a rational manner, through objective processes was also construed as neutral and thought to be able to explain all aspects of the physical and the social world. One of the key points that many writers make when retelling this narrative is that it is a "one-truth epistemology" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 27). Scientific method and rational thought are the only ways to understand the world and the only ways to find the 'unbiased truth'. The project of Western science is to produce universal knowledge. This is supported by monotheism of the Judeo-Christian traditions of the West. The effect of this is to separate Westerners from the world they inhabit as the legitimate way of coming to know that world is through objective observation. Human beings are located outside of and in control of the natural world in which they live. This disconnection and belief of control are frequently evoked when causes for environmental degradation are sought. The binary of the Western knowledge systems sets up oppositional frames through which to understand the world. One of those frames is that civilisation is culturally superior, whereas the natural world is morally superior (Davies, 2000).

The narrative of Indigenous knowledge takes a very different form. In contrast Indigenous knowledge varies across different groups of people. Rather than been derived from objective observation and rational thought it is “considered to be the embodied experiences” (Shahjahan, 2005, p. 215). Dei, Hall and Rosenberg (2000, cited in Shahjahan, 2005) conceptualise Indigenous knowledge “a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organise and regulate the people’s ways of living and making sense of their world” (p. 215). Indigenous knowledge is “dynamic and adaptive, hav[ing] evolved over centuries, successfully adapting to continuous environmental and social change” (Millat-e-Mustafa, 2000, cited in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 215). Smith (1999) highlights a fundamental difference between Western and Indigenous knowledge is that the earth is a living thing. She makes the point that the essence of a person is linked to the earth. “A human person does not stand alone, but shares with other animate and, in the Western sense, ‘inanimate’ beings, a relationship based on a shared ‘essence’ of life” (p. 74). This, she argues makes for a very different reading of essentialism that is not tied to the reductionist forms of analysis that occur within Western knowledge systems.

Indigenous knowledge and universal Western knowledge

Essentialism and authenticity have been a central element to the ‘race’ question, particularly in relation to who comes to count as Indigenous. Smith (1999) argues that ‘authenticity’ “is used by the West as one of the criteria to determine who really is Indigenous, who is worth saving, who is still innocent and free from Western contamination” (p. 74). Authenticity in relation to this takes specific forms beyond skin colour and an appropriate percentage of the ‘right’ blood. One of the markers of

authenticity is the relationships Indigenous people have with the land and the ways in which this relationship informs their behaviour. The *ecologically noble savage* is the point at which 'authentic' indigeneity and the environment coalesce.

Buege (1996) suggests that the ecologically noble savage has become more prevalent and builds on the 'noble savage' that has served white people so well. The noble savage was the motif used by colonisers to grab land and to justify the destruction of Indigenous peoples. The noble savage is employed by "Euro-Americans who desire something from native people" (Buege, 1996, p. 72). The ecologically noble savage is another manifestation of this and "serves the current 'polemical and creative needs of whites'" (Grande, 1999, p. 309). As the discontent with the modern world and the modern project grows on a number of levels, including environmental there is a need for "an illusion of the uncomplicated primitive utopia" (Grande, 1999, p. 309).

Invested in the ecologically noble savage is the moral superiority of the natural world. Indigenous people are seen to be closer to nature and less corrupted by civilisation than white people. One of the effects of classifying Indigenous people in this way is to portray them as "'timeless' beings – that is, as people who exist in an indistinguishable present-past" (Buege, 1996, p. 73). Indigenous people not only maintain a connection to the past, but they do not live in the present. To count as an Indigenous person in the mode of the ecologically noble savage requires the fulfilment of a number of criteria. It can only be vested in groups and this group must have a "direct connection to a particular environment" (Buege, 1996, p. 74). Third, this involves a sacrosanct relationship with that particular environment which informs all action and all behaviour. To count as ecologically noble, Indigenous people must put environmental concerns above all others. Buege (1996) highlights this as a particularly important point as it suggests that "a group either has it or it

doesn't" (p. 74). As with any marker of authenticity the operation of binary opposites works to clearly demarcate who is in and who is out.

Indigenous knowledge becomes idealised through the motif of the ecologically noble savage. Knowledge is fixed and frozen, sealed from the corruption of civilisation (Baber, 1996, cited in Shahjahan, 2005). Freezing and sealing Indigenous knowledge serves a number of purposes. It provides a form of measuring the progress of Western society and a foil to our way of life. The ecologically noble savage represents a utopian vision of life as it could be. "We persevere by dreaming that there are people out there living the lives that we believe we should live" (Buege, 1996, p. 76).

Both Buege (1996) and Grande (1999) examine the ways in which the myth of the ecologically noble savage works to assuage the West's view of its own unsustainable environmental practices while also reiterating Indigenous people as Other and lesser than white people. Indigenous people are valorised for living close to nature which may claim moral superiority but it reduces Indigenous people to being governed by nature rather than by rational thought (Grande, 1999). Both nature and Indigenous people, through their closer connection to nature, are rendered as fixed. Within Western knowledge "nature came to be understood as timeless, unchanging raw material...culture writes on and as nature, making the natural its inscriptive surface, the neutral and indifferent medium for any message" (Grosz, 2005, p. 45). Just as nature is an inscriptive surface, so Indigenous people become an inscriptive surface on which the needs of white people are written.

It also positions Indigenous people for an inevitable fall. The fall occurs as "the Native Americans have failed to live the lives that Euro-Americans have expected of them" (Beuge, 1996, p. 85). They have neither remained frozen and fixed from the corruption of

civilisation nor do their environmental issues necessarily cohere with the West's vision of what these should be. Indigenous people can not live up to Western ideals of the authentic as these are idealised and mythologised to meet the needs of the West. The authentic does not reflect the lives of Indigenous people nor does notions of the authentic offer many resources to understand issues that are real to Indigenous people at any particular time and place. Obscured in the inscriptive surface is the process of inscription and more importantly, who is doing the scribing and for whom this works.

As Nayak (2006) reminds us, black and white are relational and mutually constitutive. The ecologically noble savage and the way it is being deployed may reveal more about white people than it does about the Indigenous people that are being valorised in this way. The essentialist and reductionist tools deployed in the creation of the ecologically noble savage provide few resources to deconstruct that creation. Grande (1999) discusses three tactics that have been used in an endeavour to dismantle the myth of the ecologically noble savage. The first is the notion that 'we are all the same' and if Indigenous people had had access to modern technology and similar population pressures then they would have lived the modern, over consumptive life. As she points out this both renders the influence of culture silent, and elevates the contemporary world to an inevitability that would have happened regardless of 'who was in charge'. The second tactic is to reveal the 'truth' behind the noble savage. The objective of this is to measure the accuracy of the myth of the ecologically noble savage and establish authenticity. The final tactic identified by Grande (1999) is organised around the principles of universal human rights. "Such scholars are intent on working to right the wrongs of the past: in this instance, freeing the savage from the oppressive realities of the primitive margins while carving a location for Indians in the mainstream" (Grande, 1999, p. 316). She suggests the tenor of this work takes on an evangelistic quality especially when wrapped with crisis narratives about the

environment, Indigenous people or both which tends to “conscript such experiences into desperate cries for salvation rather than as organised political movements’ (Grande, 1999, p. 317).

The question of whose stories are told, how they are told and to what effect, is not a new one. Many writers have asked questions around how Indigenous people are represented and what implications this has. Here I will take some time to canvass some of this literature, before I come back to the question of why Year 12 students in Victoria answer questions of relationships to nature through the axiom of ‘Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad’.

Narratives in OES studies

The rationale for OES is to study the ways humans interact with and relate to natural environments which are understood to include those environments which have had minimal human influence. The OES curriculum specifically addresses Indigenous relationships with the natural environment prior to European arrival. From the arrival of Europeans the focus is on peoples’ relationships with the natural environment. This does not preclude an inclusion of Indigenous views and Gough, Pleasants and Black (2006) incorporate Indigenous viewpoints throughout the text book that supports this area of study. Peoples’ relationships with the land are primarily framed through the discourses of impacts and sustainability. They highlight some of the differences in relationships to the land that are consistent with the narratives of Western and Indigenous knowledge and focus particularly on the spiritual connection that Indigenous people had and continue to have with the land. In a section on changing views of the Australian environment the authors suggest that “Australians view the environment differently from the early European

settlers. We no longer see the outdoor environment as totally hostile and alien...Many Australians now also see their role as conservers or protectors of the environment...Not all Australians share these views. There are those who see the environment as a resource to be exploited for short-term gain, or who believe that development is necessary” (Gough et al, 2006, p. 155-156).

The shifts in language and focus that occur in the curriculum document and the text which supports this area of study provides a starting point to explore some of the productive tensions of environment, race and ethnicity. The curriculum has an explicit focus on Indigenous peoples’ relationships to the natural environment prior to the arrival of Europeans but then the language shifts to focus on Australians relationships with the land. This is particularly evident in the section on contemporary relationships. Who exactly these Australians are is unclear as Indigenous people are also referred to, especially in relation to Native Land Title. The authors point to legislative changes so “in remote areas where Aboriginal people have maintained a traditional relationship with the land, full management responsibilities now lie with Indigenous communities” (Gough, 2006, p. 150). While this describes a situation that exists it also describes the “tensions between racial categories, and the practices and identities they seek to inscribe” (Nayak, 2006, p. 418). Those Indigenous people who have remained ‘free of the corruption of civilisation’ have been given management responsibilities. The practices and identities of Indigenous people inscribed here are those of a timeless past where knowledge is fixed and frozen in some idealised past. It is unclear if those Indigenous people who do not reside on their traditional land, which includes many urban Indigenous people, are subsumed into the category of Australians in contemporary times.

Similar slippage and tension occurs around the concepts of conservation and sustainability that are used in the OES text. Earlier in the text there are numerous references made to

the different relationships that Indigenous knowledge and western knowledge afford. “*Indigenous people see the land as a part of themselves*” (Gough, 2006, p. 181, original emphasis) and they “feel it is their responsibility to look after it” (p. 181). Buege (1996) comments that relationships of native people and land are quite complex and though Gough et al (2006) write that the views of Indigenous people are as varied as the environments to which they have kinship the relationship is defined through the land being part of themselves. Gough et al (2006) go on to discuss the ways in which other people interact with the land, these others presumably being non-Indigenous people. They include landholders and landowners, scientists, adventures, naturalists and conservationists whose relationships with the land varies from an economic resource, a laboratory, a gymnasium or friend, an inspiration, and a temple or a museum. While non-indigenous people are permitted to have a diversity of relationships with nature, indigenous people appear to have a fixed relationship. This denies the adaptive responses that indigenous people have had to the environment, including the ways in which they are adapting and responding to the contemporary world. Unit four in the OES curriculum focuses on the future of human-nature interactions. This section is largely framed around the principles of universal human rights and a conservation ethic familiar to Westerners. While this may provide some very productive strategies for thinking about human-nature interactions it can also take on an evangelistic quality which turns to cries for salvation rather than political action as Grande (1999) warns.

Given the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are represented here and the ways in which the different knowledge systems are said to influence relationships with the land it is hardly surprising that teachers and students reduce this down to ‘Indigenous good, non-Indigenous’ bad. Together with the current focus on the environment which is occurring primarily through the rubric of crisis, discourses around the good / bad dyad are

reinforced. While I do not want to minimise the environmental issues or the impact of crisis narratives that inform and shape so much of the current debate in this area, I want to consider what possibilities the good / bad dyad create in understanding people and the environment. One strategy that may work to achieve this is to bring the unmarked marker of whiteness into sharper focus.

Colouring in whiteness

The oversimplification of binaries as occurs through good / bad, Indigenous / non-Indigenous works to freeze race as fixed and essential. It also works to reiterate the 'unmarked marker' of whiteness, "a continued inability to 'colour' the seeming transparency of white positionings" (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). Whiteness as the unmarked marker excuses us from having to engage with the question of the production of white selves. Fixing race as a binary both reifies and homogenises what it means to be white as well as what it means to be Indigenous. As relational and mutually constitutive categories (Nayak, 2006), whiteness and indigeneity work together to constitute practices around race binaries. But as the unmarked category, whiteness is excused from scrutiny and obscures the way in which the assignment of good / bad occurs to meet the needs of the White population (Grande, 1999).

Frankenberg (1997) examines the question of whether white culture is 'good' or 'bad' in relation to Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness programmes where people are guided to greater racial awareness of themselves and others. Her analysis can be usefully applied to what may be occurring in the OES curriculum, and therefore in the classroom in relation to the question of 'Indigenous good, non-Indigenous bad'. In relation to the question of whether white people and white culture are 'good' or 'bad' "we see a displacement of

practical and material questions about white people's location in racial hierarchy onto very static notions of essence and original sin. It follows naturally from this displacement that whites embark urgently on the quest either to be proven innocent or to find redemption" (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 18).

I do not want to pursue the quest for innocence or to find redemption here, but highlight that unless we engage in the question of race and the "dominance of transhistorical, essential, asocial and universal characteristics of unmarked whiteness (Dwyer & Jones, 2000, cited in Shaw, 2006, p. 854) we are limited to a good / bad binary when it comes to examining human relationships with the environment. This is indeed dangerous territory as it is easy to reiterate and reify the very categories that are under scrutiny. It is also easy to romanticise notions of Indigenous knowledge and behaviour in ways that bears little resemble to either Indigenous history or to contemporary concerns and issues. It is equally dangerous to erase race from the discussion and draw on what appear to be universal and therefore, seemingly 'objective' ways of understanding and relating to the natural environment. The question of race can not be avoided in the question of human relationships with the natural world, as race and racism are critical axis around which issues of the environment cohere (Hicks, 2006).

It seems important to bring race into the outdoor and environmental education discussion and practice. Currently the literature locates Indigenous people along the lines of the ecologically noble savage and whiteness is invisible due to its normalcy. Frankenberg (1997) reminds us that "analysing whiteness is inseparable from the critique of racism" (p. 21) and this analysis may be a way to start remaking whiteness. A closer examination of whiteness and the ways it intersects with environment, race and ethnicity provides a strategy to examine the good / bad dyad that has emerged at the intersection of race and

the environment that moves beyond holding Indigenous people up for further scrutiny. One of the compelling reasons for embarking on this trajectory is that “it could be argued that a critical understanding of how we ‘do’ race may yet inform us with strategies and techniques to ‘undo’ it” (Nayak, 2006, p. 423).

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ⁱ I use the terms nature, natural and environment interchangeably throughout this article. Different bodies of literature tend to use the terms differently and in crossing over these bodies of literature I have found it difficult to settle on one term.