Soka Education and the Land Ethic: Educational Leadership toward the

“creative co-existence of nature and humanity”[[1]](#footnote-1)

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Brief Bio:

From the university’s opening in 2001, Heffron served as a member of the Humanities Concentration and from 2005 through 2016 as Dean of Students. He also served as Associate Director of the Pacific Basin Research Center from 1997 until 2014, in which capacity he edited and co-authored four books. In 2019 he was awarded with the BELMAS *Management in Education* 2018 Best Paper of the Year. In 2019, Heffron published his most recent book, single-authored, *The Rise of the South in American Thought and Education: The Rockefeller Years (1902-1917) and Beyond*. His research is situated at the intersection of cultural and intellectual history, social and economic development, and the transnational sources of schooling.

ABSTRACT

According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) Article 26, “Everyone has the right to education,” which begs an important question. What sort of education does everyone have a right to? Inspired by the 2020 Comparative and International Society (CIES) conference theme, “Education Beyond the Human: Toward Sympoiesis,” the purpose of this paper is twofold: to embed a critique of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the call for “an end to human exceptionalism” (CIES, 2020: 1) and to explore the kind and degree of schooling it will take to “Foster leaders for the creative co-existence of nature and humanity,” one of the four major Principles of Soka University of America (SUA). It begins by comparing and contrasting Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic” with the projenitor of Soka Education, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who in 1903 published *The Geography of Human Life*.

**Introduction**

Just before his death in 1948, the critical conservationist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) made the case for a new ethic, “the land ethic,” what he described back then as “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity,” one no less necessary, if not much more so, today than it was over half a century ago (Leopold 1949, p. 12). Philosophically, human ethics derive from an understanding of the interconnection and with it the mutual obligations people share as individual members of their communities, from local, to national, to global. The land ethic, writes Leopold, “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (Leopold 1949, p. 12). Our externalization of these forces, or worse our expropriation of them for economic purposes, has alienated us from the biotic community upon which our shared survival depends.

On the other side of the world, a forebear of Leopold by nearly half a century, was the Japanese educational leader, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), who in 1903 published *A Geography of Human Life*, geography understood as a means of empowering students with a dynamic and critical understanding of the world, one in which “The conditions of vast expanses of heaven and earth are largely revealed in even the tiniest plot of land” (TMW 1903, p. 23), land describing not merely soil, but the entire pyramid of life, human beings just “one of thousands of accretions to the height and complexity of the pyramid” (Leopold 1949, p. 14). With that being said, in order to “grasp in outline,” adds Makiguchi, “the great and complex phenomena of the geography of the nations of the world,” it was necessary for students and their teachers to go back to the village, back to the local community, back to *the land* where the school existed (TMW 1903, p. 23). Here all these complexities stood in microcosm, sharing nevertheless a single universe of overlapping influence and dependence, a metaphysic of interpenetrating micro and macro-worlds. It was the role of education to tease out these interconnections and to utilize them for the business of “soka” or value creation, the conscious effort under any and all circumstances to produce good, beauty, and gain (or benefit), core values identified by Makiguchi in his subsequent work (1930) on *Value Creating Pedagogy*. This paper examines what one more recent author (Callicott 1989) has identified as, indeed, the metaphysical dimensions of an ecological conscience, drawing on the value-creating pedagogy of Soka education for a better understanding of their implications for critical school leadership.[[2]](#endnote-1)

According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) Article 26, “Everyone has the right to education,” which begs, however, an important question (United Nations 1948; 2015, p. 54). What sort of education does everyone have a right to? Conversely, what sort of education would constitute a deprivation of that right? And looking to the future of the planet and its inhabitants, sentient and insentient, a deprivation of probably the most important right, the right to an existence (Article 3), one characterized by “inherent dignity” (United Nations 1948; 2015, p. 1) in the opening words of the *Declaration*’s preamble? Taking one of the Principles given to SUA by its founder—"Foster leaders for the creative co-existence of nature and humanity”—this paper questions the way, on the other hand, abstract concepts of authority, freedom, and control, concepts embedded in the *Declaration*, frame the way that people think about schooling, education, and leadership even when there’s a sensitivity to environmental issues [Institution 2019, p. 6].

These concepts all raise the larger question of legitimacy. Currently, democracy in the U.S., the United Kingdom, and elsewhere is experiencing a crisis of legitimacy. That is, it is no longer clear in people’s minds (or sometimes too abundantly clear) where the legitimate authority resides and who has freedom to control the kind and degree as well as the direction of mass public schooling. Authority, freedom, and control are relative, not absolute terms—relative to the degree of power, social and cultural capital, and, yes, the level of education held by various stake holders in public education from central government bureaucrats, to locally elected school officials, to superintendents and school principals, to teachers, parents, and children. Spring contrasts “education as a source of freedom and political power with education as an instrument of social control and political despotism” (Spring 2007, p. 3), but are the two visions of education mutually exclusive? As we show here, drawing on critical race theory, the terms “freedom,” “power,” “social control,” and “despotism” are contested ones, meaning different things to different people at different times (Horsford 2011; Capper 2019; Author 2019). They lack *universal* meaning and definition, another problem with the *Declaration*.

Especially problematic for the development of a planetary consciousness, one in which the spatial and temporal dimensions of self-awareness are planetary in scope, is the admixture of the “universal” rhetoric of the *Declaration*, all our putative rights planetary in nature, with a narrow focus on nationalism, its legalization in Article 15 of “the right to a nationality” (United Nations 1948; 2015, p. 32). The purpose of this paper is thus twofold: to embed a critique of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in the call for “an end to human exceptionalism” (CIES 2020, p. 1) and to explore the kind of education it will take to develop “Leaders for the creative co-existence of nature and humanity.” To wit, as Makiguchi declared in 1903,

Sympathetic interactions occur . . . when you encounter that person or object at a deep emotional level and are able to place yourself in the position of that person or object, perhaps regarding the other as one of your own kind, a part of yourself (Makiguchi, cited in Bethel 2002, p. 29).

Notwithstanding this, we need, as Adams and Savahl (2017) have recently argued, a greater awareness of “the meaning children attach to nature . . . their subjective understandings, perceptions, and discursive constructions of natural spaces” (p. 316).

**Rethinking the nature of nature**

This meaning can vary dramatically based on any number of competing factors and influences, including but not limited to wilderness experiences (or the lack thereof), family values, religious beliefs, commercial habits and expectations, and the whole trope of conservation and human ascendancy over the future of “nature.” In the latter case, as children may learn, nature has less to do with non-human rights than with strictly human ones, rights from which nature is presumably derived. The quid pro quo? Take better care of me (the environment), so I can take better care of you (human beings). These and other forms of so-called “implicit bias,” the stereotypes we hold often unconsciously of nature and our relationship to it, can lie at the bottom of our meaning-making and that of our children (Staats 2015-2016). These biases need to be exposed and held up to question, if we are to move beyond the “anthropocentric gaze” as exemplified in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010, p. 525). While human rights of one kind or another may be essential, we must also understand that they emerge in “*a relational field*,” one in which “*non*-human forces are equally at play and work as constitutive factors in children’s learning and becomings” (p. 527).

That there lies “a core democracy in the biosphere” (Ame Naess, cited in Nash, 1989, p. 146)—an “ecological egalitarianism” in which all people, animals, and plants may be seen “as siblings” (Ikeda 2002, p. 5)—is an important precursor for, in the words of the *Declaration*, “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want” (United Nations 1948; 2015, p. 1), not simply for our own sake, however, but for the sake of the ecosystem of which we are an interdependent part. Indeed, to what today biocentric environmental ethics identifies as “the moral merit of all forms of life, including humans,” Makiguchi at the turn of the last century went one step (a logical one) further, wondering “Shall we try to look at our interactions with the outside world through nature’s viewpoint? Nothing is more generous or fair,” he wrote, “than nature. Nature never, ever closes its doors to anyone. Nature never judges us by our social status, never discriminates between rich and poor” (Nash, 1989, p. 155; Makiguchi 1903, cited in Bethel, 2002, p. 31) On this point, we may need a complementary “Universal Declaration of Nonhuman Rights.” These rights would include not only the right to survive, the right to sustainability, but the right to grow and prosper as well as the right to moral and ethical integrity! That non-animate no less than animate forms of existence—insentient ones like wood, rock, and ground soil (including all the atoms and molecules that go into their formation)—are all members of the same biosphere suggests, as Lener (2019) writes, “There is no line to be crossed because there is no one factor that is responsible for what we call life. I believe we instead lie on a spectrum that ranges from inanimate (an atom of hydrogen) to most animate (a human being) and that we cannot physically determine when that transaction happens” (p. 3). The *a priori* natural rights said to belong to human beings in the *American Declaration of Independence* (1776)—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—thus belong to nature as well.

If it is true that the right to education under Article 26 of the UDHR includes “the full development of the human personality” than it stands to reason that education for sustainable development—social and economic going hand in hand with environmental—lies at the heart (United Nations 1948; 2015, p. 54). As Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of Soka schools, K-12 and tertiary around the world, and an early exponent of education for global citizenship (1996; 2012), put it in a paper honoring the tenth anniversary of the United Nations 1992 Rio Earth Summit, “To cultivate in children’s hearts the desire to treasure nature and protect the Earth is a vital step toward protecting their future,” education alone being able to “provide the driving force for such a renewal of awareness” (Ikeda 2002, p. 3 & p. 2). To be effective, such an education, according to Agenda 21 of the Summit, must integrate physical/biological, socio-economic, and human (which may include spiritual) development; it must be interdisciplinary; and it must utilize non-formal no less than formal modes of learning and communication (Agenda 21, cited in United Nations, 1992, p. 320).

Outdoor education and with it, experiential learning became an object of scholarly study and evaluation with the issue at the turn of the century of the UK *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*. The editorial welcome of 2000 describes the journal as “a forum for dialogue, research, thinking, understanding, teaching and practice in the field” (p. 5). As one recent author observes, “Outdoor experiences that involve understanding and experiencing nature can change behavior and attitudes, and are key attributes of sustainability” (Prince 2017, p. 165). The idea of experientialism calls for children’s direct observation of phenomena both in natural and cultural settings, which enables them to understand the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world, thus cultivating a sense of appreciation and respect for nature, people, and the world. This becomes an important step towards planetary rights education, an education entailing, in the words of the 2020 Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) conference theme, “Education Beyond the Human: Toward Sympoiesis,” a “Reevaluation of human rights and humanism—their traditional roles, objectives, and constructions—in the context of climate change and the human/environment interface” (CIES 2020, p. 2).

**Leadership for the “creative co-existence” of nature and humanity**

What are the duties and obligations of leaders for the “creative co-existence” of nature and humanity? More importantly, what is the kind and degree of education necessary to foster such leaders? For as Makiguchi asserts, “Can anything be more important . . . than to discover how to plan educational experiences which will enable every person [students and teachers alike] to develop this [a reference to “the capacity for direct and intimate communications with natural phenomena”] deeper understanding of life and nature which is so essential to living a fulfilling and rewarding life?” (Makiguchi 1903, cited in Bethel 2002, p. 22). As one of several areas of concentration from which to choose toward the B.A. in Liberal Arts at SUA, Environmental Studies has taken on this mission, dedicating itself to a “learning environment that encourages the creative, responsible, interdisciplinary, and independent thinking necessary for understanding and effectively responding to local, regional, and global environmental challenges” (Institution, 2019, p. 75). Creative coexistence requires this sense of responsibility. Without it, where is the animus to share our lives with nature in the quest for mutual existence, for co-dependence? At the same time, what makes for creativity—that is, the ability to create something from nothing—is the kind and degree of human imagination, one that an interdisciplinary education can absolutely help bring into effect. Creative coexistence is about border crossing. At SUA, Environmental Studies requirements include courses taught by professors of philosophy, literature, music history, economics, and international studies. One such course, “Thinking Through Nature: Enigma and Insight,” a literature course cross-listed with Environmental Studies, examines how classical writings from Heraclitus and Plato to Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson have shaped the Western idea of nature. At the same time, the objective of the course is to challenge students to employ these historic concepts for the purpose of “meaningful engagement” with alternative points of view toward the whole notion, for example, of “ecology *without* [italics mine] nature,” one modern protagonist’s warning against the latter’s reification as “a plastic knockoff of the real thing” (Morton 2007; 2012, p. 7).

What the UN Rio Earth Summit called famously for in its Agenda 21, education for sustainable development, and what in 2005 became the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, culminated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), only one of which, Goal 4, called for the greatest challenge here, a quality education. Goal 4 reads “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” with no reference, however, to Goal 15: “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss,” not even its sub-goals and their indicators (United Nations 2015, Goal 4, p. 1; Goal 15, p. 1). This is problematic, bringing us back to the shortcomings of the anthropocentric *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As Ikeda wrote in 2002, hearkening back to Makiguchi’s view (1981-97) of the “subtle and exquisite mutual relationships” (Vol. 3, p. 66) between nature and humanity, “creative coexistence,” *kyosei* in Japanese, is

an ethos that seeks to bring harmony from conflict, unity from rupture, that is based more on “us” than “me.” It signals a spirit that seeks to encourage flourishing and mutually supportive relationships among humans and between humans and nature. It is my belief that by making this ethic of coexistence the shared spirit of our age, we can find the certain means to close the gap between power and ethical standards of behavior. (Ikeda, 2003a, p. 9)

For Makiguchi, and for Ikeda in turn, this came down to community studies, the local and the particular being the starting point for a system of forward and backward linkages, a “continuous dialectical tacking,” in the words of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, “between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure” in such a way, he goes on to say, “as to bring both into view simultaneously” (Geertz, cited in Bernstein 1988, p. 133). A decade later in 2012, three years before the end of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and with it the formal establishment of the 17 SDGs, Ikeda laid out the elements of a community-based education for sustainable development from which, to be honest, the United Nations still has much to learn. In addition to Makiguchi, he was also taking his cue (“I fully share her conviction”) from the Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai (1940-2011), who once declared: “Education, if it means anything, should not take people away from the land, but instill in them even more respect for it, because educated people are in a position to understand what is being lost” (Maathai, cited in Ikeda 2012, p. 10). This is an important message to all educational leaders.

**Schooling for community-and-environment-based education: Beyond ESD**

Ikeda’s three guidelines for a quality community-based education are thus worth citing, not because they provide specific advice to classroom teachers or to school principals, but because they throw a larger net, one in which the health and vitality of the surrounding community is nested in the land ethic ala Leopold and Makiguchi no less than Maathai, pioneers each of them of a deep ecology, a non-anthropocentric theory of human-environment relations. The objective? “The end of dualism; humankind would step back into the life community as a member and not the master” (Nash 1989, p. 148). Ikeda’s proposed “successor framework to the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development” focuses less upon the local community *per se* than upon realigning its education and development around these and other higher purposes:

* It should not stop at simply providing knowledge of the natural environment, customs and history of the local community, but should encourage feelings of affection for that community and the determination to treasure it.
* It should inspire a deep sense of appreciation for the ways in which the surrounding environment, including the productive and economic activities of others living in the community, enhances our lives: it should encourage daily actions based on that sense of appreciation.
* It should enable people to consider the issues of the local community in terms of what we must protect for the sake of future generations and the kind of society we must construct on their behalf, placing this at the heart of our way of life (Ikeda 2012, p. 11).

And so, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) must first and foremost inculcate a sense

of mutual responsibility for the health, the safety, and the preservation of all community members, human and non-human alike; it must uphold an appreciation for the interconnectivity of the environment, our varied social and economic lives, and the actions necessary to sustain those relations in a positive order; and it must make efforts to locate the past no less than the future in the present, our being not the passive objects but the progenitors of the destiny of our respective communities.

Narrowly construed, ESD can go hand in hand with anthropocentrism. As Bonnett (2019)

avers in a Special Issue of the *Journal of Environmental Education*, “A 50 Year Retrospective on

Environmental Inquiry: Reorganizing the Past and Challenging the Future,” sustainable

development can be “highly problematic semantically (e.g., precisely what is to be sustained—

economic growth? Existing ecosystems? Some “natural” equilibrium?) and epistemologically

(e.g., how is nature best “known” and how do we establish a knowledge base sufficient to

“managing” natural systems in their extreme complexity and temporal and geographical extent?)

[,] . . . “a superordinate “metaphysics of mastery” whose ambition is to make all subject to the

human will” (p. 252). In 2016, writing for *Management in Education*, Wade warns of “top down,

hierarchical models of leadership” and their own “limitations and ineffectiveness . . . especially so

in relation to sustainability” (p. 131). The same holds true of neo-liberalism “with its emphasis on

short term market models, deregulation and privatisation” (p. 134).

One of the jobs of educational leaders is to inculcate in community members, young and old alike, a sense of empowerment, and to educate them in what exactly ecologically-correct efforts might look like. The two-part requirements for Makiguchi were “objective cognition,” on the one hand, and “reciprocal interactions,” on the other (Makiguchi 1903, cited in Bethel 2002, p. 28). In the first case, community members were to be encouraged “to regard all phenomena external to oneself as material for experience and objects of study, clearly distinguishing the self from objects external to the self” (p. 28). This for the purpose not of imperious self-distancing and dissociation but to help people identify their responsibilities, including any restraints, vis a vis the Gaiatic community of which they were members. At the same time, as part of their educational program, this was to be paired with “reciprocal interactions,” which were about firsthand “encounters” as opposed to secondhand “experiences,” external and primarily intellectual in nature (p. 28). This apparent contradiction between self and environment as independent and interdependent is an important pedagogical one, human self-interest and other-directedness going hand in hand. Why? Because it is possible, even desirable, as Nash has pointed out, “to attain ecologically responsible behavior without assuming the intrinsic value or rights of nonhuman life” (Nash 1989, p. 150). Human survival (the common denominator) is based equally upon our cognitive strengths as upon our affective sensibilities, the ascendancy of the natural environment and its intrinsic worth in keeping with our enlightened self-interest.

Finally, so-called globally minded leaders (Heffron and Papa, 2020) are critical to the enforcement of the Land Ethic, that “ecological egalitarianism” in which all people, animals, and plants may be seen “as siblings” (Ikeda 2002, p. 5). To qualify as such, community-based educational leaders need to understand with Bender (2006) that “The nation cannot be its own context. No less than the neuron or cell, it must be studied in a framework larger than itself (p. 7), a framework existing in “multiple overlapping networks of interaction” (Held 2002, p. 93). This requires in turn what is called imaginative empathy, an empathy that reaches out beyond one’s immediate environment to embrace the sufferings of those worldwide—human, plant, and animal alike. Globally minded leaders undergo something of a revolution in identity formation, “a radical act” of seeking one’s identity in every member of society (Heffron and Papa, 2020, p. 18), what the poet Walt Whitman once referred to as “the democratic self,” a self “that came to recognize vast multitudes of possibility within its own identity” (Whitman 1888, as cited in Folsom 2010, pp. xx-xxi). At the same time, just as a plum tree is a plum tree and a peach tree, a peach tree, no two people are the same, our homogeneity as a species lying in our heterogeneity. It is this effort to identify and celebrate the unique qualities of all those persons and things around us that distinguishes the globally minded leader from the xenophobe. Which will take readers back to the importance of an interdisciplinary education, one that does not make hard and fast distinctions between one mode of inquiry and another but rather encourages their unique and creative coalescence in the pursuit of new and holistic forms of knowledge and understanding, including an important measure of self-knowledge.

**On the obstacles to implementation and the needs of the practitioner under a higher, transcendental deep ecology**

What are the challenges teachers face to implementing the Land Ethic and with it, value-creating education in our schools today, K-12 and tertiary? What strategies might educational leaders employ to overcome these challenges and thereby raise the environmental consciousness of students, teachers and parents toward saving the environment, saving it from the deleterious effects of an urban-industrial, consumer-based society, while at the same time reconstructing science and technology to better serve us all, plants, animals, and human beings alike? And with that said, what are some of the core subject matter areas for the best environmental education—a comprehensive versus a piecemeal one—of pre-service teachers and ultimately their students?

Five recent, data-driven studies—one involving a sample of 287 U.S. teachers (Ernst 2007) and another the kind and degree of necessary administrator support (Ernst 2012), a third study of 41 secondary school science teachers also in the U.S. (Kim and Fortner 2006), a fourth of 2152 students and 1374 teachers in 101 so-called eco-schools in Belgium (Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem 2018), and the fifth, a survey of 150 principals of primary schools in Cyprus, Australia (Kadji-Beltran, Zachariou and Stevenson 2013) 60% of whom were women—these leading studies begin to document some of the obstacles facing both K-12 teachers and school leaders in the pursuit and practice of environmental education. Equally important for all teachers and leaders alike was “environmental literacy knowledge and skills” (Ernst 2010, 75). Often missing for them, however, was the institutional support of state and local governments as well as adequate pre-service and in-service training and education. For Ernst’s administrators one of the greatest “Perceived teacher obstacles” was “My teachers” lack of environmental content knowledge” (p. 83). Their own obstacles ranged from lack of interest to lack of funding to “lack of support from higher levels of administration” (p. 83). Interestingly enough, one of the greatest obstacles for teachers was “state standardized testing,” which not only excluded environmental knowledge, but dominated their teaching time (p. 75).

For secondary school science teachers “External and logistic barriers to teaching environmental issues” were also at the height (Kim and Fortner 2016, p. 18), first and foremost the fact that “Standards for my subject do not address environmental issues” and therefore a “Lack of instructional materials” (p. 19). At the same time, as Kim & Fortner conclude (an especially relevant challenge to EE as understood by Leopold, Makiguchi, Ikeda, and Maathai), “Environmental Issues have various ranges in terms of complexity, uncertainty, and intangibility, and teachers may have more difficulties in addressing more complex and uncertain issues,” including but not limited to Ikeda’s “ecological egalitarianism,” one in which all people, animals, and plants may be seen “as siblings” (Ikeda 2002, p. 5). Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem begin to address this challenge in their study of the eco-schools and their educational outcomes in Flanders, Belgium. Not unlike eco-schools throughout the world—some 59,000 in 68 countries—the schools in Flanders combine cognitive with affective pedagogies that, on the one hand, encourage students, in Makiguchi’s words, “to regard all phenomena external to oneself as material for experience and objects of study, clearly distinguishing the self from objects external to the self” (Makiguchi 1903, as cited in Bethel 2002, p. 28) and, on the other, to utilize “applied knowledge to develop environmentalism,” they being co-dependent learning objectives (Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem, p. 1253). The eco-schools under study in Flanders, while reducing “utilization values,” values centered on “the use and exploitation of the natural environment,” nevertheless failed to raise the necessary “preservation values” (p. 1252). This, according to the researchers, due largely to an over-emphasis on theoretical knowledge, the complexification of the environment leading to a sense of helplessness in students, one student exclaiming “how can I as an individual make a difference in huge issues such as global climate change?” (p. 1252).

Students in a UK required stage 3 course in geography, one that as an outcome requires upper division level cartographic, graphical, numerical, and statistical skills, may have similar concerns. The difference here being an important one, however. While, according to the Department of Education (2013), “[students] should become aware of the increasingly complex geographical systems in the world around them,” by the same token, they need to “understand how human and physical processes interact to influence and change landscapes, environments and the climate; and how human activity relies on the effective functioning of natural systems” (p. 6). And in another report in 2014, outlining General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) specifications, there is the call for “a greater stress on the multivariate nature of “human-physical” relationships and interactions” (Department of Education 2014, p. 4). Under the heading “People and environment: processes and interactions,” the GCSE calls for the following:

An overview of large scale natural global ecosystems. For two selected ecosystems, draw out the interdependence of climate, soil, water, plants, animals, and humans; the processes and interactions that operate with them at different scales; and issues related to biodiversity and to their sustainable use and management (p. 7).

Although not made an explicit requirement here, as it should be, at least for the sake of “the creative co-existence of nature and humanity,” it will be very important for faculty and students to study together the four interconnected environmental spheres: the geosphere, the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the biosphere. And to better facilitate our creative co-existence with these spheres to introduce them to so-called “environmental thermodynamics,” the production and consumption of energy for the sake of the mutual survival of all living things (plants, animals, and organisms) and their non-living, host environments (weather, earth, sun, soil, climate, atmosphere) (Murray 2014, p. 1). Ecosystems are the foundations of the biosphere and they determine the health of the entire Earth system.

At the end of the day, as Kadji, Zachariou and Stevenson (2013) explain in their study of sustainable school leadership practices in Australia, the school is “a social agent to promote collaboration with the community for achieving common visions and objectives for a sustainable future” (p. 304). The place of the local community and its role in establishing the goals and practices of an interdependent existence with the school reflect, or should reflect, the same goals and objectives of the school principal, the question being what environmental duties and concerns unite the two. To answer this, they say, would require “in-depth critical enquiry, reflection and dialogue that questions assumption, beliefs, values and alternative possibilities of approaches to ESD” (p. 308), the outcome of which would need to go beyond “keeping schools tidy,” the most common environmental management practice at the schools under study (p. 312). Rather, it will be important in cities like Cyprus to identify collectively those social and economic conditions, past and present, that compromise ecological sustainability and for the sake of a biodiversity including but not limited to “school grounds” (p. 305), reform them accordingly.

Despite the countervailing practical issues cited here—a lack of the necessary kind and degree of teacher training and education, the ebb and flow of student interest, the demands of a standardized curriculum, the “low confidence” (Kadji et al 2013, p. 316; Ernst 2012, p. 83) of school principals in their ability to administer and uphold ESD—not to mention the ideological hurdles—rationalism, anthropocentricism, neo-liberalism and a mass consumer culture—notwithstanding these ongoing challenges, the ability to create a biotic ecosystem in our schools and communities, a Land Ethic broader and more encompassing than the soil under our feet, is no longer out of the question. There are reasons for optimism: the growing number of eco-schools worldwide and in the case of the UK, and much of Scandinavia, forest schools designed to support a “creative” and “resilient” relationship between the learner and the natural world for the sake of “the future of the planet” (Knight 2016, p. 293 & p. 292); a cosmological approach to the earth sciences as in the case of the UK’s required geography course, one combining physical geography and human geography in very much the same vein as Japanese philosopher Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and his latter day counterpart, Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of SUA; and finally, the large and growing amount of research on environmental education, research that is challenging educational leaders to go beyond a narrow, anthropocentric understanding of Education for Sustainable Development and to embrace instead “a world of reciprocal relationships with other beings and forces that make up the life/spirit world” (Bowers 1995, p. 319), the metaphysic of interpenetrating micro and macro-worlds. In the David Orr’s famous words “all education is environmental education” (1992, p. 90).

**Conclusion**

With everything else being said, becoming “leaders for the creative co-existence of nature and humanity” is no simple task, requiring not only the right kind and degree of education or the commitment “in both school and non-school settings to build a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world” (Author and Papa 2020, p. 16); it also requires an appreciation for *the ineffable*. No one better captures this transcendentalism—a metaphysic of the here and now, uniting Soka education and the Land Ethic—than the famous English poet William Blake:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour (Blake 1803, cited in Kazin 1946, p. 150).

People may feel limited and constrained by their circumstances, but if and when awakened to the ability to create value and meaning in their lives—within, not outside, those circumstances—are able to exchange a superficial relationship between oneself and the environment for the profound one depicted in Blake’s words. “This,” wrote Makiguchi, “is how we are drawn into communication with the infinite,” our hearts filled with “awe and reverence” for all that we are, either reflected “in a Grain of Sand” or a “Wild Flower” (Makiguchi 1903, cited in Bethel 2002, p. 30). And, so, there is nothing anthropocentric about this. Educational leaders, drawing not simply from the Japanese example but looking to “organizational frameworks that are diffused around the world,” like Makiguchi and Ikeda, “planting seeds of ‘silver bullets’ or ‘best practices’,” need to build some of these sensibilities into their schools, students, teachers, and parents alike; and working with leaders across the board, into the larger community, positioning themselves as ancient philosophers, Socratic and Confucian, as romanticists like Pascal (“the heart has reasons that reason knows not”), and as pragmatists in the Deweyan mold, theory the *sin qua non* of practice (Astiz and Akiba 2016, p. 1; Larson 1999, p. 1; Dewey, cited in Tomlinson 1997, p. 379). Welcome to what one author describes as the discourse of “pedagogical naturalism,” an “emancipatory” act of “living, acting, and educating according to nature” (Fuchs 2004, p. 157).

Early childhood education may be the best place to start, or to return to, the analogy between the child and the garden (kindergarten) being an old and a famous one, an ideal abandoned to the emergence in our own time of linear developmentalism, the myth of progress. Childhood today is seen as merely the first step, a fleeting one, in the lifelong journey to rational adulthood, a state-of-being averse to anything child-like, much less the garden. And yet for the sake of the future, the world threatened as never before by environmental dismemberment, we all need to return there, child-like, with open eyes and arms, hands and hearts.

**Note**

1. One of the Principles of Soka University of America is to “Foster leaders for the creative co-existence of nature and humanity” (University Catalogue, Vol. 18, Fall 2019, 6) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a more detailed background explanation of Soka education and its progenitor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, see Goulah, J. and Andrew, G. (2009). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi: Introduction to the man, his ideas, and the Special Issue.” *Educational Studies*, *45* (2), 115–132 and Goulah and Gebert, (Eds.). (2014). *Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944): Educational philosophy in context*. London, UK: Routledge. Also useful would be Ikeda, D. (2001). *Soka education: A Buddhist vision for teachers, students, and parents*. Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press.

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