The Wired Village:
Sustainability, Social Networking and Values in an
Urban Permaculture Community

De Chantal K. Hillis

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Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne
Abstract

This study is an examination of learning and teaching processes within the Permaculture Out West (POW) community group, a sustainability organization that operates in the Western suburbs of Melbourne.

It is posited that key social values are taught and learnt by member participants of the POW organisation through engagement in everyday group activity. Using a multi-sited ethnographic methodology (eg Marcus, 1995) the researcher traces learning and teaching practices amongst participants, with particular reference to group values. These values are examined with reference to the Permaculture concept (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978), the grassroots environmental philosophy which informs sustainability discourse for POW members.

The Community of Practice learning framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991) has influenced both research approach and design, and throughout the project, the group is constructed and interpreted as a ‘Community of Practice’ in line with this school of literature. Web-based ICT technologies are regularly used by group members to produce, enact, teach and learn social values, and thus, the role of ICT in group and communications life forms a particular research focus.

Declaration

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature

Date
Acknowledgments

It takes a village to raise a child, particularly if Mum is busy writing a thesis. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my village; the people who have provided me with a rich intellectual ground from which to develop, and who have helped me along the way.

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I started this thesis when my son, Ethan, was very young. I hope this work, and others with similar goals, will influence the world that he inherits.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Issues of global sustainability and climate change have moved to the fore of public debate. In the face of such challenges, the question of how individuals and communities can ‘become more sustainable’ becomes increasingly pertinent. Can a concerned householder learn to save water? What does it actually mean for a family to ‘live sustainably’? Is it possible for neighbours to work together in order to reduce community reliance on fossil fuels? What sorts of thinking, and what kinds of social values inspire sustainable action and social change? Such questions point to challenges that many Australians are attempting to confront. This is the challenge of learning new ways of being and doing, new ways of thinking, valuing and living, in the face of increased global environmental risk.

Led by their concern over environmental issues, many individuals and communities are struggling to ‘change their ways’. They are attempting to disrupt ecologically damaging habits and practices and move towards alternatives. Concerned individuals may know that buying heavily packaged goods, using too much paper, and wasting water is ‘bad for the environment’. Such points often seem self-evident to the environmentally aware. But in order for individuals and communities to achieve environmental goals, transformational processes must prove successful. Such processes are multi-faceted, highly complex and fraught with political, economic and social significance.

Thus, it can be understood that many individuals, wishing to live sustainably in a ‘modern’ Australian suburb, are attempting to learn how to function differently in their society. This may involve finding out how to shop for special goods and services, or how to harvest water and sunlight in order to meet family resource needs. It may mean teaching a child that water is too valuable to waste, or that it is important to compost. On a deeper level, it may mean engaging with the complex idea of ‘sustainability’. What does the term ‘sustainability’ actually mean? What sorts of discourses guide understandings of ‘sustainability’?

In Melbourne today, there are many community groups and initiatives that are working towards the goal of the ‘sustainable suburb’. Education is generally not an overt aim of these community groups. Nevertheless, education, teaching and learning can be understood as central to transformational processes. The shift from unsustainable lifestyles to sustainable alternatives cannot occur without educative processes. Effective learning facilitates the move from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’.

Examples of grassroots initiatives which work towards such forms of social change include food co-operatives in Footscray, Seddon and Newport. These food co-operatives organise bulk-buying schemes so that families can buy relatively local, unpackaged organic food at competitive prices.
They include local non-government groups such as the Moreland Energy Foundation (MEF), a not-for-profit organization which was established to “help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the municipality of Moreland”. MEF works to achieve outcomes through a variety of on-the-ground training programs, initiatives and strategies:
They include web-based social networking ventures like ‘The Sharehood’ ([www.thesharehood.org](http://www.thesharehood.org)). This is a social networking site that enables individuals who live near each other to form neighborhood based ‘clubs’ (or ‘hoods’). Under a Sharehood scheme, anything from a sewing machine to a lawn mower can also be ‘borrowed rather than bought’ from a neighbor. The interface encourages the sharing, swapping and lending of resources – reducing the need for individual private purchase of goods.

![Image 1.3: retrieved from www.thesharehood.org (2010)](image)

Groups such as these aim to facilitate sustainable lifestyle choices for urbanites. Their goal is to provide solutions to the mundane and quotidian sustainability challenges of everyday life, and to promote a broader cultural shift around resource use and waste management. By their very nature, they present a critique of mainstream ways of living – a critique of resource and energy intensive Australian lifestyles. Taken together, such local groups may be understood as forming an “ecology of alternatives” (Ramos, 2010), a variety of initiatives around living, buying and consuming that provide householders with alternative living strategies and options. From a cultural perspective, such groups are educative in that they promote the teaching and learning of values that are intimately linked to ‘progressive’ and ‘green’ worldviews, as well as grassroots sustainability discourse. Such groups promote ecocentric worldviews; the belief that mankind is part of (as opposed to separate from, or superior to) the natural world. Human-centred worldviews, by comparison, often define mankind (and the products and achievements of mankind) as superior to (i.e. intrinsically of greater value than) the products, achievements and processes of the natural world.
The Study

The focus for this study is one such local initiative: the volunteer-run community group ‘Permaculture Out West’ (or POW). The group was formed when three individuals living in the inner West of Melbourne met whilst undertaking a Permaculture Design Certificate course.

The group mission is the development, promotion and facilitation of sustainability initiatives in the Western suburbs of Melbourne (in particular, the inner West around the area of Footscray). These initiatives draw inspiration from the Permaculture concept: a philosophy of sustainability and sustainable systems design that was developed by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978). As the POW website states: “we’re a group of [local] people who [are] inspired by how Permaculture provides practical solutions” [i.e. to the global sustainability crisis] (www.pow.org.au, 2010).

The inner West area surrounding central Footscray area has, until very recently, been known for both proximity to the Melbourne CBD and very cheap real estate. This area has the largest recent migrant and refugee population in Victoria, with both recently arrived and well established communities from Africa, India and South East Asia. Socially disadvantaged white communities also live in both the inner and outer West – it is not unusual to see groups of people sitting on benches and sharing cheap cask wine. Downtown Footscray is a well acknowledged locus of heroin related activity in Melbourne. Many of the social services that support both poor white communities and recent migrant populations (from government housing, to ESL learning centres, to needle exchanges) are located in the region. I have heard Footscray referred to as ‘Foots-crazy’ or ‘Foots-scary’, and nearby Braybrook as ‘the Braybronx’ – references to the rough and disadvantaged traditions the area is home to.

In the last ten years, house prices rose dramatically throughout Melbourne. As the last (relatively) affordable housing wedge near the CBD, buyers (and particularly first home buyers) flocked to the area. With this, a ‘gentrification trend’ began. In areas once defined by abandoned factories, old service stations and vacant lots, fashionable cafes are beginning to appear. The working class culture which defined Footscray has begun to fade, as increasing numbers of professionals have moved to the area.

A set of ten individuals can be understood as key informants for the study. These individuals are all active members of the POW organization. All informants live in the area, and are between the age of 25 and 65 (with the majority of members aged between 30 and 45). Three are male and seven are female. All were raised in Australia and are fluent English speakers, and eight of the ten are University educated. Many have bought (their first) homes in the area, and most have children under the age of ten.

These individuals can be understood as part of the gentrification trend occurring in the region. They can be broadly described as ‘white’ in that they are conversant with, and have social agency within, dominant white Australian power structures. Within and
beyond this, all informants can be said to have a strong ‘green progressive’ political orientation. This is reflected in the kinds of employment informants are engaged in. One is an activist community artist. Several work in community development (i.e. as nurses, teachers, community workers, or with non-government organizations such as the Wilderness Society). Two have established a small-scale city farm, and one previously ran a green cleaning business.

In line with Permaculture approaches to community development, the projects which POW members organize place an emphasis on the development of local food and resource networks, inner urban organic farming and community development for social and environmental purposes. Thus, a typical POW initiative may be the establishment of a local ‘edible garden’ which serves as a food source for people in the immediate area. This is considered preferable than, for example, locals shopping at the supermarket; supermarket produce is rarely organic, is generally heavily packaged, and has often been transported large distances.

To date, some of the projects that POW has been involved in have included the development of the POW website, which promotes sustainability initiatives in the local area:

The rehabilitation of the Maidstone Community Garden, which was filmed for the SBS television show “Costa’s Gardening Odyssey” (www.sbs.com.au/shows/costa):

Images 1.5 and 1.6: retrieved from www.mooimadeit.com (2011)

The establishment of two Permaculture playgroups that promote sustainability issues and gardening with children; ‘Playblitz’ and the ‘Braybrook Sprouts’:


The co-ordination of local ‘Permablitzes’. These are one-day garden makeovers. During a ‘Blitz’, a large team of volunteers converge on a suburban backyard in order to transform it into an ‘edible garden’:
Image 1.8 and 1.9: (left) retrieved from www.permablitz.net (3rd April, 2011) and (right) retrieved from www.mooimadeit.com (4th August, 2011)

Gardening projects such as these offer a stark contrast to the large roads, industry, and concreted civic areas the West is known for:

Image 1.10 and 1.11: (left) retrieved from Wongm's rail gallery (12th October, 2011) and (right) retrieved from www.fitzroys.com.au (12th October, 2011)

Social Change and Pedagogy

The POW group works to create social change. Activities and projects are implemented with the goal of developing sustainable alternatives to mainstream lifestyle practices. Such activities and initiatives are often educative in nature; for example, the group typically organises events where community members can learn how to grow vegetables
in their backyard:


Or preserve 'local harvests' at a canning workshop:


From a sustainability perspective, it is felt that growing parsley in the backyard is a sustainable alternative to buying it at the local supermarket. In this way, the group engages in ostensibly educative processes: the 'how to's of alternative lifestyle practice.

These educative ‘how-to’s are not the central focus of this research project.

Rather, this research project is an examination of key social values that drive group life,
and the ways in which these social values are both enacted and taught through group activity. I define ‘social values’ as that which is valued by a particular group – quite literally, that which community members hold in high regard.

Two key social values function as key assumptions around what ‘the good life’ entails. They contribute to group members’ definitions of what is worthwhile and important in the world.

1) Group members place a high value on ‘nature’. They idealise the products, processes and aesthetics of natural ecosystems.

2) Group members place a very high value on the development of ‘local community’. They believe that individuals who live near one another should provide one another with social and practical support, form mutually beneficial networks, and so forth. They idealise ‘village’ style social groupings over socially atomised suburban configurations.

It is my thesis that these ideals can be seen as underpinning both the broader Permaculture movement, and local POW ventures. These values inspire and shape POW activity (including learning and teaching processes). Interestingly, such values are very often taught online. Like many modern Westerners, POW members spend a lot of their time in cyberspace. They communicate face to face, but they are also heavily dependant on newer Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

This study is therefore an examination of the ways in which ecocentric and community-centric values are taught in both online and face-to-face settings through participation in POW group work.

The research questions which guide this study are:

1) What key values do POW participants understand as socially valuable and meaningful, and how are these influenced by the Permaculture tradition?

2) How are such values produced, enacted and taught/learnt in face-to-face settings?

3) How are such values produced, enacted and taught/learnt through online technologies?

**Learning Discourses**

As Hodkinson and McLeod (2010) have commented, the term ‘learning’ is a construction used “to label and thus start to explain some [of the] complex processes that are important in our lives” (p.174). In order to analyse teaching and learning, therefore, it is necessary to establish which traditions are relevant to the kinds of learning explored within a project.
This project is informed by constructivist schools of socio-cultural education theory that emerged in response to the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1935). A learning framework developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) has particularly influenced both research approach and design. These theorists describe learning cycles that occur in groups of people engaged in shared activities. These are designated ‘Communities of Practice’ by Lave and Wenger. The ‘Community of Practice’ framework is concerned with the dynamics, interplay and characteristics of groups as they engaged in knowledge production processes. Such an orientation seeks to understand how communities construct, disrupt, transform and teach/learn ‘knowledge’ and ‘capacity’ (including social values) within worlds of everyday lived experience. The Community of Practice framework (and commentary which it has generated) is explored in chapter three.

The tradition that underpins participants' understandings of ‘sustainability’ within the group shapes POW beliefs and values. I define the term ‘sustainability’ as referring to the goal of maintaining a viable planetary system that is able to support life well into the future. The kinds of sustainability activities that participants engage in are formulated with regards to grassroots, rather than scholarly, traditions. Participants principally (though not exclusively) engage with sustainability issues through the framework of the Permaculture tradition. Permaculture is a grassroots philosophy and ‘conceptual toolkit’ that is concerned with the development of sustainable human habitats (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978). The Permaculture concept is explored in greater detail in chapter two.

**Methodological Approach**

The methodological approach taken within this study is that of extended and immersive ethnographic encounter. Ethnographic fieldwork is a common methodological choice for the study of teaching and learning processes within cultures (Beckett and Gough, 2004; Katz, 1991; Chung, 2009; Pieredes, 2008). The practices of social production and reproduction are the “stuff of everyday life, and can be witnessed on the ground” (Katz, p. 1). The Community of Practice literature, and research informed by that literature, is also most commonly associated with ethnographic methodologies.

Within this study, the POW group is viewed as a Community of Practice, and ethnographic approaches which are commonly associated with the Communities of Practice framework are utilised. This study, however, diverges from typical Community of Practice approaches to research in several significant ways, and it is worthwhile noting these in the introduction.

Firstly, the study is an example of ‘complete member’ research (Anderson, 2006). I am a regular member of the POW group, and have been so for over two years. The study incorporates some brief auto-ethnographic elements; sections where “the researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered vital data for understanding the social world at hand” (Anderson, 2006, p.378).

Secondly, in response to recent challenges to, and shifts within, the ethnographic tradition
a 'multi-sited' research strategy has been employed. Multi-sited (Marcus, 1995, 2001; Pierides, 2008) educational research designs can be understood as strategies which aim to reconcile the difficulties of studying educational process within globalising communities. This issue is explored in greater depth in the methodology section of the report.

Finally, in order to more faithfully reproduce, record and analyse the life-world of participants, a great many images have been incorporated into this work. I have included these images with the intent of reproducing the visually rich online environments of my subjects. These days, individuals are as likely to ‘show’ as they are to ‘tell’ when uploading a blog or Facebook post. I consider the image a vital form of data for a project of this kind.

This study has been divided into an introduction, two literature reviews, a methodology chapter, two separate discussion/analysis sections, and a conclusion.

The first literature review provides a critique of the Community of Practice framework, noting in particular the strengths and weaknesses of this framework, and its relevance to the study of both values and online social formations.

The purpose of the second literature review is illustrative; here I provide a description (as opposed to an analysis) of the history and salient features of the Permaculture concept and movement. A grassroots environmental tradition, Permaculture has only generated a small amount of academic literature. Furthermore, much of this literature deals with the Permaculture concept in a limited or topical manner. In order to fully articulate the most relevant aspects of the Permaculture concept, I decided to draw from a wide range of sources (both academic and mainstream) throughout the review. In general, the richest sources proved to be grassroots commentary; these have been incorporated because I feel they best capture the ‘flavour’ of the movement.

The methodology section outlines the reasoning behind the approach taken, and details data collection methods and issues. The discussion sections explore project findings and outcome. These are summarised in the conclusion.

It is hoped that a better and more robust understanding of learning in informal settings can lead to the development of approaches which maximise the learning/transformative opportunities of communities and individuals.
Chapter Two: The Community of Practice Framework

Introduction

The purpose of this review is to provide a critical analysis of the community of practice framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991), in order to better inform a study of values pedagogy amongst Permaculture Out West (POW) group members. A historical overview is conducted, and relevant contexts where, and purposes for which, this framework has been employed are selectively examined. Of particular importance to this study is a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the model, as well as an investigation of the use of the model in the study of values pedagogy. The influence of web based social formations on more recent community of practice literature forms an additional focus.

Background

The articulation of coherent social learning theories marked a movement away from many of the signposts which structure definitions of learning in both behaviourist and cognitivist accounts. Most notably, social learning theorists did not define the individual learner as a 'stand alone' field of analysis. In that ‘knowledge’ and ‘skill’ reside within the collective, the social constructivist schools that emerged from the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1935) were distinctive. As Hager and Halliday (2006) have noted, “what [was] missing from cognitivist and behaviourist accounts…[was] the social element” (p.17). And if, as Hodkinson and McLeod (2010) have suggested, “learning is a construct that we use to begin to describe some of the processes that are important in our lives” (p.174) then the emphasis on the social in these traditions marked a general movement away from individualism and the idea of the atomised stand-alone learner.

Thus, within socio-cultural schools, we see that learning functions “as a dimension of social practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1996, p. 149). Understandings around the ways that individuals shape (and are shaped by) group life form the basis of knowledge production processes and teaching/learning frameworks. Processed through the social, 'knowledge' and ‘capacity’ thus became a “by product of social process” (Hoadley and Kilner, 2005, p.31). The ‘expert’ must be recognized as such by others; the ‘expert’ is one who has developed skill and capacity in relation to enterprises which have value in particular social contexts (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Consequently, sociocultural learning models can be applied to the intentional acquisition of skill/knowledge as well as the general acquisition of culture – both “deliberate education and accidental adaptation” (Hoadley and Kilner, p.32).

The Community of Practice Framework

The theoretical positioning utilised in the development of this study (the community of practice framework) emerges explicitly from these constructivist schools. This model was
first articulated by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in their monograph ‘Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ (1991). Wenger’s 1998 publication ‘Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity’ provided additional commentary on the original thesis. Essentially both underscore different aspects of the same key concept; the idea that through engagement in communities individuals adopt the skills, values and practices of those communities.

The community of practice (CoP) framework was developed through ethnographic study of work practices amongst site-bound groups. Lave (1991) for example, examined apprenticeship relationships amongst both midwives in the Yucatan and tailors in Goa. Wenger observed office work - that of claims processors located in the office of a large health insurance company. Thus, in its first iteration, the community of practice framework strongly referenced, and drew from, the idea of place. In this sense, Lave and Wenger’s framework (1991) could be seen as fitting squarely within very traditional ethnographic approaches where the study of co-located group members, in situ, forms the central focus.

Lave and Wenger (1991) described the ways in which communities where social practices/activities or goals are shared (for example, communities of dressmakers, midwives or surgeons) engage in informal and spontaneous learning processes, inducting new participants into the skills, traditions, values and customs of their established group. ‘Old timers’, or experienced members, induct ‘newcomers’ through a process described as 'legitimate peripheral participation' – a learning trajectory whereby novice participants gradually moved from positions on the periphery of community life to positions of centrality, mastery and relative community importance. This occurs as they adopt the capacities and practice-identities that are central to group membership. They adopt these processes by imitating the work of, and modelling from the products of, old-timers within the community.

Certain key tenets (or core assumptions) were used to draw the model together. These can be seen as the assumption of practice (all individuals engage in practices and activities), the assumption of human sociability (“no man is an island, entire unto himself”) and a redefinition of the construct of both learning and knowledge (learning as an adaptive, constant, and embodied process/knowledge as capacity with regard to socially validated enterprises). These core assumptions converge on a single point: the idea of the Community of Practice. This is the community that coheres around core set practices or, alternatively, a shared goal, defined by Lave and Wenger as any kind of ‘negotiated enterprise’ (1991).

Within the Lave and Wenger (1991) framework, the motivations and structuring agents for Community of Practice formations were understood to be broad. For example: individuals may seek out others who are interested in the same activities (e.g. going fishing on a regular basis with a group of friends who also like to fish). They may undertake paid employment out of necessity, moving into a space where they are compelled to participate in particular practices such as slapping burgers together with others at a fast food restaurant. Or, as Wenger (1998) has suggested, a family may be
considered a community of practice (“simply surviving together is an important enterprise”, p.154). Thus, it is understood that individuals who work together in a ‘negotiated enterprise’ of nearly any sort develop shared cultural practices, community knowledge and perspectives on expertise which facilitate communal life.

In its treatment of the teaching and learning of values, early descriptions of the framework clearly place values in the realm of what is learnt and taught within CoP formations (Cox, 2005; Handley, Sturdey and Fincham et al., 2006). For example Wenger (1998, p.187) states that participants “construct identities [and beliefs] in relation to communities”. Lave and Wenger note that participation is about becoming “a certain kind of person” (1991, p.67).

Despite this, the teaching and learning of specific social values (eg that which communities identify as particularly important and worthwhile) have rarely formed the focus of research design, and are often referred to in passing rather than examined in detail (Cain, 1991; Cox, 2005). Handley, Sturdey and Fincham et al have noted that: “within the situated learning literature there is surprisingly little reference to explicit theories of identity construction [despite the fact that] ongoing participation within a community is bound to affect a sense of individual identity” (2006, p.36). The exception to this rule is a small band of literature from the sociolinguistic tradition. I describe this literature in greater detail in subsequent sections of this review.

**Strengths of the CoP Framework**

The CoP model has proved to be an influential learning framework, reinvigorating interest in situated and social forms of learning and attracting a wide following (Amin and Roberts, 2008; Duguid, 2005). As a variety of scholars have noted (e.g. Beckett and Gough, 2004; Beckett and O’Toole, 2010; Billett, 1994; Handley, Sturdey and Fincham et al. 2006) ideas of modelling, imitation and ‘everyday pedagogy’ as vital and relevant learning forms often sit uncomfortably with Western theoretical traditions which posit a separation between mind and body (e.g. the so-called ‘Cartesian dualism’).

Within such traditions, objective and rational ‘mind work’ achieves eminence over unreflexive ‘apprenticeship’ approaches to learning. Such pedagogical traditions often emphasise the value of formal, classroom-based “critical” approaches to study over the kinds of learning that occur in the context of situated social practice. For example, scholars such as Prawat (1993) have argued that apprenticeship approaches to learning may privilege procedural forms of skill acquisition over the development of propositional and conceptual forms of knowledge. This is the fear of pure mimicry, of the reproduction of one ‘right way’ of doing which limits depth of understanding and ultimately, creativity.

In contrast to these claims, ‘apprenticeship’ scholars argue that work within inherently social practice fields are key to the development of context sensitive judgement and independent reasoning capacities. Brown, Collins and Duguid capture these ideas through
their notion of Cognitive Apprenticeship (1989), arguing:

“apprenticeship techniques actually reach well beyond the physical skills...to the kinds of cognitive skills more normally associated with conventional schooling. [For example] advanced graduate students in the social sciences...acquire their extremely refined research skills through the apprenticeships they serve with senior researchers. It is then that they, like all apprentices, must recognize and resolve ill-defined problems that issue out of authentic activity, in contrast to the well-defined exercises that are typically given to them in their earlier schooling...[and develop] their conceptual understanding through social interaction and collaboration” (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, p.36).

Hildreth, Kimble and Wright (2000) argue a very similar point through their differentiation of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ forms of knowledge. These scholars describe hard knowledge as that which can be readily captured and reified, for example in canonical texts within disciplines. Soft knowledge, by comparison, implies the tacit understanding of the seasoned professional. Seasoned individuals and groups can work fluidly, and potentially innovate, in relation to the established, codified norms of particular traditions. Hard knowledge can be written down, soft knowledge is better understood as reflexive.

Duguid (2005) also argues that codified knowledge often requires interpretation: “the bible finds radically different interpretation amongst different sects...[it’s not enough to]...learn to decode a text in the abstract, but of learning to decode from the perspective of that discipline” (p.113). Because experts function naturally and automatically within given contexts, “experts may know more than they can say” (p. 108).

Thus, the holder of tacit knowledge is able to compare and contrast ways of doing and being, with reference to an understanding of the ways in which ‘hard knowledge’ actually applies to real-world situations. The holder of tacit knowledge is the domain elder - able to innovate with confidence. The folk expression ‘you’ve got to learn the rules if you want to be able to break them’ perhaps best sums up the transition between these states.

Commenting on the popularity of the framework, a variety of authors have argued that eager adoption of the model can be linked to the overtly positive and egalitarian connotations of the word “community” (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cox, 2005; Duguid, 2005; Roberts, 2006). As Hobsbawm (1994, p. 428) famously commented, ‘never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life’. According to these authors, the term ‘community’ implies warmth, trust, familiarity and humanity. Within the context of the modern life world, the term has an undeniable attraction.

Nevertheless, a variety of writers have commented on the benefits of socially situated learning, of the type described by Lave and Wenger. Edwards (2005), arguing from a
Deweyan perspective, has stated that socially situated forms of learning are driven by (and through) a legitimate search for meaning. To this I would add: socially situated forms of learning often imply agency within social worlds – in learning to bake one gets a cupcake, in learning about baking one receives a cupcake sticker.

Rogers (2000) suggests that one of the benefits of social and situated forms of learning is the focus on multiple viewpoints: “when learners regard knowledge as dynamic and negotiable they build their own representations of knowledge and help each other understand important domain concepts…this is congruent with ‘best practice’ cognitivist models” (p.384). Like much of real world problem solving and activity, CoP learning occurs in teams (Johnson, 2001). By comparison, traditional approaches to schooling may risk an overemphasis on individual effort.

Handley, Sturdy and Fincham, discussing CoP formations, have observed that successful learning within domains requires play with the artefacts and tools of the domain (2006). A surgeon must know his/her scalpel, an astronomer his telescope, a social worker his client intake sheet, and so forth. Familiarity with reified objects, both physical and conceptual, is best achieved on the ground.

**The Community of Practice and Values Pedagogy**

Whilst many scholars who utilise the CoP framework have acknowledged these formations as a forum for the teaching and learning of social values, an examination of such has rarely formed the focus of research design (Cain, 1991; Cox, 2005). As Handley, Sturdy and Fincham et.al (2006) have commented: “this is surprising [since] ongoing participation within a community is bound to affect individual identity” (p.45).

Exceptions have included those presented by scholars such as Cain (1991), who positioned the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting as a community of practice where individuals adopt a specific belief system, arguing that:

“As a cultural system, and one that no one is born into, all of the beliefs of AA must be learned. The propositions and interpretations of events and experiences, the appropriate behaviors and values of an AA alcoholic, and the appropriate placement of the alcoholic identity in the hierarchy of identities one holds must be learned. In short, the AA identity must be acquired, and its moral and aesthetic distinctions internalized. This cultural information is transmitted through the AA literature, and through talk in AA meetings and in one-to-one interactions” (p. 215).

Cain (1991) portrays this process as identity work. Joining AA, the individual first comes to describe themselves as an alcoholic. They participate in meetings, study AA literature and conduct casual conversations, engaging in educative cycles with other reformed alcoholics. Over time, the participant begins to reframe both their history and their future.
‘Moral and aesthetic’ systems shift as the individual begins to construct an identity that is aligned with their AA network. Individuals reset personal priorities and goals in accordance with their new ‘sober alcoholic’ identity. The views, values and beliefs of the AA community are increasingly internalized by the reformed alcoholic.

The largest contribution to the literature around CoP formations and social values comes from a small band of scholars from the sociolinguistic tradition, who describe CoP teaching processes thus: “in the course of regular joint activity, a CoP develops ways of doing things – views, values, power relations, and ways of talking” (Eckert, 2006, p.1). These scholars brought the CoP concept into socio-linguistics ‘as a way of theorizing [the teaching of] language and gender’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, p.1). According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, use of language within CoPs shape the culture of such groups – while conversely, the culture of groups shapes internal language practices.

Following from the work of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) the teaching and learning of gender practices and identities within CoPs formed a particular focus for sociolinguists such as Ehrlich (1999), Freed (1999), Kiesling (1998) and Paechter (2002, 2006). In addition to a special focus on the relationship between language and gender, sociolinguists mobilised the model for the study of a variety of other aspects of social identity.

De Fina described ‘code-switching’ (or linguistic identity shift) amongst Italian American immigrants (2007). In the work of De Fina, we see Italian American immigrants moving from one linguistic style to the other, depending on the ‘community’ with which they are conversing. In order to fit into multiple settings, these immigrants must effectively internalise not only the language, but also the culture and priorities, of both ‘Italian’ and ‘American’ settings.

Eckert (1989) has described “burnouts” and “jocks” as unique communities of practice within the high school setting whose unique language practices work to shape and delineate values. Also focussing on the internal communities within a suburban high school, Bucholtz (1999), used the framework to describe the learning and teaching of social values (and processes of valuing) amongst a group of “female nerds”, examining the ways in which these students construct goals and priorities that critique their mainstream high school culture. In order to construct viable and legitimate identities within a ‘nerd’ subgroup community, Bucholtz’ subjects develop language, slang and stories which reinforces their unique priorities within the high school system.

Also of particular note is the work of Bathmaker (2005), who describe cultures of disillusionment and apathy amongst older teachers. Bathmaker critiques and examines the apprenticeship relationships between ‘mentor’ and ‘trainee’ teachers, drawing attention to the ways in which trainee teachers engage with the views presented by their ‘burnt-out’ mentors. Older mentors, within Bathmaker’s study, are committed to simply ‘getting by’. By comparison, the teachers who they are meant to be training actively reject many of the apathetic value models that they are introduced to – preferring to develop their own educative goals, priorities and standards.
An interesting analysis of early childhood pedagogy has also been presented by Fleer (2003). This author describes the early childhood classroom of mainstream Australian society as a CoP which stands quite distinctly apart from the rest of society. According to Fleer, early childhood education institutions have their own artefacts (e.g. miniature furniture, crayons, ‘big picture’ storybooks, etc) and distinct culture (e.g. specialist television shows, celebrities such as ‘The Cookie Monster’). These environments, the artefacts within these environments, and the unique ‘early childhood’ culture that distinguishes such settings must be seen as running parallel to (rather than integrated with) mainstream Australian culture. By comparison, early childhood education, in both indigenous Australian settings and other indigenous cultures, is distinct in that it is seamlessly woven into the fabric of daily adult life. In her work, Fleer argues that indigenous children are taught to perceive themselves as part of the larger group (rather than part of a subgroup – ‘the children’). They are also taught to internalise adult goals and priorities (i.e. ‘getting food’). By comparison, Western children belong to the CoP of childhood – their goals and priorities are those of the other children (i.e. ‘getting a Barbie doll’).

Emergence of the Web Based ‘Community of Practice’

As Cox (2005) has stated, early analyses of communities of practice were built on a “body of common influences in ethnographic studies” (p.2) that emphasised the situated and engaged. As Amin and Roberts (2008) have noted, however, understandings of what a community of practice is have moved from descriptions of the craft or task based group or workplace, to the world of the virtual. Increasingly, the model is used to make sense of learning amongst web-based communities; a tool for understanding learning and knowledge production within online groups.¹

Such a shift is not as out of touch with the original thesis as it may seem. Lave and Wenger explicitly stated that community of practice “does not necessarily imply co-presence” (1991, p.98). Wenger, additionally, observed that participation refers not just to ‘local events of engagement, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities (original emphasis, 1998, p.4). This correlates with Amin and Roberts’ assertion that relational knowing comes in different spatial forms (2008).

Both the concept (and the rise in the popularity of) the online ‘Community of Practice’ can be seen as intimately linked to forms of social interaction enabled by Web 2.0 developments. This includes the rise of ‘collaborationware’, social media platforms, user-generated media content and the popularisation of the wiki, blog and podcast (to name a few). With the adoption of such technologies, theoretical models with the capacity to

¹ CoP scholars who study online groups rarely examine the teaching and learning of social values. Exceptions include Robertson’s (2008) study on online ‘gaming’ and masculine identity.
describe and analyse learning in online spaces were required. The CoP framework became one of these.

Examples of online ‘Communities of Practice’ have included an extremely wide variety of web-based configurations, from online interest groups, to ‘gamers’ (Robertson, 2008), to database managed health insurance customers (Cothrel and Williams, 2000). Most notably, this trend has occurred in parallel with moves to ‘operationalise’ the framework. Since “networked technology and remote collaboration” (Johnson, 2001, p. 45) are now norms for many outsourced and globalised knowledge workers we see a rise in interest in models which explore teaching and learning amongst experts linked through web platforms rather than geography.

As Hildreth, Kimble and Wright (1998) argue, the CoP model took on increased relevance “with the rapid internationalisation of business [that spread knowledge and practice] over national boundaries posing problems of cultural and temporal as well as physical distance” (p.1). Thus, we see the statement that “reports from the field suggest that virtual communities of practice are becoming a knowledge management tool of choice for an increasing number of multinational corporations, including such industry leaders as Hewlett Packard, Chevron, Ford, Xerox, Raytheon, IBM and Shell” (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2003, p.4).

While many advocate for use of the tool as a framework in the area of organisational knowledge management (e.g. Wenger, 2000), the move from conventional academic publishing to “management toolbox literature” (Amin and Roberts, 2008) has sparked controversy. These authors critique the “instrumentalist… increasingly homogenous… and… imprecise” appropriations of the term. Cox, likewise, contends that “the breadth and ambiguities of terms like ‘Communities of Practice’ are a source of the concepts’ reusability, allowing it to be reappropriated for different purposes” (2005, p.1).

Both within and beyond business publishing, the diverse kinds of social formations which are positioned as Communities of Practice have led to the general argument that the model lacks clear cut definitional boundaries. Cox (2005) has suggested that the model, at worst, often suggests nothing more than a “primordial culture sharing entity” (p. 98). In an attempt to bring a greater degree of precision to CoP models, attempts have been made by various authors (e.g. Brown and Duguid, 2001; Linkvist, 2005) to refine and define definitional boundaries through the development of sub-categories. Thus we see the articulation of the “collectivity of practice”, the “practice team” and the online “practice network”.

Oesterlund and Carlile (2003, p.21) however, have argued that the danger of these extensive taxonomies has been “a proliferation of concepts describing cross-communal boundaries [that] leave more questions open than answered”. Brown and Duguid (2001) have also noted that “an overarching focus on [what sharing practices] means in the broader literature often loses site of the thorny relational thinking forming the foundation of a practice theory” (2001, p.21). These authors argue that people naturally engage in shared practices together, and scaffold new knowledge for each other. They occupy a
space where they “draw on different backgrounds and experiences...allowing community members to engage in a task by complementing each others activities in an unfolding improvisation” (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p.4). They may work face-to-face, collaborate remotely, or learn from each other in any variety of ways. This is an organic process which does not sit well with the policing of strict definitional boundaries. As Oesterlund and Carlile (2003) frame it:

“relational thinking lies at the heart of practice theory and creates a particularly dynamic and open-ended approach with leeway for quite different formulations...a community of practice is not defined in and of itself (or certain essential characteristics of its members) but through the relations shaped by its practice. Communities of practice are, thus, probabilistic constructs that should not necessarily be conflated with reality” (p. 34).

With the move to increasingly open and fluid forms on online interaction and learning, Duguid (2005) has argued that the online CoP may often simply be understood as a “learning ecology”; a term which implies the openness, flow and randomness of a complex adaptive system. Certainly with the rise of technologies such as the wiki, there is an argument to be made for the notion of “distributed intelligence” (Brown, 2002) – the idea of multiple individuals who work together to each contribute a piece to the puzzle.

In concluding, it is worth noting that two questions are regularly raised alongside the idea of the online CoP. These can be summarised as: can online CoPs deliver the trust, relationship and social capital of face to face formations, and can such CoPs facilitate the learning of ‘soft’ as well as ‘hard’ (or canonical/easily reified) knowledge? (e.g. Johnson, 2001; Rogers, 2000).

Interestingly, CoP scholars who study online groups rarely examine the teaching and learning of social values in online settings. An exception to this is Robertson’s (2008) study on online ‘gaming’ and masculine identity. In an extensive review of the video gaming experiences of over four hundred boys, Robertson concluded that the frame of CoP was inappropriate, since the boys were engaging with fixed media (rather than each other). Nonetheless, Robertson did note that video games (though not ‘Communities of Practice’ in any real sense) did work to reinforce hegemonic understandings of masculinity.

These questions, to varying extent, may go to the heart of the issue of what it means to be human in the present era - and what it means to adopt certain beliefs and values.

As Henri and Pudelko (2003) have noted:

“certain authors question the fact that communities can exist in virtual mode, since for them the concept of community cannot be disassociated from a common physical space and from a history shared by its members, two elements on which complex social relationships are
based...for other authors, virtual life is an established fact and the
destiny of human society is from now on dependant on it. Virtual
communities exist and play a socialisation role to the same extent as
‘real’ communities...they carry values...” (p.474).

**In Conclusion: The Permaculture Out West (POW) Community of Practice**

The group under study is located in a specific geographic space (the inner Western suburbs of Melbourne). Members generally subscribe to the idea of *relocalisation*; a philosophy which emphasises the importance of knowing neighbours, building local community and managing resources within small, closed-loop systems where possible (this issue is explored in greater depth in the next chapter). POW members meet regularly in the local area. They also ‘meet up’ via a variety of networked technologies (e.g. email and facebook) on a daily basis.

Whilst the internet was originally conceived as a tool for enabling collaboration across large distances, it can be seen that the group under study is (by contrast) using online interaction as a way to relocalise – to reassert the value of the geographically bound.

The original Lave and Wenger (1991) rendition of CoP emerged from the study of such site-bound groups. Scholars who have utilised the framework as a way of studying identity issues, values and worldview development have, likewise, focussed on site-bound groups – or groups whose interaction occurs in face-to-face settings.

While research has been conducted on both online and co-located groups the learning and teaching of values within such groups has rarely formed the focus of such research.

This gives rise to the question: how are the values and worldviews of member participants learnt, taught and generated through participation in a ‘community of practice’ which also functions in online spaces? If ‘Communities of Practice’ are no longer understood as, by definition, situated and co-located, if they can be fleeting or relatively permanent, how are social values taught through these forms of relationship?

As individuals increasingly participate in forms of relationship and community which stretch from the face-to-face to the networked, such issues become increasingly pertinent.

It is hoped that this study can contribute to a greater understanding of such issues – and the relationship between pedagogy, values and contemporary forms of relationship.

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2 These are groups that function through both face-to-face and online relationship.
Chapter Three: The Permaculture Concept

Introduction

The organisation under study is the group Permaculture Out West (POW). Members of this group work to achieve sustainability goals in the inner Western region of Melbourne.

Sustainability as a public discourse is underpinned by a variety of theoretical and grassroots perspectives which lead to a great variety of ‘sustainability strategies’. As the name of the group suggests, the kinds of ‘sustainability strategies’ that participants endorse are, in large part, formulated with regards to the Permaculture tradition.

The purpose of this review is to provide a general description and historical overview of the Permaculture concept. Both a philosophy and a design framework, the Permaculture concept was first articulated in the book Permaculture One (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978). Over the past thirty years, the concept has given rise to an international grassroots Permaculture movement. An outline of both the concept and movement is given, with salient features outlined.

Permaculture is a holistic philosophy and design tradition whose goal is the development of ‘closed loop’ human habitats and systems (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978; Holmgren, 2002; Woodrow, 1996; Smith, 2002; 2004). Bill Mollison, a naturalist, psychologist and agricultural specialist, was a lecturer at the University of Tasmania, and co-author David Holmgren a graduate student at the same institution, when the two published Permaculture One in 1978, the first clear articulation of the concept. The ideas presented drew heavily from ecological systems theory, and in particular the work of ecologist Howard T. Odum (1924-2002). Whilst the term Permaculture arose as a portmanteau of the words ‘permanent’ and ‘agriculture’, over time Permaculture design principles came to be understood as applicable to a wide range of human activities and structures. These days, the term is generally understood as a portmanteau of the words ‘permanent’ and ‘culture’ (King, 2008).

Though conceived in academia, early Permaculture was also clearly influenced by the ‘bush hippy’ and intentional community movements of the 1970s. Permaculture One thus functions as a conceptual 'toolkit' for the development of sustainable forms of agriculture (‘permanent agriculture’) for the ‘tune in, turn on, drop out’ generation – in most cases, individuals who were willing to leave the city and try their hands at subsistence farming. Early Permaculture approaches can thus be seen as intimately linked to the ethos, goals and aesthetics of 1970's environmentalism and in the preface, Mollison and Holmgren identify their audience as:

‘small groups, living on marginal land cheaply available, where the ethics of farming are aimed at a future, and different, life style and where regional self-sufficiency is more important than cash cropping
for export, or monoculture for commercial gain” (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978, p3).

The Permaculture Concept

At the centre of Permaculture approaches to design are the ideas of biomimicry: the ‘examination of nature, its models, systems, processes and elements to emulate or take inspiration from in order to solve human problems’ (“Biomimicy”, Wikipedia, 2011), as well as systems thinking: ideas around the examination of whole systems and their interactive processes. Thus, at its heart, the tradition is concerned with the innovation of human systems and structures that mimic and maximise the beneficial synergies (i.e. systemic relationships) of indefinitely sustainable natural ecosystems (King, 2008; Smith, 2002, 2004).

Holmgren and Mollison (1978) argued that human systems often lack the inherent self-regulation and self-organising adaptive capacities of indefinitely sustainable natural ecosystems. We adapt nature to our ends with the aid of fossil (and other non renewable) fuels rather than effectively utilising, and positively interacting with natural forces. For example, this refrigerator uses electricity to create a cold environment.

Alternatively, through intelligent design, we can harness nature to attain the same ends. In this case, we see that we can learn from the bear (i.e. ‘biomimicry’) and build a larder

– taking advantage of stable earth temperature for the storage of foodstuffs.

Images 3.2&3.3: Biomimicry, Permaculture (2011)
(Storage underground makes use of a stable earth temperature. From observation to biomimicry: “termite mounds inspire passive climate control in modern housing” and “storage underground”).

In addition to this, as ‘linear’ thinkers (i.e. individuals who tend to perceive and resolve problems one at a time) we fail to engage with, understand and capture the complex interactive processes within systems. Observation is the key to the harnessing of beneficial synergies (Holmgren, 2002; Woodrow, 1996). Permaculturists ask: if we observe natural ecosystems over a protracted period of time, what can we learn? How can we use the forces and relationships we find in nature to meet human needs? Can sustainable structures be developed which mimic the self-regulating and sustainable systems found in natural eco-systems? How can we harness these relationships?

**Permaculture Principles: Designing for Sustainability**

Permaculture philosophy is based on three core ethics: that of ‘earth care’ (i.e. care of the earth), ‘people care’ (care for the people of the planet) and ‘fair share’ (the belief that resources and surpluses should be distributed appropriately). Underpinned by these ethics, the ideal Permaculture design system moves from the practice of observing natural
systems, before *harnessing and using nature* to attain human ends. In Permaculture there is a difference between the concept of *harnessing* nature (as a paradigm), and *dominating* nature (as a paradigm). In the harness paradigm, one looks at the whole system, including all parts and factors (or, more realistically, as many as possible), as well as the beneficial synergies between parts, in its estimation (Woodrow, 1996). Solutions are sought which maintain the ongoing viability of a balanced ecological system. In the *dominate* paradigm, the utilisation of one resource occurs at the expense of the whole system. For example, driving a car compromises the ongoing viability of the biosphere. In this way, ecological damage occurs.

An exemplary Permaculture design, and an oft used metaphor for the capturing of beneficial synergies, is the chicken tractor:

*Image 3.4: retrieved from [www.uwsp.edu](http://www.uwsp.edu) (2nd August, 2011)*

The chickens in these “tractors” are able to forage for much of their own food (chickens are scavengers; they quite happily eat grass and insects) reducing the need for external food sourcing. Within three weeks, they will have eradicated the grass in the area under the tractor – either it will have been torn out and eaten, or it will have been burnt off by the nitrogen rich chicken manure. This chicken manure will also have fertilised the soil. The population of predatory pests (for example, cabbage moths) will have been decimated, and the soil will have been tilled by the birds as they foraged for food. After three weeks, the area under the chicken tractor is ready for the planting of vegetables, and the tractor can be moved to a new site.
This can be understood as a ‘closed loop’ agricultural system – the chickens provide what is required for the growing of successful vegetables, and, in turn, the vegetables growing site provides what is needed for the chickens to live and produce eggs. Very few external resources are required, and human workload is reduced. As Woodrow (1996) frames it: 'the trick to doing less is doing what we humans do best: use our intelligence to see patterns, create designs and invent things...good designs can get most other work done free...work smarter, not harder' (p. 2). Permaculture designers argue for ‘design intensive’ approaches and strategy to the achievement of human ends, rather than approaches requiring fossil fuels and human labour for their maintenance.

A key aspect of the Permaculture approach is the focus on both local and closed loop systems – the idea that both resource and waste management solutions should be found as close to the source where they are needed as possible. Often, as the example of chicken manure demonstrates, these are one and the same. Within a Permaculture design, one first articulates the boundaries of the overall system, and then designs within that system. Designed systems are typically small-scale ‘human habitats’ – for example, in the image below we see a retrofit design for four interdependent terrace houses:


Because Permaculture design principles are holistic and intuitive, Permaculture cannot be ‘fixed’ or described as an absolute theoretical construct. Twelve key design principles, and three core ethics form the basis of the Permaculture tradition and these function as ‘signposts’ for designers (see Appendix). For example, principle number one - “observe and interact” - encourages a *protracted* period of observation of any natural system, before the development of a design solution. Principle eight, “integrate rather than segregate”, emphasises the idea that designers should look for solutions where multiple
aspects of a system support each other (as they do in the example of the chicken tractor). As Holmgren has written:

“each principle can be thought of as a door into the labyrinth of systems thinking. Any example used to illustrate one principle will also embody others, so the principles are simply thinking tools to assist us in identifying, designing and evolving design solutions” – (Holmgren, 2002, p.7).

Because Permaculture principles are always interpreted creatively and intuitively, it is fair to say that “the term Permaculture [has come to mean] different things to different people” (Holmgren, personal communication, November 7th, 2009).

Whilst Permaculture was conceived in academia, scholarly interest in Permaculture approaches have been slow in developing – possibly because of the holistic, interdisciplinary and interpretive nature of the tradition. The tradition has spread primarily through the training of individuals in Permaculture through the Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC). This is a certificate course which is offered through a variety of community and grassroots institutions, such as local eco-centres. Emphasising practical design activities and skills, the focus of PDC graduates has generally been “grass roots change, usually starting with their own backyard and/or community…” [which as of 2007] has led to more than 4000 projects across all continents (Smith, Willetts, and Mitchell, 2007).

Globally, Permaculture can also be seen as particularly influencing the organic farming movement (King, 2008; Santiago de Abreu and Pettan et. al, 2007). Increasingly, Permaculture approaches are being incorporated in the design and development of sustainable housing (Littman, 2009, SustainableABC.com, 2011) as well as approaches to urban planning (Keady, Williams and Marshall, 2008). Permaculture has long been associated with the eco-village and intentional community movement (Veteto and Lockyer, 2007) and associated cultural movements. These include ‘alternative’ educational initiatives that promote experiential forms of learning (Lewis, Mansfield and Baudains, 2008; Smith, Willetts and Mitchell, 2007; Suzuki, 2008).

Re-localisation

Permaculture (as a tradition) emphasises small and decentralised solutions to local problems. Because of this emphasis on community-led grassroots problems solving and governance, critics of the Global Northern development model (and particularly, attempts to introduce the same into Global Southern communities) often tout Permaculture approaches as a development alternative (Morrow, 2010; Veteto and Lockyer, 2007). In this vein, Permaculture farming methods have influenced agricultural policy in countries such as Vietnam, Cuba and Brazil, where they function as an alternative to large scale industrial forms of agriculture (Santiago de Abreu and Pettan et. al, 2007; Veteto and Lockyer). A variety of community development initiatives in the developing nations have
also taken inspiration from the Permaculture concept (Wilson, 2007, Santiago de Abreu and Pettan et. al, 2007).

As a social movement within industrialised nations, urban Permaculture approaches can be understood as closely linked to ideas of food miles (the principle of minimising food transport emissions), organic and edible gardening practice, the ‘slow food’ movement (which promotes local culinary traditions over globalised and corporatised food production), as well as urban reforestation.

An important concept which is associated with Permaculture is thus ‘relocalisation’ (sometimes described as ‘localisation’). The term ‘relocalisation’ is used to describe the belief that the local should be prioritised in the development of civic and community life. Relocalists argue in favour of the local production and consumption of goods and services, local approaches to waste management, the promotion of local histories and cultures, and the maintenance of local identities. For example, Permaculturists place a large emphasis on the development of local community networks for social and environmental purposes. One re-localisation example, Transition Towns, is an international social movement which draws explicitly from the Permaculture tradition (Keady, Williams and Marshall, 2008). ‘Transition Towns’ are suburbs, neighbourhoods or municipalities who are working to shift toward sustainability. The rejection of long supply chains and fossil fuel dependence are key elements of the Transition Town approach – proponents argue that communities need to obtain resources as locally as possible. ‘Relocalists’ aim to:

“build societies based on the local production of food, energy, employment and goods… relocalism promotes greater security and self-reliance in terms of energy, food and water systems and aims to dramatically improve environmental conditions. In doing so, it rebuilds and reconnects community and strengthens local culture and identity”

The Relocalisation Network (www.postcarbon.org/relocalize, retrieved 2008, para. 14)

Commenting on the relocalist movement, Gray has stated that it:

“can be defined firstly through its concern for ‘place’ and the strong connection between community and the biophysical environment that reinforces an ethic of ecological responsibility…[it has been argued that] this innate, intuitive connection with the natural environmental context is built upon a utopian philosophy. [Thus] the defining value orientation of bioregionalism can appear deeply personal – almost spiritual in nature. However, the bioregional vision of a small scale, socially and environmentally responsive society can also been seen as the product of rational, ecologically enlightened thought” (2007, p.791).

Many of the sustainable elements of relocalisation can be linked back to the Permaculture
movement (Keady, Williams and Marshall, 2008). Permaculturists argue for the value of connection to place (and particularly, nature-in-place) and connection to local community. And as Gray (2007) has suggested, these elements of the tradition often appear almost spiritual in nature. One of the best demonstrations of this is the fact that Permaculture is an unashamedly ‘beautiful’, or aesthetically sensitive, tradition (Hitchins, personal communication, August 2nd, 2010; Woodrow, 1996).

For example, in the image below we see a poultry run which has been developed with an eye for aesthetic considerations – note the flowers at the centre of the run:

![Image 3.6: “Duck Run” (2010)](image)

The Permaculture diary and calendar (published annually) feature some of the best examples of the eco-centric conceptions of beauty that are central to the tradition:

Within this emphasis on the aesthetic, we see the development of romantic, neo-agrarian ideas and images. For example, Permaculture site designs such as the ones below often offer the romantic vision of agrarian ‘past as future’:


This idea of ‘past as future’ is a compelling vision for many Permaculturists. It is a vision
of connection with others, and connection with the natural world. It is intimately linked to the idea of the local; the ideal of return to village, to simplicity, and to eco-connection.

Indeed, the majority of Permaculturists I have met do what they do because they want to connect with these very ideals: a sense of community, a connection to the biosphere and the wonders of the natural world. They use Permaculture as a ‘start where you are’ approach; a way of regaining agency and relationship through touching, making and doing and gardening. Permaculture is seen as a way of “overcoming separations and dualisms, between person and world, theory and practice…[and] putting back together what our culture has torn apart” (Palmer, quoted from Kizilos, 2007, p.5).

Such approaches may be viewed as utopian, as indeed they are. Critiques of these forms of sustainability solution are numerous. Huckle (1993) for example, argues against the “radical ecocentric…or ecologic minority [which] contains individuals supporting a range of diagnoses and prescriptions including many who are idealistic or utopian in their thoughts or actions” (p.89). Nonetheless, as Ramos (2010) shows, social movements contain elements of idealistic or utopian futures…. And this is part of what animates them. In the Deweyan sense, it is also possible to argue that imaginatively conceived ideals are often central to both meaningful action and learning. Mollison, in defending this aspect of the tradition, has stated: “perhaps we seek a garden of Eden, and why not?” (Mollison & Holmgren, 1978).

At its worst, aspects of the tradition can encourage an isolationist stance – a utopian rejection of mainstream sustainability strategies. It is worth noting that the Permaculturists I have known tend to love their power tools, pick up trucks, and a variety of other technologies which ease the workload of the urban organic farmer. These
technologies are, after all, products of large-scale industry – a contradiction that is lost on some practitioners. At its best, Permaculture approaches promote ‘ancient traditions and appropriate technologies’ (Wilson, 2007) as well as highly novel design solutions to human problems. Permaculture promotes the importance of both knowing (and relying upon) neighbours; creating vibrant community connections with those one lives closest to.

Permaculture design activities can foster the development of an experiential relationship with the natural world, and the habit of observing natural forces at work (Greenway, in conversation, 2010). Practices such as growing and harvesting teach individuals to observe ecosystems, encouraging the development of fundamentally ecological worldviews (Smith, 2004). Growing food allows individuals to work through an experience of alienation from nature, particularly in cities, because “cities often express an uncomfortable relationship with nature...giving rise to biological, aesthetic and social consequences” (Deelstra, quoted from Hultman, 1988, p.28).

The act of growing conceptually moves individuals beyond engagement with the world of human artefacts. Growing food emphasises the development of experiential relationship with the biosphere; the world of ecological process and interaction, the world beyond the human.

**Conclusion**

Permaculture provides the background and context from which to understand the POW community. Permaculture (as a tradition) is a distinct approach to sustainability, and forms the practical and ideational ground from which the POW Community of Practice develops its goals and activities. The Permaculture worldview, or way of knowing, is expressed in a variety of ways. It is expressed theoretically through Permaculture ‘design principles’. It is expressed ideologically through romantic imagery, the image of the
village, and the image of ‘past as future’. It is expressed via action-research praxis and it is expressed through the emergent yet ancient worldview of ‘deep ecology’; our intrinsic connection to the complex world of living entities.

In the following chapter, I discuss the ethnographic methodology used to explore and understand situated learning in the POW community.
Chapter Four: Multi-sided Ethnography and Emerging Communities

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the ethnographic methodology and specific methods used in this study. Key challenges and issues are outlined, and a justification for the approach taken is provided.

Ethnography is a research practice based on the idea of intimate encounter with people and the spaces that they consider uniquely ‘theirs’. A strength of ethnographic methodology is its capacity to explore local culture and context, to engage with the mundane and the everyday, and to work at the human scale. In this way, it becomes possible to make sense of learning processes triggered by global phenomena (such as climate change) and to humanise international issues through the perspective of the local. Ethnographic methodologies are often employed for the study of culture and cultural transformation within groups (e.g. Katz, 1991; Chung, 2009). The use of ethnographic approaches for the study of teaching and learning within small communities is well established (Beckett and Gough, 2004; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1996).

Mary Black has commented that anthropologists “should not go into the field armed with specific questions to which they intend to find the answers but with an open ear for responses to which they intend to find the question” (1963, p.1347). This has been the approach I have taken throughout this research project. My membership in the group preceded my role as researcher, and thus, it appeared logical to employ a naturalistic methodology which embraced my position as an ‘insider’. I spent an extended period of time participating in group activities before I began the process of developing a research question.

I knew that I wished to examine the kinds of teaching and learning that occur outside of educational institutions. I was interested in the idea of pedagogy as a regular function in everyday social worlds. The group was a local sustainability initiative. Thus, the initial research question from which this thesis developed became: how do members of my group teach and learn social values, which they associate with the goal of environmental sustainability?

In order to hone the process of inquiry, I made several key decisions.

First, I embraced and explored the idea of social pedagogy – the basic principle that processes of learning and teaching are endemic to virtually all human activity. Thus, it is assumed that individuals teach and learn a variety of skills, values, worldviews, ‘facts’ and so forth simply through processes of everyday interaction. I decided to explore literature which examined such processes, eventually settling on the Lave and Wenger (1991, 1996) framework as most relevant.
Next, I adopted the position, suggested by these authors, that participation in specific types of communities leads to the attribution of social value to some things over others – that individuals learn and teach social values through participation in community.

Lastly, I decided to examine how values are taught within a community of practice. These decisions, and the research which they prompted, allowed me to work to identify what participants appeared to value, and the ways in which these manifest (with and through) the Permaculture tradition. The core questions, therefore, became:

1) What key values do POW participants understand as socially valuable and meaningful, and how are these influenced by the Permaculture tradition?

2) How are such values produced, enacted and taught/learnt in face-to-face settings?

3) How are such values produced, enacted and taught/learnt through online technologies?

Ultimately, I chose two primary foci. First of all, group members seemed overtly committed to the idea of ‘community’, and the goal of community development. Group members believe in getting to know the neighbours, emphasise the importance of sharing, and are committed to the development of local resource loops (for example, through food swapping - e.g. ‘my eggs for your honey’).

As Permaculturists, group members are also generally enthusiastic organic gardeners. They are committed to the idea of sustainability in the abstract – and they also have a strongly sensual, experiential appreciation for the natural world (or they are learning to have one, through engagement in POW). This manifests through the kinds of photographs which group members take: group members value eco-centric forms of beauty.

These can be seen as some of the key values which group members promote; the value of community-mindedness, and the valuing of an eco-centric aesthetic. Group members see these as intimately linked with the goal of sustainable lifestyles, and, more broadly speaking, “the good life”.

**Specific Approach to Ethnography**

Traditional approaches to ethnographic writing involve the study of a group, within a fixed social and geographic context. The ethnographer functions as an external agent to (or observer of) the group under study.

While such social research techniques have their place, the design presented here must be understood as constructed somewhat differently. Achieving a deep, and accurate, understanding of how these learning processes mediate values within POW required an immersive ethnographic approach.
Most notably, the group has somewhat fluid boundaries and membership. As with many volunteer community groups, membership can also shift and change quite rapidly. The group has a floating active membership, a large email subscription base, and also attracts a range of casual and peripheral participants to its activities. Sub groups within the primary group exist, and peripheral participants often move from ‘active’ to ‘inactive’ membership (and back again) for a range of reasons.

The group can also be understood as both ‘local’ to the inner west of Melbourne, and ‘wired’, in that much group activity actually occurs online. Group members maintain a strong web presence, with individuals regularly publishing articles and photos on websites and blogs that promote group goals, values and activities. Most members regularly use Facebook and email to communicate.

In addition to this, I have been a member of this group since 2008. I was not an external researcher, but rather a ‘complete member researcher’ (Anderson, 2006) whose role as member preceded my role as ethnographer.

Moving from these positions, it seemed logical to collect research materials in relation to the ten informants at the centre of the study (I include myself in this number). Conversations, quotes, artefacts, email correspondence, web posts and general observational data has been incorporated in relation to key informants.

A variety of online sites, in particular the POW website (www.pow.org.au), respondent Angela’s Moo I Made it blog (www.mooimadeit.com), the Perambitz website (www.permablitz.net) and respondent Rayna’s Radical Cross Stitch Blog (www.radicalcrossstitch.com) proved to be particularly important. Materials drawn from activist sites are in the public domain, a fact that makes it possible to reconstruct culture and activity surrounding key respondents. The inclusion of such materials made it possible to move beyond the key respondents, and explicate the broader context in which these respondents functioned.

I have included a great many images in this project in order to more faithfully reproduce, record and analyse the life-world of participants. These images have been included because they are representative of the visually rich online environments respondents participate in. Individuals are as likely to ‘show’ as they are to ‘tell’ when uploading a blog or Facebook post.

In the next two sections, I will address some of the challenges presented by the approach that was taken, and the ways I have worked to moderate and resolve certain issues.

**The Issue of ‘Complete Member’ Research**

I am a POW member. My work in the POW organisation preceded my role as researcher in that organisation; therefore I am a ‘committed member’ (Anderson, 2006) researcher. I consider members of the POW group my friends, and I am active in forms of social
change that promote environmental sustainability. I am viewed as having a full stake in the outcome of group projects, along with the intense emotional involvement that this implies.

Thus, the approach taken here engages with scholarly traditions which validate the incorporation of subjective experience and narrative story telling; auto-ethnographic strategies where “the researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered vital data for understanding the social world at hand” (Anderson, 2006, p.378).

Such approaches can be understood as increasingly common in the latter half of the 20th century. As Deschler has pointed out: “what we decide to research and the way we conduct our research is a political statement about who and what is important to us” (quoted from Beckett and O’Toole, 2010, p.7). As Haraway (1991) has stated: “the view” is always “from a body…[a] complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, as opposed to the view from nowhere, from simplicity” (p.195).

To a great extent, therefore, this project moves and argues from the space and role of the subjective, including the goals, values and mythic visions of the subjective, as a critical bridge in understanding the inter-subjective and social.

There are, of course, inherent benefits and challenges in this positioning.

Most obviously, both auto-ethnographic, and committed member approaches offer the opportunity to work from within the vantage point of the insider. I have had the pleasure of truly being embedded with members of the group under study, for several years. I have been “embedded” within myself for a good deal longer. POW members and I garden together, we take our kids to the pool together, we lend tools. I have been able to enjoy an immersion in subject matter, the opportunity to get to know people, places and projects slowly and gradually, ethnographic methodology rather than method. Within such approaches, both data collection and analysis is emergent.

The inclusion of personal narrative also brings with it certain considerations. As Atkinson, Delamont and Coffey have noted: “auto-ethnography loses its sociological promise when it devolves into self-absorption [and we must not] lose sight of the ethnographic imperative that we are seeking to make sense of complex social worlds of which we are only a part” (2003, p.57). The experiences of the self may be conflated with the experiences of the other; a tendency to “swamp the research” with the author’s own views and perceptions (Cook and Crang, 1995). At times, I have had to struggle against the temptation to write an extended personal narrative, and indeed I did excise large sections of these from final drafts.

Writing about one’s friends and acquaintances also brings its own challenges. Perhaps because of the non-sensitive nature of the research project (teaching and learning practice and process) I have been lucky in that I have not had to excise materials from final drafts. Very few people seem to take offence at descriptions of gardening working bees.
The Local/Non-local Nature of the Group

Members of the POW group often identify themselves affectionately as ‘Westies’, and a sense of local space and place is central to group goals, vision and identity. Group members know that they are living in a rather tough and extremely multi-cultural area – and tend to take pride in this fact. POW is a local endeavour, a community building enterprise centred on a sense of place. People bump into each other on the street, and they share tips and resources face to face. In this sense, the ‘Westies’ I know are not unlike Mediaeval villagers – they meet at the modern equivalent of the town square, and grow food together.

However, look closer, and the comparison soon falls apart. The vast majority of communication that occurs between group members occurs via email. Participants live in the West, but most have done so for less than five years. Several members have lived overseas for years at a time, and some members are married to recent immigrants (myself, Scott, Nyree, for example). My American husband and I enjoyed watching Star Wars the other night because it reminded us of our childhoods; these days many cultural reference points have global reach. I spend (probably too much) time on the internet. I am addicted to my iPhone and I watch TV. I, and other POW members, live in the media saturated, and thus mediated, suburbs of the industrialised world.

In response to social conditions such as these, a variety of scholars, drawing on the work of authors such as Marcus (1995, 2001) have questioned the validity of studying communities like POW from the traditional, single site perspective. As Chung asks: “how [do we] apprehend ‘modern’ objects when they are less bound by space than knowledge and where [do we] place the social in this construction?” (2009, p.56). Are traditions which draw strict spatial and temporal boundaries always effective in the era of globalisation, or is a “new paradigm’ required, ‘different in significant ways from that which shaped sociocultural anthropology over the previous 80 years?” (Marcus, 2001, p.16).

In research design, therefore, I have worked through these issues by constructing this project as a ‘multi-sited’ ethnography (Marcus, 1995, 2001; Nordstrom, 2004; Pieredes, 2008, 2010;). Multi-sited research designs can be understood as approaches which are “derivative of the historical spirit of ethnography” (Marcus, 1995) but which modify the architecture of traditional approaches. Fieldwork, broadly acknowledged as the mainstay of ethnography (e.g. Wolcott, 1999) becomes flexible, weaving in and out of various sites. Thus, in exploring POW spaces, we move from blog, to community garden, to text, to photograph, to newspaper article, to website, to conversation, to personal narrative, to working bee. This is the nature of group process, and group interaction.

Multi-sited research designs can be understood as extremely varied and fluid. The primary requirement is that fieldwork manages to effectively “follow the thread of cultural process” (Marcus, 1995, p.97). Such approaches respond to Funnell’s comment
that “all research strategies [must be continually adapted to bring] the final object of research into clear focus” (1996, p.12). Thus, multi-sited ethnographies expand the possibilities of what may be considered ethnography, allowing for a great deal of flexibility\(^3\).

Because a lot of group interaction occurred online, following the thread of cultural process implied engaging in online spaces as well as through the real-world ‘sites’ of face-to-face encounter. Online spaces are important ‘sites’ in the context of this research project, and web pages, emails and other forms of electronic interaction form the basis of much of the research materials gathered.

In online spaces a picture is also often used to replace a thousand words. Because images are key forms of communication for groups such as POW, the aesthetic of the web page, the photo in the newspaper article, the shared image, soon proved to be essential empirical materials. Through the production and sharing of images, activist groups spread their message, perform themselves, define objectives, articulate goals, and invite others to participate in activities. The image, as it is embedded in multiple forms of media, is a key form of communication - a swift way to catch attention and get a point across. In an era where individuals ‘surf’ rather than read, images prove succinct and effective.

The inclusion of digital images as research materials has thus been a key aspect of the overall data gathering process. Working with images can be, at times, challenging. Images may be viewed as problematic research objects, ambiguous and constructed (Holt, 2008; Berger, 1972). Nonetheless, I felt that it was important to conduct research which attempted to move “beyond words” (Holt 2008). As the well known art historian John Berger has pointed out, there are limits to the expressive capacity of the written and spoken word and “often dialogue is an attempt to verbalise how, either metaphorically or literally, ‘you see things’, and an attempt to discover how ‘he sees things’... in this sense, images are more precise and richer than literature (Berger, p.9-10).

Many individuals in globalised societies think through and with media/multi media forms like television, the internet and increasingly through devices such as the iPhone. Metaphors and allegories are derived from cultural reference points. These cultural reference points (which are often expressed through the image) can be used to build understanding.

For example, image 4.1 below references the popular film ‘the Matrix’ (Silver and Wachowski, 1999):

\(^3\) A good example of the flexibility of such an approach can be seen in “Shadows of War” (Nordstrom, 2004). Nordstrom explores the question: what is the experience of war? To do so, multiple viewpoints which operate over space and time are integrated - from the CNN correspondent, to television viewer, to soldier, to black marketeer.
The tagline reads: “taste the truth….what does the truth taste like? A bitter pill? On the contrary. You see we’ve been tricked. Scammed. By that thing in the supermarket that looks like a tomato but doesn’t taste like one. By that shiny analogue of an apple….”

In ‘The Matrix’, the hero must choose to engage with reality by swallowing a red pill (in this case, tasting a real apple) or remain in a dystopic dream world by swallowing ‘the blue pill’. Thus, we see a narrative, a social critique, developed through this popular image. The supermarket apple, here indicated by the blue pill, is presented as a “shiny analogue” of the ‘real thing’ (i.e. organic, heritage fruit – as presented on the left).

**Fieldwork and the Gathering of Materials**

I live in the same area as participants. I go on ‘playdates’ with my son to the home of other POW members, ride my bike in the area and attend POW meetings and events. The great majority of field materials were developed in this way – on the bike and in the street. Casual conversation and face-to-face participant observation thus formed the basis of fieldwork.

My ethnographic tool for documentation was my iPhone 4. During the course of everyday events, I used this to record, by text, video, audio or still, situations, conversations and observations that were considered noteworthy or significant. It was also used to bookmark webpages and blogs that I was shown. In the evenings, relevant observations and notes were transferred to a database, an example of which can be seen in Table 4.1.

Online fieldwork was also a key research activity. Blogs, webpages and emails which I had accessed directly in relation to POW activity were included as materials. Personal emails were selectively included.

Over time, relevant materials were worked into entries for commentary:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Context</strong></th>
<th><strong>Event</strong></th>
<th><strong>Researcher Notes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| POW garage sale, 2/3 Conversations between Nick and Rita whilst staking boxes. | Nick: “I’m a womble”  
Rita: “What do you mean”  
Nick: “you know that show – the wombles – making good use of the things that you find….all the furniture in *my* house came from hard rubbish”. | Nick is referencing the 1970s british t.v. show the wombles, etc…  
Possible question: did you always go through hard rubbish? When did you start doing so? If you haven’t always done this – what made you change? |
| EMAIL 7/3 Delia to Scott, cc’d to Nyree | Delia: anyone know how to make ricotta  
Received three responses – Mark, Sylvia, Bob  
Bob: my dad used to make it on the farm….etc | Procedural knowledge…cheese making…craft and traditional approach renewal? |
| Miles and Janice are collecting snails at a permaplay mini-blitz. | Parents were initially unsure about this…comments such as “I am not sure that’s a good idea” (Nyree), Bob: they’re having fun…let them go…. | |

*Table 4.1: Example recording framework (Image retrieved from [www.pow.org.au](http://www.pow.org.au) Dec. 2010)*
Analysis

I constructed my analytic framework by sifting and re-sifting materials, looking for nominal categories. Points of interest soon emerged. As Black (1963) has noted: anthropologists “should not go into the field armed with specific questions to which they intend to find the answers but with an open ear for responses to which they intend to find the question” (1963, p.1347). One of the things which seemed to clearly differentiate POW members from other members of the Inner Western community was their positioning in a ‘green left’ values space. I began to ask myself: what kind of social values defined group members? How were these social values being enacted, taught, learnt and reinforced within group life?

The theme of social values emerged and was developed as the focus of the project. Two key group social values were identified as central to group identity, these were:

1) The teaching and learning of the social value of ‘local community’, and particularly, a Permaculture inspired conception of ‘local green community’ (i.e. the ‘urban village’).

2) The development, teaching and learning of particular aesthetic values (through practices such as online photo sharing) which reflect eco-centric conceptions of beauty.

Additionally, the role of ITC in the teaching and learning of social values was identified as important.

Materials were organised in reference to these key themes.

Final Stages of the Project

In order to fully articulate the positions and learning experiences of the group and avoid misrepresentation of participants, a full draft was sent to participants after the thesis had been written, and prior to redrafting.

Funnell (1996) has argued that a weakness of ethnography is that it is particularly susceptible to researcher bias - getting subjects to read, comment on and modify their own data is an essential form of trustworthiness. In the case of an ethnography with an auto-ethnographic component, I would argue that there is an increased danger of conflating the experiences of the self with the experiences of the other (particularly when one is writing about friends). In light of this, the need for participant commentary on data produced became greater. When fed back to the POW community, the text was accepted by all research participants, who expressed satisfaction with the ways in which they were represented.

In this chapter I have discussed my use of multi-sided ethnography. This methodology was critical to understanding how POW, as an emerging community of practice, learns
and embodies sustainability thinking in the Permaculture tradition. In the next chapter, I discuss the key findings of the study.
Chapter Five: Pedagogy and Community Values

In this discussion section I examine the way in which ‘community values’ are taught, learnt and enacted through Permaculture Out West (POW) group involvement.

I am sitting on the couch web surfing. I move from the POW site, to Angela’s blog, to Rayna’s blog, and back again. It has been a busy month.

Angela’s most recent post promotes a local happening – a passatta bottling which is being held at an inner Western community centre. The blog post reads: ‘all my life, I’ve dreamt of finding an Italian family willing to adopt me as a long-lost cousin, just a few times a year – but especially during the great passatta making festivities’ (see below).

Image 5.1: retrieved from www.mooimadeit.com (December, 2011)
As an event, the activity draws inspiration from communal Mediterranean cultures. The image used conjures up visions of village life. Reading it, I am struck by the repeated use of the word ‘community’, the insistence that the group of people who live in my area should come together to bottle tomatoes, to engage in what is essentially an Italian peasant tradition. Called to identify as ‘community members’ rather than residents, individuals are advised that “plenty of bicycle parking will be available”:

![Image 5.2: retrieved from www.mooimadeit.com (December, 2011)](image)

I keep surfing.

I head to the ‘Radical Cross Stitch’ website. Rayna, who authors the site, is also a POW member. Scanning the page, I notice that Rayna’s most recent post is very similar to Angela’s – Rayna has written up an apple sauce bottling session she organized at a local community centre. I am struck by the ‘Country Women’s Association’ overtones of the event, the idea of people coming together to make apple sauce:
I look at the kinds of photos she has posted. These are mainly pictures of locals working together. Babies are slung onto hips and shared around – parenting seems as shared an activity in these images as sauce making:
The gingham used to decorate the bottles reinforce a homely, ‘country fair’ aesthetic. I examine images of the labels she made for the event. These read: “made with locally grown apples, sugar and spice and all things community and family and nice” (italics mine).

*Images 5.5&5.6: retrieved from [www.radicalcrossstitch.com](http://www.radicalcrossstitch.com) (December, 2010)*

I am struck once again by the use of the term ‘community’, here equated with ‘locally grown apples, sugar and spice’, here described as ‘nice’.

I remember the day that POW members participated in the filming of an episode of the television show ‘Costa’s Gardening Odyssey’ ([www.sbs.com.au/shows/costa](http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/costa)). The buzz phrase which presenter Costa continually used during filming was “bringing the community back to this local garden”:

![Apple Sauce Label](image-url)
I note the way that Angela and Rayna are using the internet, a tool which stretches around the globe, to promote over-the-fence local activity. What are they promoting in the media which they are producing? Media that depicts, and also targets as an audience, members of the POW community. I am struck by the movement to the past – a past where women make apple sauce while babies are handed from person to person, a past where communities make passata from home-grown tomatoes.

I am reminded of the famous Hobsbawm quote: ‘never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life’ (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 428).

I wonder what the term ‘community’ can realistically be said to describe? ‘Community’ is a slippery term which defies strict definitional boundaries. Benedict Anderson’s suggestion of nations as imagined communities (1983). Lave and Wenger’s situated craft communities (1991). The idea of ‘online communities’ – people who have never met each other, yet feel a sense of kinship.

The Attraction of Community

Within the POW context, the idea (and ideal) of ‘local community’ is a powerful one. The development of ‘local community’ relationships, activities and structures is a group goal. I have heard Katerina comment that “what we really wants to create is a fantastic urban village here in the West”. I have heard Rayna state that having a strong local community helps people get through tough times. I have heard Nyree and Leah argue that it’s impossible to raise children in a conventional nuclear family…” it takes a village to
raise a child”. ‘Community mindedness’ is central to the POW mission; a key cultural value.

For POW members, ‘community mindedness’ means interacting with those in your neighborhood, having local friends, sharing resources and swapping child minding. Such attitudes are not generally automatic amongst modern urbanites. Rather, this ethos is explicitly learnt, taught and promoted within the group.

For example, I overheard Delia urge a newcomer to borrow her lawnmower with the words ‘that is what it is there for’. I, similarly, offered a visitor to one of our playgroups (a young mother who had recently moved to the area) the loan of an extremely expensive bike trailer. Similarly, I overheard Rayna telling a friend to ‘borrow the tent’ the other day. Members regularly baby sit for one another – ‘fling your kids around’ is a common phrase. Through a constant modeling of this ethos, relative old-timers to the group both set and reinforce ideas around private property, cooperation, and the importance of sharing both time and resources.

In this way, POW members consistently teach and learn the idea of ‘community’, of locals helping one another and working together to achieve goals.

**Permaculture and the Inner Urban ‘Village’**

Permaculture is an explicitly relocalist movement that advocates for the development of ‘closed loop’ regions and neighborhoods. For ‘bush permaculturists’, this has sometimes been conceptualized as ‘living off the grid’. An example of a Permaculture influenced settlement of this sort is Moora Moora, an intentional community situated in Healesville, Victoria:
Within the POW group, such values are endorsed, but can be understood as translated into a suburban setting. Katerina involves herself in local political campaigns, food networks and gardening, in order to facilitate the development of a “fantastic inner urban village in the West” (personal communication, March, 2010). With Nyree (another POW member) she worked on the ‘Memorybyrnong’ project, an arts and storytelling initiative celebrating the traditions, people, places and cultural heritage of Melbourne’s inner West.

Katerina’s vision of the inner West as an ‘urban village’ does not imply an isolationist position. Rather, it reflects the ideal of relocalisation which group members share. This ‘relocalist’ vision can be understood as the development of the cultural value of ‘community mindedness’: ideas of community interdependence and an identification with the ‘inner west’ locale. Such values imply a loyalty to the gardens, spaces and people of ‘a local neighbourhood’. The food gardens, playgroups, workshops and blitzes which the group runs are about ‘greening the West’ and creating a socially cohesive union of residents that can work together to address ecological issues. The argument that life in ‘socially atomised’ suburbs compromises our capacity to work with others to find solutions to both social and sustainability challenges is a common one amongst group members.

Summarising the arguments I have heard, it can be stated that POW members view the cultural value of ‘community mindedness’ as having multiple benefits.

Firstly, local connectedness is viewed as emotionally fulfilling and socially valuable. Kids know other kids on the street, friendships can be developed, emotional and practical support can be provided by those nearby. For example, Nyree told me that she found it ‘wonderful’ to have another POW member living in the street adjoining hers, and described, at length, the social support she derived from the relationship.

Secondly, it is assumed that ‘local people working together’ can solve sustainability challenges which individuals working alone cannot. For example, Deb posted this quote as the tagline to the POW website: “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (generally attributed to Margaret Mead, 1901 - 1978)

Finally, it is believed that local communities should work towards functioning as ‘closed loop’ ecological systems, where and as far as possible. This may involve such activities as the management of the communities’ specific ecological terrain (such as parks and rivers) and the ecologically sound sourcing of local rather than far-flung resources. ‘Closed loop’ approaches of this sort minimise the need for transport and the externalisation of environmental problems. For example, in the group community gardening is pursued because ‘local’ food is considered the ideal.
The Teaching and Learning of ‘Community Mindedness’

My grandmother grew up in a village on the island of Cyprus. The people and local places of her island village were her whole world until she moved to Australia. Her relationships were heavily circumscribed by distance and geography, and they were generally expected to last a lifetime. She grew up with close ties to family and other locals, whom she was dependant on for the basic necessities of life. The Greek Orthodox Church functioned as the defining institution within that context. ‘Community mindedness’, for my Greek Grandmother, was experienced as unavoidable interdependence.

By comparison, POW members are modern Australian urbanites. Like all Australian urbanites, they are not necessarily familiar with their immediate neighbors. They can choose to live with little connection to a ‘local community’ – they are not completely dependent on other locals for daily necessities and social support. They shop at supermarkets and travel overseas, watch TV and surf the net. They participate in the life of any number of institutions – from churches and Buddhist temples, to childcare centres, Universities and local tennis clubs. They do not live in a social world that implies unavoidable interdependence with other locals.

Rather, POW members choose to teach, learn and promote the ideals of ‘local community interdependence’, or ‘community mindedness’ as a key social value. This occurs in ways which are significantly different from the ways in which community membership, as a lived experience, was learnt by my Greek grandmother.

In the next section, I will examine how the social value of ‘community mindedness’ is learnt, taught and promoted through participation in POW. For POW members, group activity occurs both in face-to-face settings, and online. I thus divide discussion into two sections, analysing ‘community values education’ as it is taught through a face-to-face POW event (the Permablitz) and also through web-based interaction.
**Pedagogy and Community Values: The Permablitz**

As a concept, a Permablitz can be understood as very similar to the ‘barn raisings’ of 18th and 19th century America.

![Image 5.9 “Barn raising”: retrieved from www.wikipedia.org (September, 2011)](image)

Such ‘barn raisings’ involved members of a rural community coming together to assemble a barn for a household within that community. Food and fun were as integral to the barn raising process as the work of building; barn raisings were festive events. Individuals were not paid for their participation in barn raisings – rather, participation in barn raisings functioned as a basic social expectation for those within such societies.

POW organises approximately four Permablitzes per year, functioning as the inner Western ‘arm’ of the Permablitz network (www.permablitz.net). During a Permablitz, as with barn raising, large number of volunteers assist a member household to develop important infrastructure. In the case of the Permablitz, suburban backyards are transformed into edible gardens or ‘micro-farms’.

Permablitzing has been summarised as:

1. An event in which volunteers use Permaculture principles to transform a suburban garden into a place that produces its own food.
2. A combination of the words Permaculture a design system for sustainable living and land use and Backyard Blitz a television program in which backyards receive a makeover. (Blitzing the Burbs, Katherine Kizilos, The Age, July 17, 2007)

Reflecting on the Permablitz concept, Bee (2010) has written that: “basically it [a Permablitz] is a permaculture-inspired backyard makeover where people come together to share knowledge and skills about organic food production in urban gardens while building community and having fun.
The basic idea is that by converting their lawns into organic food producing gardens, people will be able to back away from a dependence on industrial agriculture and the shipping of food back and forth across the world. At the same time, it makes organic eating accessible to more than just the upper-middle class.

The whole permablitz thing started with a group called Codemo (Community Development and Multicultural Organisation) a local community group composed primarily of South American immigrants [and]…a permaculture geek named Dan Palmer [who] started hanging out with the Codemo crew...[they] expressed interest in growing food in their own backyards. The first permaculture backyard makeover was held in Dandenong at the home of Vilma from El Salvador. And permablitzes have been spreading all around Melbourne since.

Permablitzes involve a combination of learning, practicing and socialising. I'd say the social community-building aspect is just as important, or even more so, than the garden make-over itself. In our socially atomised suburbs, with our tall fences separating our yards from our neighbours’, it’s rare to get to know those living closest to us [italics mine]” (p.6).

The Permablitz concept was developed by Dan Palmer. Palmer, with fellow Permaculture designer and friend Adam Grubb, runs the Permablitz network, an online site that promotes the concept and advertises individual ‘blitzes’.  

Whilst Permablitzes do involve hard work, a fun, festive feel has been evident at the Permablitzes I have attended. Children play together, a good lunch is provided by the Permablitz ‘hosts’ (the householder who are being blitzed), conversations are free-flowing and socializing is as integral to the process as landscaping.

Permablitzes in the Inner West

POW organises approximately four Permablitzes per year, functioning as the inner Western ‘arm’ of the Permablitz network. ‘Permablitzing’ fulfils important social, practical and pedagogical functions within the POW community, teaching a high level of interdependence and teamwork, and promoting an ethos of ‘community mindedness’ between member households that participate in such events. The social aspect of Permablitzing (for example, the sharing of a communal lunch) promotes an experience of social cohesion. Where relationships of unavoidable interdependence (fostered by the

\[4\] Permablitzes have been held in a variety of places – one hundred have been held in Australia so far. The concept is also beginning to spread to countries such as the UK and the USA (see www.permablitz.net for more details).
social isolation of country life) underpinned the barn raising process, permablitzing, by comparison, is driven by the social values of cooperation and volunteerism. From a values education perspective, Permablitzing promotes the idea of unpaid participation in local community.

Local residents can put in a request to have their (inner Western) backyard ‘blitzed’. After a request has been approved at a POW meeting, a team of three POW designers visit the residents backyard. The designers work together to develop a site plan for the edible garden that will be developed on the day of the Permablitz:

![Site plan image](www.mooimadeit.com) (August, 2011)

Once a site plan has been finalized, volunteers are sought. The resident emails a ‘Blitz invitation’ to both the POW committee and the Permablitz network. The ‘Blitz invitation’ is then posted on both the POW and Permablitz websites (www.permablitz.net), emailed to other ‘locals’ and disseminated through both the POW weekly digest and the Permablitz newsletter:
Here is a sample blitz invitation:

Blitz #93 - Sunshine West

Angela’s blitz on Sunday August 21 will feature:

Removal and reuse of paving to transform an under-utilised space into a productive garden and a neighbour’s brick wall into a warm microclimate. The front yard will be re-shaped with swales and minor earth works to become a self-watering edible landscape. A separate doggy-doo compost system will be installed.

Location: Sunshine West

Time: 10am to 4pm

RSVP is needed to Angela on 0432 590 145. Address will be given upon RSVP.

Interested parties then rsvp to the event via email or phone text.

Because most blitzes attract around forty volunteers, as with a barn-raising, preparation for the one day event is vital. Clear site plans which are displayed around the backyard facilitate the move between an on paper design:
Hosts are responsible for sourcing all necessary materials, and planning a midday meal for perhaps fifty people. In order to successfully do so, they generally lean heavily on friends, family and, in particular, other POW members and the inner Western ‘green’ network. This involves asking individuals to bring along food. It means coordinating baby-sitting rosters, and finding volunteers who are willing to commit to those rosters. Re-using and scavenging resources is emphasized – other locals donate timbre and nails.
as well as time. In the process, the idea of the ‘community’ rather than individual resource is emphasized. Social values which revolve around ideas of ‘sharing’, ‘lending’, ‘giving’ and ‘volunteering’ are modelled.

Because much of the logistical coordination required for Permablitzing occurs online, processes of ‘sharing’ and ‘lending’ are also heavily dependant on net-based interaction. It is not uncommon, for example, for a Blitz host to email thirty volunteers the night before a Blitz with a request like this one:

If anyone has spare shovels, can they please bring em along tomorrow. We are a bit short

Thanks!

D

On the day of the Blitz, the Permaculture designers direct volunteers in what is generally a drastic restructuring of the exterior of a suburban property, including the installation of tanks, poultry runs, and the removal of entire front and back lawns (the hard way – with teams of individuals working with shovels).
And while Permaculture designers do take on roles of leadership, Permablitzes are rarely premised on the kinds of ‘master-apprentice’ learning relationships described by Lave and Wenger (1991). In general, volunteers with particular skill sets (i.e. the ability to use power tools) quickly move into roles of leadership or autonomy depending on their personal capacities and level of confidence.
A volunteer (man in blue t-shirt) takes over the process of building a henhouse from PDC designer Scott.

Volunteers may also run impromptu workshops. For example, here we see a propagation demonstration run by a volunteer:

Thus, an ethos of relatively horizontal social relations and knowledge, skill and resource sharing underpins the Permaculture Blitz process. The key to successful blitzing is teamwork – hosts draw on the resources and knowledge of volunteers, as well as the guidance offered by designers, to complete the Blitz task. ‘Shared improvisation’ (Duguid, 2005) is thus a key component of this approach as participants work together to solve problems. Because
there is a big difference between an on-paper site design and a finished garden, participants are ideally flexible and responsive, able to solve problems in a variety of ways according to the resources at hand and their own unique skills and knowledge.

Activities such as the Permablitz emphasise knowledge sharing amongst individuals. A comment I heard made by a professional horticulturist and regular Blitz participant: “I believe in sharing what I know”, reflects the fundamental worldview at the heart of activities like Permablitzing. Participants scavenge resources together, sharing left over pieces of timber and old nails. By working and socialising with other locals, individuals learn to identify as ‘community members’. The spirit of giving and volunteerism which powers the process means that the social value of ‘community mindedness’ is taught, learnt and reinforced through all aspects of the Permablitz process.
Pedagogy and Community Values - Participation in ICT Enabled Spaces

POW members (and regular participants in POW activities, such as Playgroup members) are notably dependent on web based technologies that function as communication tools for individuals who live near each other. Individuals bump into each other on the street; they also ‘bump into’ each other via a variety of email networks, blog sites and through web platforms such as Facebook. This creates a particularly unique and open-ended experience of ‘local community’, of who ‘belongs’ and who does not, of where ‘community’ begins and ends. It creates a ‘community’ of individuals that:

a) Identify as green or sustainability oriented (‘likeminded’ is a term I have heard individuals use on several occasions).

b) Live in close geographic proximity to one another.

c) Participate in online spaces and use email, blogs, and group websites to develop and maintain relationship and shared activity within a limited geographic zone (i.e. the inner West).

The flexibility of online interaction within ‘inner Western’ green community members means that while a fixed and reified group of ‘POW members’ clearly exists, the fluidity of online interaction makes ideas of ‘membership’ somewhat problematic. It can be hard to discriminate between POW group ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. The nature of web-based networks mean that a great many individuals remain ‘in the loop’ whether or not they regularly attend activities.

For example, the formal POW working group runs monthly meetings for which agendas are drafted, minutes taken, and actions agreed upon. There are set roles (‘convener’, ‘treasurer’, ‘secretary’, ‘web administrator’) which people must nominate or be nominated for. A weekly email bulletin (The POW weekly digest) is disseminated by the group, and this bulletin promotes ‘green’ projects and events. The subscriber base for the email digest has been growing steadily (at present, approximately one hundred individuals subscribe to the bulletin). A website (www.pow.org.au) is maintained, and this also provides a forum for the dissemination of information on the group and its projects, as well as similar groups and projects that occur around Melbourne. A large number of emails are circulated by, and cc’d amongst, group members and their ‘local’ friendship networks.

Despite the ‘official’ nature of the group, however, perhaps only five to twelve people attend the average POW meeting. Forty-one individuals are registered as ‘POW members’, but only ten or so of these are active in projects at any one time. Most importantly, it is not the same ten or so people who are active at any one time. Whilst there are core players, people will move in and out of project work, POW activities and relationships depending on what is happening in their lives. Both the voluntary nature of the organisation, and the flexible nature of web communities generally, facilitate this.
A very large number of individuals also function as ‘peripheral participants’. These individuals are sympathetic to (and identify with) the aims, goals and ‘community’ ethos of the group, but have no interest in attending meetings. Typically, such individuals are friends-of-friends, Permaculture Playgroup mums and dads, offsiders and interested parties who agree to help out. These individuals choose to participate at a variety of levels, and are often privy to email communications, but have no interest in identifying as POW ‘members’. Nick, for example, was not a ‘POW member’ when he helped to organize and run both the POW garage sale, and the Braybrook Sprouts Permaplaygroup. Rather, he was a local Dad and ‘friend-of-friend’ helper who decided to lend a hand. Over time, Nick moved to the position of group convenor - and then back to the position of peripheral, ‘occasional’ participant. Thus, the flexibility of ICT forms allows for a particularly fluid and free-flowing construction of ‘community’, ‘membership’ and ‘belonging’. It is not really possible to clearly articulate where the POW group, as a Community of Practice, begins or ends, and who truly ‘belongs’ and who does not. As Oesterlund and Carlisle (2003) have noted, Communities of Practice are often best viewed as ‘probabilistic constructs’ rather than absolute entities. For POW members, relations are shaped by highly fluid forms of practice and engagement.

This fluidity of participation is made possible by key web tools such as email, websites, blogs and social media (i.e. Facebook). Online tools facilitate practical interdependence and social interaction between locals who may not see each other on a day-to-day basis. Participants use online networks to re-experience ‘local community’, and to connect and reinforce local identity.

In the next section, I will undertake a more detailed examination of the ways in which specific web tools are used by group members to develop, promote and teach local interdependence and ‘community mindedness’.

**Email**

Email is perhaps the most recurrent and pervasive of the web tools which group members use to promote ‘community values’. Whilst face-to-face meetings have been key in establishing relationships, interaction via email has become a pervasive lifeline that consistently reinforces an ongoing experience of connection. Being part of inner Western email networks is akin to being ‘part of the conversation’ – a conversation which centres on ideas of inner Western sustainability, local community, resource swapping and scavenging. Inter-related email networks mean fairly frequent email traffic is a given, some of it ‘bulk mail’ but much of it one-on-one or small group interaction amongst participants.

For example, the POW group was initially established by three graduates of the CERES Permaculture Design Certificate course. Having studied ‘relocalisation’ in the context of this course, these individuals chose to focus on one another as fellow inner western ‘locals’, and began developing the idea of an inner western Permaculture group. Emails such as this one were forwarded through personal contacts, with the aim of creating
Membership for the group also developed through face-to-face contacts and ‘friends friends’ connections. Many people who joined POW came to do so through their engagement in the Seddon Organic Collective (a buyers’ collective which enables residents to buy organic produce at wholesale prices). These are sympathetic organisations with many members in common.

From these beginnings, ongoing email messaging soon developed into a form of ‘local conversation.’ For example, I regularly receive emails from POW members, Seddon Organic Collective members and members of my gardening Perma Playgroup. Newcomers are generally inducted to these forms of ‘local conversation’ when email correspondence is forwarded (cc’d) along to ‘peripheral’ or ‘informal’ POW participants (friends-of-friends who live in the area, for example) thus including them in ‘the conversation’. Over time ‘cc’ lists grew, and participants began to habitually keep each other ‘in the loop’ with regards to local green activities, resources, opportunities and events.

Here we see an email which notifies other locals of an organic olive oil retailer in the area:

And here we see a PDF flyer for a local childrens’ organic gardening festival:
Email could also be used to casually make ‘give-away’ offers to other locals:

> Hey all

> We actually cooked way, way too much food for the party today.

Anyone who doesn’t feel like cooking and would like to pick up some v85Mexican, please text me! We will be home all night, so just drop around and get some (bring your own containers).

> Best wishes,
> De

Issue call-outs for assistance:

Hi All

I need to channel my inner 80's adolescence this Saturday 11th December for a friends 40th. I'm thinking Cyndi Lauper, Pat Benatar and Maddonna style (as opposed to Siouxsie, Chrissie and Debbie)
I'm putting the call out for any 80's inspired fashion you may have lying around in your (or your adolescents) wardrobe. Things like ra-ra skirts, crinoline skirts, balloon skirts, slouch shirts, lace, 3/4 length spandex leggings, lace fingerless gloves, leg warmers, doc boots, and lots of long beads to drape around neck and wrists, large earrings, strips of fabric to make into matching head bands and to tie around the wrist etc etc Ahhhh the excess of the 80's….anyone have anything?

Nyree xxx

Or request advice from other locals:

--- On Tue, 20/10/11, <nyree@yahoo.com> wrote:

> From: Animata Quartet <animataquartet@gmail.com>
> Subject: chook with fleas!
> To: pritchardmartin@yahoo.com, ****, ****, ****, ****

does anyone know what to do with a chook with fleas? Ugh! I’m still itching!
>
>
Digital images, shared through email networks, became important communication devices. Image sharing became one way in which individuals posted ‘news bulletins’ for one another. Such images often functioned as powerful reminders of the community spaces which participants regarded as important. For example, here we see an image which was circulated of a local orchard after a storm:

>From: Scott
>Subject: the orchard flooded!
And an image of a local community garden shed after vandals have damaged a wall:

>From: Delia  
>Subject: Braybrook Community Garden

Through the generation of email conversations of these sorts, a connection to local
people and places was reinforced. A sense of ‘community’ as a valid and plausible construct began to develop. Individuals began to share tips, lend tools, and ask questions of other locals. They learnt and taught a sense of ‘our neighbourhood’, and ‘what we do’ - nudges toward an ethos of local engagement and interdependence. Images reminded individuals of ‘shared local spaces’; the places which group members regarded as both local and important.

Ongoing forms of interaction began to move the cultural value of ‘community mindedness’ from the theoretical to the actual.

**Websites and Blogs**

Newspapers and periodicals are often directed toward specific communities and consequently, imply identification with a specific community (i.e. ‘The Sydney Morning Herald’, The *Moonee Valley Gazette*). Community noticeboards also target specific groups or ‘local communities’. For many contemporary Australians (including POW members) both print media and community noticeboards have been, to varying degrees, superseded by websites and blogs.

Unlike major print publications such as newspapers, websites can be easily and cost effectively by run small interest groups (such as activist groups) and individuals. A variety of sites are maintained by POW members, and whilst broad readership for these publications is appreciated, the local green west community has been the particular target of such sites.

The POW website fulfils many of the functions of the community noticeboards of old ([www.pow.org](http://www.pow.org)). POW members use the site to promote sustainability initiatives operating in the inner West:


The POW weekly digest is an automated email newsletter which is run through the site. POW website ‘posts’ are collated on a weekly basis through the newsletter, and emailed
Both the POW website and the weekly digest have a ‘West’ focus in that they exhibit, promote and emphasise the opportunities of a ‘green inner West’. For example, in the post above, we see a food swap in inner Western Spotswood advertised. Thus, the generation of local media of this sort both posit and reinforce the idea of highly localised inner Western ‘community’.

In addition to the POW group site, several POW participants are keen bloggers. POW member Angela runs the ‘moo I made it’ blog (www.mooimadeit.com). With a tagline of: ‘know, sew, grow’ Angela’s blog focuses on themes of gardening, sewing, and sustainability. This blog is also regularly used to advertise POW activities:
POW member Rayna also runs the ‘radical cross stitch blog’ ([www.radicalcrossstitch.com](http://www.radicalcrossstitch.com)). A self proclaimed ‘craftivist’ (activist crafter), Rayna enjoys subverting traditional craft forms such as knitting and cross-stitch for political gain:

“Reduce, reuse, recycle: friends don’t let friends buy useless mass produced crap”

This blog is regularly used to promote ‘alternative’ values (Rayna is an outspoken critic of consumerism). The blog also promotes participation in (and identification with) local community. The post below, for example, references the suburb of Wyndham Vale as ‘Mad Max country’:
The Mad Max films, which are set in a post-apocalyptic landscape, were in fact shot in Wyndham Vale. Through the construction of these images, we see a playful pride in the gritty outer-urban ‘Westie’ identity. The West might be ugly – but it is also fun:


Whilst websites and blogs such as those run by POW members Angela and Rayna aim to achieve the broadest possible audiences, such forms of publishing also demonstrate the development of highly local forms of media. This is ‘user-generated content’; media whose audience is relatively small in terms of population, geographic zoning and (to varying degrees) political/cultural orientation. As locals publish for one another, understandings of ‘local identity’ are thus reinforced.

Facebook

The social media site ‘Facebook’ has become an increasingly important medium for
group interaction. Many POW participants have nominated other members as ‘friends’, and regularly use Facebook to promote events, issue call-outs for assistance, comment on shared activities and interests and post images and video which is relevant to other locals. It is possible that in the future interaction via social networking platforms (like Facebook) will supersede email as the preferred form of group interaction.

For example, here we see a post from POW member (and local brewer) Nick, asking others to donate used beer bottles:

![Image 5.34: retrieved from records (August, 2011)](image)

Similarly, we see Kat using Facebook to promote a local activist event:

![Image 5.35: retrieved from records (August, 2011)](image)

and Rayna using Facebook to connect with other ‘Westies’:

![Image 5.36: retrieved from records (August, 2011)](image)

Whilst Facebook users may have ‘friends’ in any geographic location, the site is also a
useful tool for highly local formations. POW members regularly use the ‘news feed’ and ‘messaging’ functions to connect with specifically local friends. Like email, Facebook can be used to facilitate ongoing interaction amongst individuals who share both green-left values and geography.

In the time that I have belonged to the group, I have observed levels of ICT and web literacy increase dramatically amongst group members. Whilst the great majority of individuals involved in POW endeavors were already ICT literate (or relatively so) before involvement in POW, most group members have actively upskilled since their engagement in the organisation. Several members of the group can now build websites. One member, who initially resisted email correspondence (preferring to ring people on the telephone) has come to accept web interaction as part of life, and has recently opened an email account.

As levels of ITC literacy have risen amongst group members, individuals can be observed using web technologies (and particularly social networking technologies) for an ever-increasing, and increasingly varied, range of community building activities. POW members use ITC to make baby-sitting arrangements, share used jam jars and beer bottles, promote festivals and local events, and sell local resources (for example, local honey). We see POW members using ICT to promote a sense of shared identity – in the Facebook post above, for example, Rayna addresses her audience as ‘westies’. Through group interaction, we see the development of inner western identity. Values are taught and learnt through the promotion of eco-lifestyle practice (by recycling jam jars for others, and swapping local food, for example). The idea of community is developed, and the experience of community is facilitated, through and with the rise of new technologies.

**The Development of Meaningful Forms of Community**

As a variety of scholars (e.g. Arnold and Smith, 2003) have noted, a particular critique of ‘web based communities of practice’, however, is that communities whose interaction occurs primarily in online settings do not develop the same levels of trust, meaningful relationship and substantive engagement as those who have face to face interaction. These critiques can be seen as particularly relevant with regard to the teaching and learning of ‘community values’ amongst POW participants.

I have observed that POW members tend to form their most influential, significant and meaningful online relationships with those with whom they also have a meaningful and substantive face-to-face relationship. They tend to maintain more online contact with those that also see on a regular basis. They tend to imitate the beautiful eco-images of those they are closest to and the imitation of trends in style and taste can be seen amongst close friends. Conversely, POW members seem more likely to filter out the emails of those with whom they have not had much personal contact.

It seems that online interaction ideally supplements rather than replaces meaningful face-to-face interaction – if one wants to teach and learn meaningful identities of local
relationship/community, the social value of ‘local community’, or influence the aesthetic tastes and choices of others. The home parents in the group are a good example of this. Individuals such as Nyree, Katerina, Rayna, Lia, Nick and Delia are at home with young children for either all or part of the week. Child friendly socialising has been an important source of social cohesion for these group members - they elect to spend time together (i.e. during ‘playdates’) and their relationships are generally typified by high levels of trust and practical interdependence.

It is also worth noting that proximity has been a key indicator for the successful teaching and learning of ‘community mindedness’ and aesthetic trend amongst group members. Individuals who live near each other find it easier to have regular face-to-face contact, share and lend resources, and generally engage in ‘neighbourly’ activities such as off-the-cuff barbeques and casual childminding. Such individuals regularly comment on one another’s Facebook posts, but their online interaction is interwoven with regular face-to-face contact. For such individuals, the social value of ‘community mindedness’ is maintained through meaningful and ongoing experiences of interaction and support (both online and offline). Rayna, after going through a particularly rough period in her personal life, commented: “I got through it because of the people I know around here, you know, just people dropping in and helping out”.

Thus, the web based relational world of the group must be understood as functioning alongside face-to-face relationship rather than replacing it. In the case of the POW group, the social value of ‘community mindedness’ cannot be taught purely through ICT engagement. Relationship, activity and enthusiasm for community engagement appear to languish when the only contact individuals have is through net-based interaction. Comments like “I was going to read your email….but….I didn’t get around to it….and I got too busy…” are common amongst members who have fallen out of meaningful face-to-face contact.

Regular (or semi-regular) group activities where one ‘comes along and belongs’ have thus proven to be key to the teaching and learning of meaningful ‘local community’ values and engagement, as well as nature appreciation. Collective passatta bottling brings people together, as do weekly run Permaculture Playgroups, which connect sustainability oriented Mums and Dads.

**Future Directions**

Increasingly, POW members can be seen experimenting with ways of using ICT to develop and teach ideas around ‘sustainable local community’, and create digital images that serve both aesthetic and practical purposes. I believe that within the next one to two years, a great deal will have changed in the way in which POW members use ICT to achieve group goals.

An example of one recent experiment has been the utilization of ‘feral fruit’ maps by one group member. Feral Fruit Trees Melbourne (the organization which provides the maps)
promotes the harvesting of local produce, and in particular, ‘feral fruit’. Individuals in modern urban society rarely think of themselves as hunter gatherers – in fact, it takes quite a psychological shift to accept that food can be free, local and there for the picking. In contrast, the Feral Fruit website advocates for the harvesting of local ‘feral’ trees, defined as:

“fruit trees [that are] growing in or overhanging public spaces that are accessible to the urban hunter-gatherer…” (feral fruit site).

The Feral Fruit site provides individuals with a Google Maps interface which they can use to plot ‘feral’ trees in their area. As the site developers state “[we seek to] promote localized food gathering in cities where food is being obtained from increasingly distant sources” (feralfruitmelbourne.wordpress.com). The maps function in real time – the map is revised as soon as online users input data. Members of inner Western green communities (including one POW member) have begun to use maps of this sort to identify and promote green food supplies, ‘food scavenging’, and the valuing of ‘local produce’:

Another initiative which several POW members (particularly Katerina) have demonstrated an interest in is the Sharehood concept.
The Sharehood model was developed:

“in September 2008 in Melbourne, Australia. Theo Kitchener delivered a letter inviting 250 of his neighbours to create a local community and share household goods, skillshare with each other, and get to know one another… the Sharehood is all about sharing resources within your neighborhood and helps you meet and make friends with people in your local area”.

The Sharehood system allows individuals to use the Sharehood site (www.thesharehood.org) to set up individual neighborhood websites. Intended for a radius of approximately four suburban blocks, the website operates in much the same way as Facebook - but membership is limited to individuals who live in close geographic proximity.

If embraced, Sharehood systems could lead the way to the teaching of more intensely local ideas of community – the four block radius as a model for valid and relevant ‘miniature communities’.
Chapter Six: Deliberative Display and Values Pedagogy

Introduction

It is a hot and dusty day. For some reason, it is always hot and dusty during the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne. My fingers are sticky from old icy pole, and I feel covered in grit. I am sitting under an open marquee, right next to the Yarra, listening to a presentation that is being given by ‘Uncle Bob’ Randall.

‘Uncle Bob’ is an elder from the Pitjantjatjara nation, which is located in the central Australian desert.

The audience that I am a part of is your typical Melbourne Green Left crowd, which is unsurprising, given the nature of the event. Everyone listens with exaggerated respect – this is an Aboriginal elder, after all.

Uncle Bob doesn’t use a projector for his talk, and in fact, he doesn’t act much like a presenter at all. He makes eye contact with individual audience members as though he and that person are having an exclusive conversation. His manner is straightforward and uncomplicated as he discusses his experiences as a member of the stolen generation. He describes being taken away from his family, and out of the bush, at the age of nine.

“I don’t know what they thought they could give us kids” he says “we didn’t need anything.”

I find this statement lovely in its simplicity, but perhaps simple in its sentimentality. The schoolteacher in my head responds: literacy and numeracy, recorder ensembles, physics, maths, the Western intellectual tradition.

“We already had the best” he tells us.
"I had the best".

He points at a tall silver gum tree that is right near us, only a couple of metres away from the marquee, one of a series of trees which bend toward the water.

“This is the best”.

He points to the slow moving Yarra, which winds along into the distance. Large boulders edge the water. The raw dark greys and blacks of the rock seem to defy the trim and proper yacht clubs along the shore.

“This is the best…and I will only accept the best”

He looks at the tree slowly. He looks at it with unfeigned, frank appreciation.

“Yes” he says, nodding conclusively, “that’s the best”.

“That’s what I want for myself.”

He looks directly at me, dark eyes locking onto mine.

“That’s what I want for you”.

I turn to look at the tree, which I hadn’t really paid any attention to before.

It’s just a tree - isn’t it?

I look again.

I notice that the silver trunk of the tree is patterned with a dark and delicate filigree that is complex, sophisticated and beautiful. Under low reaching boughs grey green leaves create a backdrop for wattle buds - bursts of intense pink.

I breathe in. I see that it is cool and peaceful here next to the Yarra, which winds downstream, as it has for perhaps a thousand years.

How could I have not noticed it before?

********

By drawing our attention to a tree, to a river, Uncle Bob engaged in a pedagogic manoeuvre – the teaching of beauty, value and meaning in social worlds.

Kant has stated that:
“…when [a man] puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things.

Thus he says that the thing is beautiful; and it is not as if he counts on others agreeing with him in his judgment of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he demands this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste, which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to men to say: Every one has his own taste” (Kant 1790, p. 52; see also pp. 136–139).

We can see Kant’s pedestal as a metaphor for an act of social pedagogy. When we place an object on a pedestal we deliberatively display it, asserting and teaching its value.

Individuals often display objects of beauty and meaning to and for others in this way. In the image below, we see a woman displaying a designer shoe as an object of value.

Similarly, Uncle Bob asked his audience to stop and pause, to take time to admire. He highlighted an object of the ecosphere (a tree) as singularly beautiful, valuable and important. In a Kantian sense, he ‘demanded [our] delight’. The lesson was experiential and situated; we were invited to share his perception of the tree rather than instructed in its merits. Placing the gumtree on a pedestal, he exhibited it for us, and denied us taste in
our cultural denigration of it. Though we were sitting below Federation Square, next to art galleries and cafes, these were treated as of lesser significance, of lesser aesthetic value, than the objects, the sights and vistas of the ecosphere. He ignored those objects, and pointed to the tree: “this is the best”.

**The Permaculture Movement and the Ecological Aesthetic**

Permaculture, as it is practiced by POW members, manifests a unique aesthetic tradition that is firmly focussed on the ecosphere, and eco-centric conceptions of beauty. As blitz designer Scott explained to me: “well, in Permaculture things are meant to work, but they are also meant to be beautiful, too”. For example in the photograph below, we see that recycled materials have been used to create a portable edible garden which is also very visually pleasing.

![Image 6.3: retrieved from www.permacultureprinciples.com (December 2010)](image-url)

Interestingly, I recently overheard a participant use the term ‘permaporn’ to describe the lush photographs which one commonly sees in connection to the tradition; images of mossy forests, trees and flowers – images which are sensual and invite a visceral connection to, and appreciation of, nature.

Photographs of this kind are also frequently taken, shared and posted by POW members. An aesthetic ideal which centres on the celebration of nature runs through the Permaculture movement; this ideal is also echoed through the POW group, and the kinds of images which POW members take and share. For example, here is a photo which Richard, a fruit tree enthusiast, drew to my attention, saying “you should see this photo we got of a bee in a quince blossom, it was great, really gorgeous”: 
The Digital Image and Deliberative Display

In the past ten years, a rise in emergent ICT technologies has facilitated the taking and sharing of photographs. Photography, once an expensive and laborious activity has become both endemic and ubiquitous; part of day-to-day life. Thus, for group members, the digital image has become an increasingly important communication device and pedagogical tool. POW members communicate by taking and sharing images. In this way, individuals teach and learn specific values within the group and beyond.

Almost all POW members own and use digital cameras. The current group convenor (Nick) is a keen amateur photographer. The husband of another group member (Nyree) is a professional photographer. Approximately five group members carry iPhones, and use these frequently to take photographs and video footage. Of course, there is an inherent contradiction in members’ use of such hardware. The production, transportation, use and disposal of electronic devices is hardly ecologically neutral.

Contradictions aside, members regularly produce, publish and share photographs via email. Tools such as Facebook and Picasso Web Albums allow members to post images for select audiences. Public websites, by contrast, allow members to exhibit and display images to the general public. Websites which regularly feature images posted by POW members include: the POW site (www.pow.org.au), the Moo I Made it Blog (www.mooimadeit.com), the Heritage Fruit Society website (www.heritagefruitssociety.org.au), the Werribee Park Mansion Heritage Orchard site (www.werribeeparkheritageorchard.org.au), the Permablitz website (www.permablitz.net) and the radical cross stitch blog (www.radicalcrossstitch.com).

As commentators such as Sontag (1977) have noted, photographs are not merely images which have been ‘stencilled off reality’. To photograph is to intentionally frame and construct (Berger, 1972; Holt, 2008). The act of taking a photo imposes value or meaning on the thing being photographed, constructing a model which other photographers may choose to imitate. Because of the relative ease with which digital photos are taken, the kinds of images which are taken by POW members are typically compared and assessed in relation to many other photos taken at the same time. For the large number of images which will be deleted, a few key images will be kept. Fewer still will be shared, uploaded or published. To post or share an image is to define it as important or significant.

The images which are posted by group members generally fall into one of two categories: ‘informative’ images and ‘art’ images (there is considerable overlap, of course). Informative images convey specific information. Such images are ostensibly pedagogic in that they demonstrate or ‘teach’ a technique, concept, system or method. For example, in the image below we see a design for some hanging strawberry pots which have been made from jute and infant formula tins:


Similarly, images such as this one, which show schoolchildren in a school garden, ostensibly demonstrate and teach the concept of the school garden. The ‘Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program’ (www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au) is an educational initiative which seeks to embed kitchen gardens in mainstream schooling. Angela (a POW member) is the director of this program. She has posted this image to promote the program, and show what she is employed to ‘do’:
Many POW members also post regular Facebook updates. By displaying images, they keep others updated on the status of current projects. For example, in the image below, we see a series of Facebook posts which demonstrate the development of a garden:

Image 6.7: retrieved from Facebook feed, personal communication (August, 2011)

In addition to ‘informational’ images, POW members also like to produce, post and share photographs of things that they simply consider beautiful, moving or meaningful. The
image below, described as ‘heritage fruit trees in blossom’ on the website where it was posted, shows an orchard in the sunshine.

![Image of heritage fruit trees in blossom](image-url)

*Image 6.8: retrieved from the Werribee Mansion Heritage Orchard site*  
*www.werribeeparkheritageorchard.org.au* (December 2010)

Images such as these can broadly be described as ‘art images’. Though such images may be also serve an informative purpose, the primary objective of such images is aesthetic. They frame understandings of beauty in fundamentally eco-centric ways. They capture imaginatively conceived ideals, and celebrate nature, through the aesthetic. In the Kantian sense, such photographs place elements of the eco-sphere ‘on a pedestal’. By posting and reposting images of this sort, POW members teach the value and importance of what might otherwise be ignored or marginalised. The repetitive posting and reposting of such images reinforces the importance of the natural world, using beauty as a marker of value.

Here, for example, we see a mandala (an art object) that has been made by children using natural materials (such as leaves and blossoms) from the surrounding area. The use of freely available natural materials as art materials works to emphasise the connection between the two:
Similarly, in the image below, we see the rich and vibrant colours of ‘feral fruit’ (feral fruit is fruit which has been gleaned from local neighbourhoods). The way the hands gently cradle the beautiful stone fruit emphasise its value, beauty and importance.


And while the image used in the blog post below works to emphasise the text (‘busy as a bee’) the image also reminds us of the loveliness of nature:
The kinds of images which POW members regularly post, and the eco-centric aesthetic which predominates within them, thus reinforce and model a valuing of the natural world. In discussion, group members often speak warmly of such photographs; they enjoy sending, receiving, posting and viewing them. Such photographs inspire appreciation rather than discussion – members recognise in them their idea of “the good life”. An appreciation of nature is taught, learnt and reinforced through the taking, posting and sharing of images. Participants are taught to value and revere the natural world.

POW images also often emphasise ideas of happiness or fulfilment. Images are displayed that show individuals enjoying water, sunshine, the outdoors, flowers, bees and the physical world. We see a pleasure and joy in the process of engagement. Here, for example, is the ‘permaplaygroups’ homepage:
And an image of a local girl enjoying her new chickens:


Here we see a digital image which has been constructed in the same vein. This image emphasises the delightful, sensual pleasures of ‘Heritage Fruit’:


In supermarkets only a limited range of commercial fruit varieties is available to us. During the 19th and early 20th centuries the diversity (and consequently biodiversity) of fruit varieties was significant. POW member Richard (who also works for the Heritage Fruit Society) promotes ‘heritage’ fruits.
By definition, cultural shifts imply pedagogic process; the teaching and learning of new ways of being in the world. When we share images, we communicate ideas of what there is to see (i.e. what is ‘real’), what we find valuable and moving, and what we ‘want to see more of’ – the directions in which we wish to move and our ideas of where happiness lies. POW participant Katerina, for example, has told me that she became involved in Permaculture because she found the images in the Permaculture diary and calendar moving: “I did a PDC because of the pictures in the diary. It was the photographs….they are so beautiful”. On another occasion, Katerina also told me that she “hates marching. It just turns people off. That's the thing about permaculture, it's inspiring…..”

POW photographs often emphasise a sense of freedom, simplicity and engagement with nature. Such images when distributed and disseminated through cultural groups and traditions become, ‘teaching tools’.

As Ballard has commented:

“I suspect that many of the great cultural shifts that prepare the way for political change are largely aesthetic. A Buick radiator grille is as much a political statement as a Rolls Royce radiator grille, one enshrining a machine aesthetic driven by a populist optimism, the other enshrining a hierarchical and exclusive social order” (2004, p.7).

By taking, sharing and posting images which celebrate nature, and human-nature connection, POW members model, teach and learn eco-centric values. They develop, crystallise and articulate eco-centric goals and directions – ideas around the value, beauty and importance of nature. They articulate imaginatively conceived ideals which place relationship with nature at the centre of human experience. In this way group members place the objects of the eco-sphere on a pedestal, teaching and learning ideas of “the best”.

Chapter Seven: Summary and Conclusion

This study is an examination of the ways in which values are taught through participation in the Permaculture Out West (POW) community group. The groups’ mission is the development, promotion and facilitation of sustainability initiatives in the Western suburbs of Melbourne (in particular, the inner West around the area of Footscray).

The study was developed with reference to the Community of Practice framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These authors described the ways in which communities where social practices, activities or goals are shared (for example, communities of dressmakers, midwives or surgeons) engage in informal and spontaneous learning processes, inducting new participants into the skills, traditions, values and customs of their established group. ‘Old timers’, or experienced members, induct ‘newcomers’ through a process which these authors describe as 'legitimate peripheral participation'. Legitimate peripheral participation can be understood as a learning trajectory whereby novice participants gradually move from the periphery of community life to positions of centrality, mastery and relative community importance. This occurs as they (gradually and over time) adopt skills, knowledges, capacities and practice-identities which are central to group membership.

Key to the notion of legitimate peripheral participation are ideas of imitation and modelling. Newcomers within a Community of Practice (CoP) learn by imitating the practice and products of community 'old-timers'. Thus, novices learn from models, as presented by community 'old-timers'. The products, practices and practice derived identities in which 'old-timers' engage form a template which newcomers may imitate.

Whilst the CoP framework has generally been employed to describe the learning and teaching of specific skill sets, a small group of scholars (eg Bucholtz, 1999; Cain, 1991) have expanded the CoP framework for the purpose of describing the teaching and learning of values within social groupings. This study can be understood as situated within this sub-school; it is an examination of the learning and teaching of values within the POW group. Thus, the first literature review presented within the study provides a critique of the Community of Practice framework, noting in particular the strengths and weaknesses of this framework, and its relevance to the study of both values and online social formations.

The second literature review describes the Permaculture tradition. Participants within the POW group principally (though not exclusively) engage with sustainability issues through the framework of the Permaculture tradition. Permaculture is a grassroots ‘conceptual toolkit’ that is concerned with the development of sustainable human habitats. A philosophy of sustainable systems design, Permaculture was developed by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s (Holmgren and Mollison, 1978). The ideal of relocalisation - the belief that individuals should be engaged with their society, community and neighborhood at the local level, is a key goal of
Permaculturists (who advocate the value of small scale, highly local solutions to global sustainability challenges). For example, Permaculturists generally believe that growing food locally, and developing resource and waste solutions at the local level is better for both people and planet.

The central theme which guides this study is that of social values (those ideas, beliefs and practices that POW group members value highly or place a premium upon). Central also to this thesis has been an exploration of the ways in which key social values are manifested, taught and learnt in both online and face-to-face settings.

The research questions presented within this thesis were:

1) What key values do POW participants understand as socially valuable and meaningful, and how are these influenced by the Permaculture tradition?

2) How are such values produced, enacted and taught/learnt in face-to-face settings?

3) How are such values produced, enacted and taught/learnt through online technologies?

A multi-sited approach to ethnography (Marcus, 1995) was employed within this study. Building upon traditional approaches to fieldwork (e.g. Wolcott, 1999), multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork becomes flexible, weaving in and out of various sites, following ideas and practices rather than being bounded with one geographic location. Thus, in exploring POW spaces, we move from blog, to community garden, to text, to photograph, to newspaper article, to website, to conversation, to personal narrative, to working bee. This is the nature of group process, and group interaction.

Images proved extremely important within the data collection process. Much of group interaction occurred online, and POW members regularly used images to communicate with one another. The key research questions were drawn from the data, and emerged in response to data gathered.

**In conclusion**

The values that I have identified as commonly held, taught and learnt through engagement in POW are ‘community-mindedness’ (i.e. a belief in the importance of participation in local community) and ‘eco-centrism’ (a belief in the value of the natural world and the positioning of humans as participants within that world rather than lords over it, as demonstrated through the display of eco-centric conceptions of beauty). These values can be clearly linked to the Permaculture movement.

Relocalisation is a central tenet of Permaculture philosophy. Permaculturists place an emphasis on local community development process and activity. Thus, community values which POW members teach and learn as part of group process might be framed as ‘village values’. In the villages of the past, individuals lived in relationship with the
natural world as they milked goats, ploughed earth, and so on. They were also unavoidably dependent on their fellow villagers for everyday survival. POW members seek to reinvent this emphasis on connection to nature, and connection to local community. In contrast to the villagers of the past, however, POW members choose to engage in activities that deepen their relationship with both the natural world and other locals – they are not unavoidably driven to do so for the purpose of day-to-day survival.

Permaculture is also an aesthetically rich grassroots environmental tradition. Permaculturists have developed an organic gardening culture that emphasises a visceral and sensual engagement with nature; the images and artefacts which Permaculturists produce reflect this. The aesthetic which Permaculture is known for also has a distinctly romantic, agrarian, ‘village’ flavour. Thus, POW members value the artefacts and vistas of the natural world.

Through observational activity, it became apparent that POW members often teach and learn ‘village values’ in face-to-face settings – at Playgroups or jam making events (for example). They regularly model the sharing of resources for newcomers (i.e. by offering to lend a newcomer a spade – “come around to my place and pick it up after dinner”). They also model community-oriented approaches to childcare (members who are parents regularly babysit other peoples’ children, and their children are also babysat in return). They work together at PermaBlitz events, where time is freely given in order to develop gardening infrastructure in the homes of other POW members.

POW members also learn and teach ‘village values’ through and with newer ICT technologies. The establishment of POW as an organisation has coincided with the rise of a variety of new technologies; thus we see member values as learnt, taught, produced and enacted through emergent ICTs. For example, participants regularly swap and share beautiful ‘eco-images’ using their iPhones. A sense of ‘community’ is maintained through regular interaction on Facebook, via the POW group page. Email lists function as ‘local conversation loops’. These circular emails are often cc’d on to newcomer locals, who may choose to join these novel forms of online dialogue, and participate in new forms of local community.

Limitations

As a study of one local group, it is arguable that the findings presented here are exploratory rather than generalizable. POW must be understood as one (of the many) green-left groups which operate in Melbourne.

Analysis of the social values within the POW group has been situated within one discourse (the CoP framework). The CoP framework, while a perennially popular framework for the examination of the teaching and learning of craft-style skills, has rarely been utilised for the study the teaching and learning of values. This study therefore draws from a highly specialised (and somewhat limited) tradition, and the veracity of such an approach has yet to be fully tested. Ideally, an in-depth study of values (and the
teaching of values) would draw from a range of frameworks and approaches, particularly since a great deal has been written on the development of values within other scholarly traditions.

Additionally, the Permaculture concept has not been extensively explored in the academic literature. This seems to be slowly changing, however, and it is likely that in the future, a much broader pool of Permaculture-related resources will emerge. Nonetheless, framings of the Permaculture concept (as presented within this work) were limited by a lack of broad and varied solid scholarly discourse. As Holmgren has noted '[the term] permaculture means different things to different people' (in conversation, March 29th, 2012). It is arguable that a tighter framing of the Permaculture concept will be necessary in the future, if Permaculture is to be utilised as an effective 'thinking tool' for sustainability.

Finally, many of the women described within the study are home parents or ‘housewives’ (one man, Nick, is also a home parent). It is noteworthy that this group of well-educated, middle class women have chosen not only home life, but also extremely ‘traditional’ manifestations of a home-based lifestyle. Home parents within the group make jam, knit, crochet, sew, and so on.

This situation is made the more remarkable by the fact that two of the women within the group identify as ‘radical feminists’ (I have also heard other women within the group describe themselves as feminists). How do these women reconcile modern ‘feminist' (and particularly ‘radical feminist’) identities with their mode of life? How do their green values underscore the mode of gendered living they have chosen? An in-depth study of the views, values and social understandings of this group might reveal a more comprehensive picture of their (and perhaps other) modern feminine identities.

Value of the study

Ironically, new forms of sharing, teaching and learning are now possible as a result of technologies which were initially developed to connect individuals living continents apart. Web platforms, designed to connect individuals on a global level, can also be used to promote engagement between individuals who live a block from one another. Thus, this study may be of particular use to individuals who are interested in the issue of relocalisation - and particularly to those who may be interested in the role that newer web-based technologies can play in the development of highly local forms of community.

For example, the POW Facebook groups page has proven to be an invaluable tool for the POW group. Group members have used the social networking functions of the POW group page to share with, inform, trade with, teach and socialise with other group members. Thus, we see the potential value of newer web-based technologies as tools for community development.

Using Facebook, community members have been able to create highly local resource
flows. When one resident has a resource glut, they easily pass the excess onto another community member (eg 'I have twenty Aloe Vera plants, come by 66 Graham St if you are interested - I will leave them on the porch'). Using Facebook, community members can both source highly local forms of information from the groups (eg 'does anyone know where I can get seedlings in Footscray?'), and pass on highly local forms of information to the group (eg 'the Seddon Organic Collective are looking for new members - contact Sheree if you are interested'). They can promote ecocentric worldviews through the posting of beautiful eco-images. These are images which reflect deeply held values, and depict that which group members place a premium upon.

Using email and web pages, POW members create circular conversations; email interactions which are about the local (eg 'the Braybrook community centre garden has been vandalized) and which promote a connection to the local. They can find volunteers for community working bees in this way - these are face-to-face opportunities for individuals to get to know their neighbors, and to volunteer within a cooperative community project.

It is important to note, however, that both the literature around online CoP formations, and observational data drawn from this study, indicate that individuals tend to create strong online relationships with those that they also have a substantial face-to-face relationship with. What this means, is that individuals who have a personal relationship are more likely to engage in online forms of learning, sharing and swapping with one another. Individuals who do not know each other in real life will, in all likelihood, ignore each other online as well. Thus, it is not enough to give 'community members' an IT platform for interaction. In order for real community interaction, and community development, to occur, strong face-to-face relationship is generally essential.

In modern, global-northern societies, householders rarely know their neighbors, and often experience a sense of alienation from the local - the people and places which are geographically near to them. Civic groups and local government institutions (in particular) may wish to use web-based platforms as tools for community development in the future. Highly local forms of social media (such as Facebook pages) are ideal for this purpose.

Ideally, further study is needed in this area. How can local councils use social media to build civic engagement and other civic values? What sorts of factors impact on local engagement through social media. What sorts of barriers make residents less likely to actively engage with, share/trade with, and support one another using online platforms? What are the potential hazards of these kinds of interaction; for example, could these forms of interaction negatively impact the wellbeing and safety of individuals? Thus, this study is to be seen as a 'starting point'; an initial descriptive examination of these forms of interaction.

**In Summary**
At the heart of this thesis are questions like: does the development of eco-centric worldviews, and engagement with deep ecological process through the aesthetic lead to shifts in political priority? Can a family learn to value water, and to prize the natural resources we have for so long taken for granted? And, what does it mean for individuals to lean on each other, rather than a market system, for survival?

The web-based technologies that have arisen in my lifetime have dramatically changed suburban social landscapes. These technologies are still changing rapidly; indeed, as a society, we seem to be on the cusp of yet greater innovation. It is arguable that the dynamic interplay we are now seeing – an interplay between human values, personal identity, technology, and social/community structures - has just begun. And it has begun at a time when individuals and communities are struggling to grapple with the significant challenges of population growth, climate change, and environmental degradation.

Within these dramatic shifts, we see POW members working to hold on to, or perhaps recreate in novel ways, ideals; to that which they view as precious and enduring. Their actions signal a desire to retain a sense of connection to land, to earth and to water, as well as a desire to create connections with others in a local neighborhood. It signals the wish for a sense of community within the busyness of a modern city, and the urge to experience nature within urban landscapes. This is the desire, as one participant framed it, to be “inspired rather than frightened” in the face of ecological uncertainty.

Within these complexities, members of the POW group seem to reach for what they truly believe “the best” to be – connection with each other, connection with the beauty of the natural world. This is what attracts them. This is what they promote, develop, teach and enact. Perhaps ironically, they often use technology to do so.

One can only speculate on what new forms of community may emerge in the future - and how members of these future communities will choose to engage with nature, technology and each other. It is to be hoped that as they do so, they will be guided by meaningful values, a deep connection to that which is most important.
Appendix

**Holmgren’s Permaculture Design Principles**

Observe and interact: by taking time to engage with nature we can design solutions that suit our particular situation.

Catch and store energy: by developing systems that collect resources at peak abundance, we can use them in times of need.

Obtain a yield: ensure that you are getting truly useful rewards as part of the work that you are doing.

Apply self-regulation and accept feedback: we need to discourage inappropriate activity to ensure that systems can continue to function well.

Use and value renewable resources and services: make the best use of nature's abundance to reduce our consumptive behavior and dependence on non-renewable resources.

Produce no waste: by valuing and making use of all the resources that are available to us, nothing goes to waste.

Design from patterns to details: by stepping back, we can observe patterns in nature and society. These can form the backbone of our designs, with the details filled in as we go.

Integrate rather than segregate: by putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between those things and they work together to support each other.

Use small and slow solutions: small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones, making better use of local resources and producing more sustainable outcomes.

Use and value diversity: diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides.

Use edges and value the marginal: the interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.

Creatively use and respond to change: we can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing, and then intervening at the right time

*Holmgren, 2002*
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Author/s:
Hillis, De Chantal K.

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