

# EDUA11387: Environmental Philosophy and City-Based Learning

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## 1. Course Details

EDUA11387 is a **20 credit SCQF Level 11** postgraduate course, primarily intended for students completing a **MSc in Learning for Sustainability**. Please contact the course organiser if you are not in this programme but are interested in taking the course.

## 2. Introduction

A “philosophical attitude” is concerned with questioning the most basic assumptions about the world and our place in it. It has the power to foster enthusiastic lifelong learners by invoking critical thought, but also awe, wonder, and humility. Philosophy is predominantly concerned with examining and contemplating metaphysics (the fundamental nature of the world), epistemology (what it means “to know”), and ethics (what it means “to do good”), although aesthetic and political questions are also sometimes within its purview. Environmental philosophy explores these questions in the context of environmental issues and ideas.

Many scholars argue that the ecological crisis is currently, at least in part, the outcome of certain basic unquestioned assumptions. If so, then it would seem that philosophy might play a part in addressing this crisis. Indeed, there have been many attempts to articulate environmental philosophies aimed at leading to more ecological relationships between humans and the environment. While many of these attempts have merits, an approach grounded in “Learning for Sustainability” perceives philosophical inquiry, like all knowledge, as *an ongoing developmental or evolutionary process*. Rather than presenting a description of how we \*should\* see the world, the invitation is to help foster a “philosophical attitude,” which has learners comfortable and versatile in questioning and re-questioning their assumptions, and eager in exploring the consequences that might result from the assumptions they make. In such a spirit, this course is concerned with developing a philosophical attitude consonant with evolving an ecological future rather than presenting a particular philosophy which promises to lead to ecological change.

This background provides the basis from which to consider the implications for *city-based learning*. The planet is experiencing the largest urban growth in its history and so the way that people experience city environments is central to the quest of Learning for Sustainability. This

course focuses on being outdoors and indoors in city environments to explore how these settings might be used to provide inspiration, contexts, lessons, and provocations in Learning for Sustainability.

### **3. Learning Outcomes**

On completion of the course students will:

1. Have an understanding and familiarity with the philosophical questions and the process of doing philosophy;
2. Have an understanding about how doing philosophy can assist in education, and in Learning for Sustainability in urban areas in particular;
3. Have critically engaged with ontological, epistemological, and ethical positions in order to formulate a programme of city-based outdoor learning;
4. Understand and explore the relationship between teaching philosophy and practitioner inquiry;
5. Have critically considered a range of educational contexts in which to promote concept-based practice (a school class, a group from an outdoor centre, field study centre, informal settings, etc).

### **4. Preparing for Classes**

Classes will consist of a combination of lectures, discussions, and pedagogical activities. Please come prepared to reflect, discuss, and expand your understanding on ideas that emerge from the readings and from prior classes.

My aim is to enable safe and creative learning. While participation is essential in class, this does not mean talking as much as possible. We will work on fostering an environment where those who tend to “take over” classes learn to keep the space open for other voices.

We will spend significant amounts of time examining the pedagogical potential of alternative learning venues. We may be outdoors at some point during every class and students should make sure they are dressed appropriately for the vagaries of Scottish weather. For example, in the past, we have gone to the Parliament Building, Calton Hill, a cemetery, and a parking garage during class. Our city affords many different learning opportunities and we shall attempt to identify and understand some of that are nearby.

### **5. Required Readings**

All resources are available through the online university library system, DiscoverEd. Books are also on reserve at the Moray House Library. Please ensure that you have read and reflected upon readings prior to class.

### **Week 1: Introduction**

- Jackson, T. (2001). The art and craft of “gently” Socratic inquiry, in A. Costa (Ed.) *Developing minds* (3rd edition). Alexandria, VA: ASCD. [Chapter 73]
- Wurdinger, S. & Carlson, J. (2010). *Teaching for Experiential Learning*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. [Chapter 1.]

### **Week 2: Environmental Ethics**

- Weston, A. (1998). Universal consideration as an ordinary practice. *Environmental Ethics* 20, 279-289.
- Goralnik, L., & Nelson, M. (2017). Field philosophy: Environmental learning and moral development in Isle Royal National Park. *Environmental Education Research* 23(5), 687-707.

### **Week 3: Philosophical Pedagogies & Practitioner Inquiry**

- Lone, J.M. and Burroughs, M.D. (2016). *Philosophy in education: Questioning and dialogue in schools* [Chapters 2-3],
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (2001). Beyond certainty: Taking an inquiry stance on practice. In A. Lieberman and L. Miller (Eds.) *Teachers caught in the action*, Teacher's College Press. Columbia, NY. [pp.45-58].
- Carr and Kemmis (2002). *Becoming critical: Education knowledge and action research*. Routledge [Chapters 1-2].

### **Week 4: Knowing and Our Sensory World (1)**

- Leopold, A. Thinking like a mountain <http://www.eco-action.org/dt/thinking.html>
- Abram, D. (1997) Waking our animal senses. <http://wildethics.org/essay/waking-our-animal-senses/>

### **Week 5: More-than-human epistemologies: The case of plants**

- Baluska, F., Mancuso, S., Volkmann, D. & Barlow, P. (2009). The ‘root-brain’ hypothesis of Charles and Francis Darwin: Revival after more than 125 year. *Plant Signalling and Behaviour* 4(12), 1121-1127.
- Gagliano, M., Vladyslav, V., Borbely, A., Grimonprez, M., & Depczynski, M. (2016). Learning by association in plants. *Nature: Scientific Reports* 6(38427).

### **Week 6: Aesthetics of Space and Place**

- Orr, D. (1993) Architecture as pedagogy. *Conservation Biology* 7(2).
- Wattchow, B., & Brown, M. (2011). *A pedagogy of place: Outdoor education for a changing world*. Monash University Publishing [selections from chapters 1-3].

### **Week 7: Phenomenology**

- Wright, R. (2017). *Why Buddhism is true*. [Chapters 5-9].

### **Week 8: Humans and Nature**

- LeCain, T.J. (2015). Against the Anthropocene. *International Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 3(1), 1-28.
- Bateson, G. (1971). The cybernetics of "self": A Theory of Alcoholism. *Psychiatry* 34(1), 1-18

### **Week 9: Class Presentations on Practitioner Inquiry**

- **No required readings for this class**

### **Week 10: Life and death**

- Crosby, D.A. (2007). A case for religion of nature. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 1(4), 489-502.
- Plumwood, V. (2008). Tasteless: Towards a food-based approach to death. *Environmental Values* 17, 323-330.
- Affifi, R. & Christie, B. (*in press*). Pedagogy of Death. *Environmental Education Research*. [this article is available on our Learn page].

## **6. Assessment**

Assessment will be in the form of 1) online discussions and 2) a written assignment of 3000 words. This covers Learning Outcomes 1-5. Students are expected to keep a reflective journal during the course. The journal itself will not be assessed but it will be essential for producing thoughtful work in the two course assignments.

### **Task one: online discussions (25%)**

Discuss philosophical and pedagogical issues in online discussion groups on Learn throughout the term. The purpose is to enact a "philosophical attitude" through collaborations with the other students in the course. I am looking for thoughtful discussions. While you are free to initiate or contribute to as many discussions as they like, all students will be expected to contribute in a sustained way to at least one discussion. A sustained contribution means a meaningful dialogue with one's peers (lots of back-and-forth), evidence of growth in one's ideas, a sensitive and open engagement with the ideas of others, a pedagogically appropriate way of presenting one's

ideas, and an authentic sense that one is inquiring into and grappling with issues of concern. As course organizer, I will sometimes contribute to these discussions but I won't "drive" them.

Students will write their own rubric for this task, and will assess themselves accordingly. You should share the rubric with me, but can also share online and make the writing of the rubric the basis of a discussion. The rubric may go through several iterations as your learning grows and your aims shift. This is fine. Please send me your final rubric and your assigned grade at the same time as you submit task two to Turnitin.

### **Task two: 3000 word paper (75%)**

Design and implement a small activity in your educational setting that engages your community of learners (this could be, for example, students, workmates, flatmates) in "doing environmental philosophy" in the context of opportunities afforded in the city. Describe and reflect on the process and its outcomes. Why and how does the activity engage the learners in philosophical thinking? And how does that thinking connect to environmental issues? What were the successes and challenges? What did not work and how did (or might) you deal with such challenges? Your paper will not be assessed on how well your learners did but on the quality of your reflections on the process, which includes a critical and questioning approach to your own practice. Papers need to be fully referenced in accordance with critical academic discourse. Students should be able to demonstrate how philosophical perspectives and philosophical approaches support learning.

Every student should have conducted their activity before Week 9. On Week 9, students will have the opportunity to present and discuss their activity with their peers. This will be a chance to deepen reflection and will be crucial not only for writing a better paper but for developing one's ongoing practice.

I am flexible about the structure of the paper, but I recommend you organise it into three parts: 1) Preparation (which includes an examination of relevant literature informing your activity content and the process you undertake it), 2) A summary or description of the activity as it occurred (ex. could be a narrative description of its unfolding), and 3) a reflection on the activity as it occurred, aimed at helping you understand what sort of learning did occur, and what you might do differently next time around. The three parts could be preceded with a small introduction summarising the paper and followed by a small conclusion wrapping everything up.

#### **Things to think about:**

-How do you context set for the activity? (Physical location, atmosphere, prior activities or lead up discussion, etc.)

-How do you prepare yourself philosophically for the activity? Do you yourself need to be suitably unlocked from habitual or accepted ways of thinking in order to help students unlock

themselves? If so, how will you do this? (ex. my preparing for the "Plant lesson" by reading up and thinking about the epistemological complexities of whether or not plants "know").

-How do you facilitate the activity? How is your process informed by your pedagogical intentions and how have you made use of other's experiences and insights to help you?

-How will you ensure that your activity is learner appropriate?

-How does the activity content and/or the process of doing it engage with sustainability and/or city?

-How will you know whether or not your learners have opened up philosophically?