

Learning from wildlife: Relational ethics, sustainability and neuroscience

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Steve holds professorial positions at two universities. He has an international reputation in his prime field as a spatial economist, has more than 150 publications, provides regular advice to international and national organisations and communities, and has been recognised by his peers with a number of awards in this field. Professor Garlick is also an applied ethicist with a specialisation and commitment to wildlife welfare. He has carried out more than 1500 animal rescues over the last ten years, rehabilitated around 400 severely injured or orphaned macropods and wombats of all sizes, and released them back to the wild. In 2009 Steve and his wife were awarded the World Shining Compassion Award by the International Ching Hai Association and the 2010 Sustainability Award provided by the Australian Wildlife Protection Council for their work rehabilitating injured wildlife. Steve is chairman of the newly created Animal Justice Party of Australia.

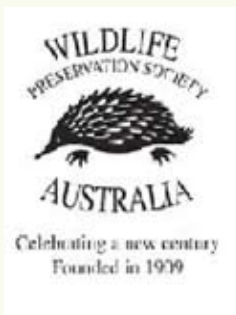
Learning from wildlife: Relational ethics, sustainability and neuroscience

Ability matters in our knowledge society. Close encounters with wildlife can yield transformative learning well beyond the simple biophysical and anthropocentric constructs that are generally a feature of studies in conservation and ecology, animal cognition, and moral concepts of welfare based on rights and interests. Such learning is necessary if we are to have insight into the sustainable practices the planet desperately needs. Humans cannot pursue these questions in isolation of other living beings in the environment and in this regard there may be a need for more discussion about the 'meaning' of animals in engaged learning. Neuroscience tells us there are sensitive and critical periods in human development when these skills and capabilities are best acquired. The context in which learning occurs is also important. There are therefore consequent implications for how we engage with wildlife in our learning frameworks and in our communities.

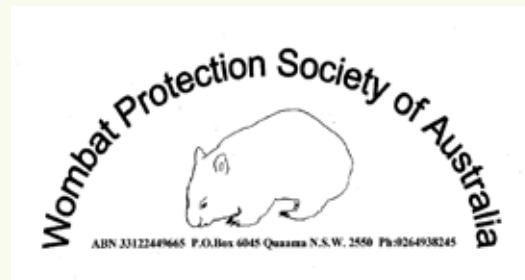
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Saving the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat



LEARNING FROM WILDLIFE: A RELATIONAL ETHIC OF CARE – A ‘THIRD WAY’ OF KNOWING

National Wombat Conference
Albury, NSW
March 19-21, 2011



Professor Steve Garlick
University of Newcastle
University of the Sunshine Coast

Plan

- ❖ To describe the unsatisfactory duality created by conservation & ecology on one side and welfare/ rights approaches on the other and in the way humans interact with wildlife - the duality & the divide.
- ❖ To suggest a 'third way' of approaching wildlife that draws on lessons from our knowledge of quantum physics in western science , the Tao of eastern mystical thought and the ethics of relationism and caring.
- ❖ To propose a new form of zoology
- ❖ Drawing on neuroscience, suggest a practical approach to learning from wildlife based on a learning 'for' the animal rather than the more usual 'learning-about' wildlife, through an 'ecoversity'.



Dualism

- ❖ **Conservation & ecology – preservation of the biota ('numbers without a heart')**
- **Moral preference based on hierarchical value of relative contribution to the universal good of the biota (eg. 'bare-nosed' wombat vs 'northern hairy-nosed' wombat).**
 - Leopold, Callicott, etc
- **Captured by neoliberal & colonialist values (money & domination).**
- **Reasons-out individuality – not only physical objects but the energy of personality, emotion, feelings, knowledge, play, nurturing, etc. As in humans these cognitive and non cognitive abilities matter.**



Dualism cont

- ❖ **Rights, sentience, consciousness, moral consideration, 'interests' & 'justice' – welfare & equality of the individual**
- **preferences the welfare of the individual without reference to the collective based on the equilibrating effect of 'suffering' (Regan) or appends a hierarchy of awareness and 'interests' to suffering (Singer). Those with similar 'interests' count equally.**
- **dolphins, whales, great apes vs wombats.**
 - **Ignores connection of the individual with its context (kin and habitat) and others and the energy related to these associations.**



Wildlife – human divide

- ❖ The binary of 'human life' & its association with 'civilisation/ culture' and 'wild life' & its association with 'barbarity/ nature'
- ❖ The human/animal binary has justified, and continues to justify, the violence and oppression of minority groups.
- ❖ Derrida suggests animal encounters interrupt our being, call us into question, challenge how we think about who we are at this moment (Derrida, 2004) and call us into responsibility.

Lessons from quantum physics & the Tao

- ❖ The universe as a complicated web of interrelations between a complex array of individually unique sub-atomic parts (quarks, leptons, protons and neutrons and their vibrating strings) where the resulting energy created by their relations and differences is a conduit for unpredicted and imprecise tendencies.
- ❖ The whole will not exist without the energy of the interrelationship of the individual parts and the parts are dependent on their interconnection with other parts in a holistic system.
 - ❖ *Tao* – ‘the way of nature’. *Wu-wei* - a connectedness to others and to the environment (the whole). The experience of the individual effects the whole and vice versa.

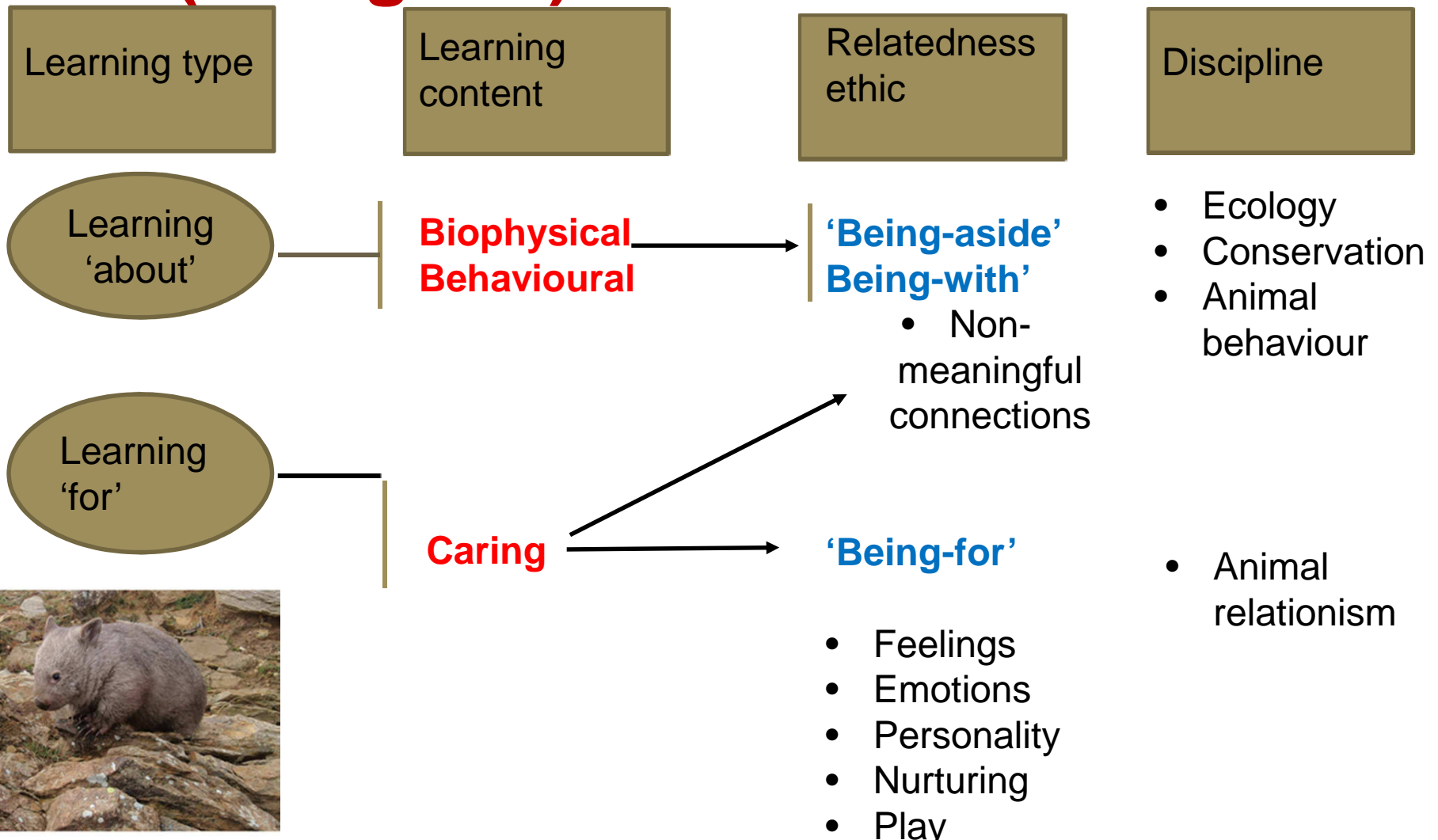


Relational ethic of care: A 'third way of knowing'

- ❖ Jacques Derrida reiterated Bentham's notion of 'suffering' was not to for classifying animals as to consciousness, cognition and 'interest' value (Singer) but to create a relational ethic of interactive learning and awareness.
- ❖ A caring ethic based on a relatedness and a 'being-for' the animal. A different knowing than knowing 'about' an animal as an object from a distance. The former generates respect, understanding (about their emotions, goals, nurturing, etc) learning, contributes to the objective of the 'other' and offers the prospect, without expectation, of reciprocity between the participants.



Learning 'about' ('being-aside' and 'being-with') & the ethic of learning 'for' ('being-for')



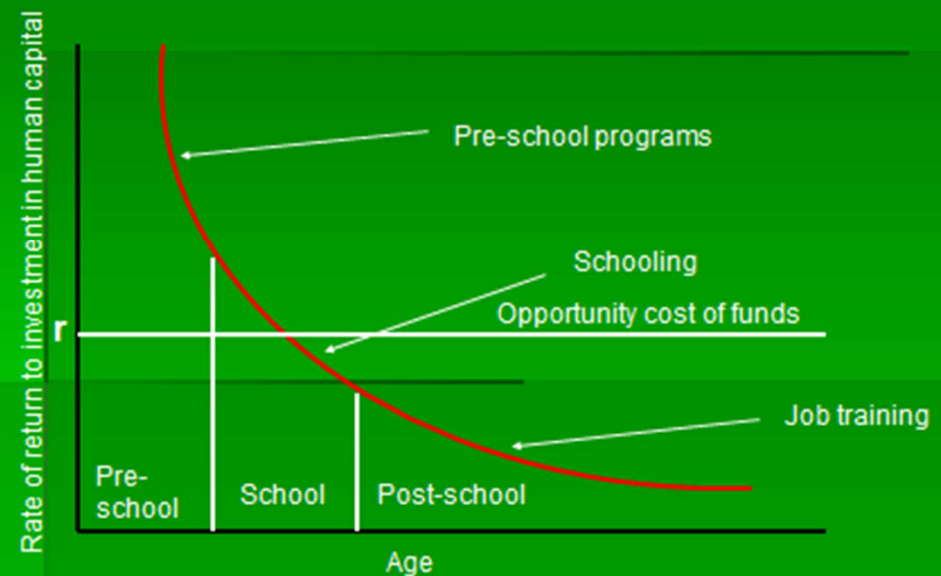
A new science discipline for wildlife

- ❖ Ecology, conservation, zoology, animal behaviour only give us learning about whole-of-species situations based on an ethic of ‘being-with’ or ‘being-alongside’ and *not* ‘being-for’. They don’t focus on the individual or relationships.
- ❖ Animal welfare focuses on the individual but not its context or relationships.
- ❖ A new discipline focused on a ‘being-for’ ethic (an ethic of care) that connects the individual with the whole. It might be termed “animal relationism”.

Neuroscience & learning

- Cognitive & non-cognitive abilities
- Sensitive & critical periods
- Sensitive & critical places
- Multiplied return from investment in early years

Return on human capital investment*

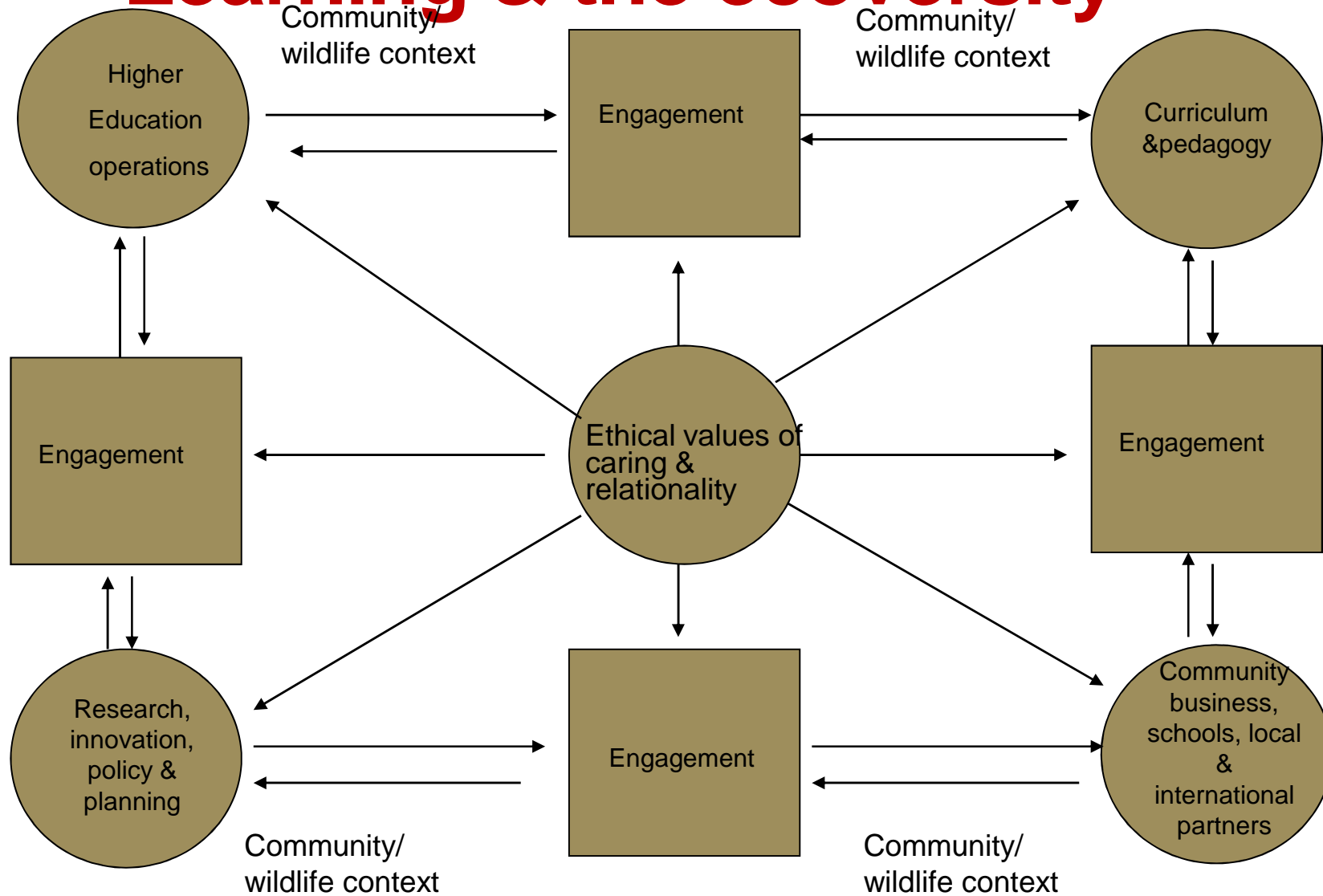


* Human capital investment initially set to be equal across all ages.

Source: Heckman, J and Cunha, F (2006)



Learning & the ecoversity



Source: Matthews, J, Garlick, S, and Smith, T. 2008 "Ecoversity: Towards a Sustainable Future", Journal of the World Universities Forum, vol 2. .

Conclusion

- ❖ **Separate approaches of the biota (conservation/ ecology) and the individual (rights welfare) and the increasing divide between humans and wildlife have failed wildlife**
- ❖ **A ‘third way’ of knowing predicated on an ethic of care (‘being-for’) and a relationism that connects the individual animal with its metaphysical, its context (habitat) and with others including kin.**
- ❖ **Neuroscience tells us to invest in learning at younger ages and that place/ context is important**
- ❖ **The ‘ecoversity’ provides a practical tool for engaged learning about wildlife with an ethic of care. Scope for a new discipline in wildlife study focused on animal relationism and an ethic of care.**

