

Songlines of Learning

The Establishment of Shearwater The Mullumbimby Steiner School as a Centre of Place Conscious Education

Konrad Frederick Korobacz B.A. (Tas), BTL (CDU)

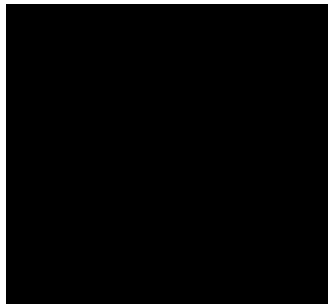
November 2014

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
the University of New England**

Certificate of Originality

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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Photographs

Unless otherwise acknowledged, all photographs were taken by the author.

Abstract

This thesis, *Songlines of Learning: The Establishment of Shearwater The Mullumbimby Steiner School as a Centre of Place Conscious Education* is about the intersection of dual crises of people having lost their core capacity as place-makers and their relation to place in post-modern society. It examines the moment where (auto)biography and ethnography cross paths with educational theory and practice to derive potent alternatives, and employs an archaeology that leads back to the primordial and forward to new potential. The education of children is at the centre of this research because it provides the opportunity to examine how these all-important intersections occur, and how the living relation to place and place making can be recovered. In this sense the thesis is also a story about finding a new way of seeing, about finding or rediscovering identity in relationship to landscape, in this case to the Australian landscape.

Place is threatened by unsustainable exploitation and place making is jeopardized by centralised governance requirements. More than fifty percent of the world's population now lives in sterile but heavily polluted urban social constructs, alienated from the organic life-forces on which they depend, and most do not regard this as problematic. A conscious effort is required to restore realization of the natural world of place and our belonging to it.

The research question: 'What can we learn about place-conscious education when we look at the establishment of Shearwater the Mullumbimby Steiner School?' leads through and past this place-blindness by employing an emergent methodology out of the process of the research itself. In applying the practice of palimpsest - a narrative of 'layered voices' (Aoki 2005) where place, self and narrative are inextricably entwined – I embraced what Somerville (2010) perceives as '... an ontology for postmodern emergent methodologies of becoming rather than being (Grosz, 1998) ...' that treats the self as a work in progress, in a continual state of becoming and being inherently multiple. This unfolding self is in ongoing conversation with the educational and ethnographic theory that supports it.

The work concludes with a guide to study, activity and reflection that embraces the revelation of place making as foundational to the generation of intentional place-makers. In examining the establishment of Shearwater, what emerged as identifiable elements included: a creative response to an ethical crisis (environmentally and its associated loss of personal identity); learning about country and associated practices from the Indigenous community; the inclusive role of parents as educational place makers; the creation of a school that saw, as its critical work, the nurturing of teachers as creative people; a struggle to allow the possibility of spirit and the cultivation of the arts as an enhanced form of place conscious education.

Place can only be experienced in place. In order to convey place to others not in place, the thesis moved away from being presented as a coherent account. While this has made for an unconventional thesis, it is one that does advance the literature in significant ways by marrying several disciplines to shed light on, and provide the groundwork for, an educational philosophy that is resilient and rooted, leaping beyond the present day orthodoxies of standard testing and an unhealthy striving for uniformity that precisely deny the dynamic person-place relationship essential to learning and thriving.

A Guide for the Reader

This work does not follow the conventional structure of a chronological narrative told by a single voice. It is more like an operatic libretto with a cast of characters that represent the multiple selves and includes place playing a leading role. They play out their parts, sometimes at variance with the others, supporting the notion of self as relational, contextual and essentially multiple. At times they speak to each other in coherent dialogue and at others times they rudely disrupt the conversation with what might appear to be unrelated stories and counter-themes.

While chapters with focussed themes give the thesis traditional structure, their order is not determined by chronology but by place, allowing it to tell its story with minimal disruption. Between each chapter I have woven in an autobiographical folio of related place experiences. I have called these, *Songlines of Learning*.

To help the reader negotiate his or her journey through the thesis, I have identified the various narrative voices through the use of fonts and other traditional academic signifiers.

Academic Narrator
(Times Roman)

This is the voice of formality and discourse. It mediates as the rational voice of constancy amid the noisy chatter of the other voices. It asks the thesis question, acts as facilitator and draw outcomes and conclusions.

Academic Voice
(Times Roman)

This is also a formal voice that acknowledges the research of others. Their voices are recorded according to the **Author-date** system (often referred to as **Harvard** system).

Voice in Place
(*Apple Chancery*)

This voice establishes the writer in place.

Voice of Recollection

(Lucinda Calligraphy)

This voice tells the stories of personal recollection and memory of people, places and events. In some cases these take the form of recreated conversations. This font also signifies the stories of people other than myself.

Journal Notes and Entries

(Lucinda Handwriting)

Written notes and entries made during the course of researching and writing of the thesis.

Poetry, Verses and Children's Stories
(Arial)

Photographs and Tables have been strategically placed within the text to illustrate the content under immediate discussion. Each includes an explanatory caption.

... the results of organising everything out of a centralised place are terrifying. (Steiner 2007:59)

It is acknowledged that in order for pedagogical practices to be successful, they must be adapted to their particular social, historical, cultural and economic contexts. (Bamford 2006:27)

The human being can only develop in the creative process through engagement with material. He [sic] is, after all, not an absolutely spiritual being. He [sic] is embodied ... (Joseph Beuys cited in Harlan & Beuys 2004:98)