



## On Peter Fensham

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Optimists kick arse!! Maybe not literally — except when clearly necessary to the advancement of eco-social equity, of course. And without them, life would be pretty — no, damn — grim! Frank Sinatra’s ‘Mr In-between’ and those smitten with too much health in their pessimism glands between them have never achieved very much of ongoing value to humans and the Earth.

However, Martin Luther King saw just futures — the promised land! And his optimism led him to claim that ‘the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice’, a statement often simplified to ‘the arc of history etc’. The US President Obama borrowed it; King had likewise probably taken his inspiration from an earlier preacher who had added the observation that this would only be the case if those who care about and for justice actively work on shape-shifting the arc so that it keeps on course, correcting whenever — in the often times! — it fell under the influence of the various personifications of real-life Darth Vaders.

As Gough (2022) has reminded us, Peter considered that ‘we were not to see ourselves as apart from but integrally part of the Australian environment(s)’ and ‘action and learning were seen as being symbiotic aspects of environmental education in all its stages’ (Fensham, 1987, p. 22). Having a positive future vision and working towards its manifestation through personal action and the encouragement of others were fundamental to Peter’s conception of environmental education.

Peter Fensham was a foundational member of The Force (AKA AAEE!), right about the time that Lucas (George), Luke (Skywalker) and his mob took their X-wing fighters where no X-box could ever go. That futuristic fable was a metaphor for the ‘stories’ that Peter Fensham wanted experienced, not just ‘told to’, Australian communities, pedagogical and all the rest. Skywalker’s lot seemed to survive by a combination of careening around ‘out there’, dogged (or Wookied) persistence, unbelievable good fortune, technological wizz-bangs — and deep ecology-style beliefs in the possibility of justice. Fensham’s crowd — as in AAEE — continues his ‘career-ing’ about the ‘out there’, the possible places of eco-social justice, that might be attained with persistence; an intelligent application of wizz-bangs, i.e. devices are for a purpose, which is not to dominate us!; and, of course, world views that deserve descriptors such as ‘deep ecology’ and, especially in Australia, a ‘fair go’ for all the animate and inanimate forms that conspire in the elegance of Gaia’s passage through the stars. His wisdom and encouragement provided the motivation for

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others to take on education for ecojustice, not just as a ‘friendly idea’, but as a necessity for a whole Earth, for now and for future generation of all species, including humans (Paige et al., 2016, 2019). Peter began his mission cloaked in the mantle of science; his arc took him through the broader-intentioned environmental education towards education for sustainability, what we prefer to identify as education for enhanced eco-social equity. As our writings indicate, we have travelled a similar single-discipline to multi-disciplinary route. And we have been fellow travellers with Lucas — unknown to him! — in our embracing of future studies which became an essential aspect of many courses and encouraged integral thinking towards wholistically sustainable futures (Lloyd, 2001; Lloyd et al., 2011).

Thanks to the inspiration provided by Peter Fensham, and many others, we have pursued critical studies pedagogy, encouraging our co-learners to seek to widen the cracks in established, eco-socially unjust practices so that the light that gets in illuminates pathways to preferred, more eco-socially equitable futures — and excites us towards action-based education, and positive eco-social change. One example of Peter’s generosity was when second author Kathy Paige presented at ASERA in New Zealand in 2005 about the AusAID Project in the Eastern Cape South Africa working with primary school teachers to increase confidence and competence to teach science and mathematics post-apartheid. Peter was in the audience. Two months later, a cheque arrived in her pigeonhole from Peter saying he would like to contribute recent publication royalties to the project. These were gratefully received and contributed to stationery items being distributed to rural schools (Paige et al., 2008).

Some of us are at an age at which we are experiencing — at a rate higher than we had previously known — attendance at funeral celebrations of colleagues who have been family and friends. The arc of each human’s life there becomes more clearly written — from the Earth, to the Earth. Our co-learners have assisted us to come as individuals and professionals to an unassailable and precious closer-ness to the Earth — parent and final place of rest — in educational activities in which we all have felt more ‘at home’ the more we are ‘at home’, in the places of red sand or lush green or blue waters, the ‘magic spots’ (Thanks, Steve Van Matre! (1990)) that are everywhere when we are mindful of the privilege of being networked-to-nature.

‘The Boys from Brazil’ — and other dystopian fictions — have shown the perils of cloning. But just a few Neo-PFs? Surely, that wouldn’t hurt? And if we spread ‘em out strategically in time and space, it might help in that arse-kicking of humanity towards the fabulously possible and eminently preferable futures that Peter and all those inspired by him and his life knew and know are somewhere up ahead, around the bend — on the arc.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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