

TOWARDS AN ECOFEMINIST ETHIC IN EDUCATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

*Por una ética ecofeminista en la educación para hacer
frente a la crisis socioambiental*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to rethink eco-education from an ecofeminist ethical perspective that can respond critically to the current socio-environmental crisis and of overcoming the subordination of certain forms of environmental education to the neoliberal paradigm of sustainable development, reorienting it toward ecosocial justice and degrowth. The methodology employed is hermeneutic and is based on the critical analysis of philosophical, pedagogical, and ecofeminist contributions, particularly those of authors such as Lucie Sauvé, Anne Stephens, Annette Gough, and Lisa Siegel. Among the main findings, the study shows that part of traditional environmental education has lost its emancipatory potential by becoming trapped in technocratic and productivist

logics. In response, the article proposes a degrowth-oriented eco-education centred on an ethics of care, interdependence, reciprocity with nature, and relational autonomy. Furthermore, it puts forward the idea of a fifth stage of ecofeminism, intersectional and intraconnective in character, which grounds a pedagogy of interdependence and a critical and sensitive ecological rationality. As its main conclusion, the article argues that ecofeminist eco-education, grounded in care and socio-environmental justice, can effectively contribute to a civilizational transition toward more just, solidarity-based, and ecologically responsible ways of life.

Keywords: environmental education; feminism; socio-environmental justice; ethics of care; eco-citizenship.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del artículo es repensar la ecoeducación desde una ética ecofeminista que permita responder críticamente a la crisis socioambiental actual y superar la subordinación de cierta educación ambiental al paradigma neoliberal del desarrollo sostenible, orientándola hacia la justicia ecosocial y el decrecimiento. La metodología empleada es hermenéutica y está basada en el análisis crítico de aportaciones filosóficas, pedagógicas y ecofeministas, especialmente de autoras como Lucie Sauvé, Anne Stephens, Annette Gough y Lisa Siegel. Entre los principales resultados, el estudio muestra que parte de la educación ambiental tradicional ha perdido su potencial emancipador al quedar atrapada en lógicas tecnocráticas y productivistas. Frente a ello, se propone una ecoeducación decrecentista centrada en la ética del cuidado, la interdependencia, la reciprocidad con la naturaleza y la autonomía relacional. Asimismo, se plantea la posibilidad de una quinta etapa del ecofeminismo, de carácter interseccional e intraconectivo, que fundamenta una pedagogía de la interdependencia y una racionalidad ecológica crítica y sensible. Como principal conclusión, en el artículo se defiende que una ecoeducación ecofeminista, basada en el cuidado y la justicia socioambiental, puede contribuir de manera efectiva a una transición civilizatoria hacia modos de vida más justos, solidarios y ecológicamente responsables.

Palabras clave: educación ambiental; feminismo; justicia socioambiental; ética del cuidado; ecociudadanía.

1. THE DECENTRISTS' TURN IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: BEYOND NEOLIBERALISM

Environmental education (EE) has emerged from international and national initiatives, although its integration into formal education has been limited by the rigidity of the school system, and has mainly developed in non-formal settings such as NGOs, museums, and natural areas. Since the 1970s, UNESCO has promoted this field in response to growing awareness of resource depletion, establishing objectives relating to awareness, values and skills in the 1975 Belgrade Charter,

and principles such as interdisciplinarity and active learning at the 1977 Tbilisi Conference. These foundations gave rise to a diverse field that has evolved through multiple strands, as noted by Lucie Sauv   (2005), who distinguishes both historical traditions and more recent approaches. This shows that EE has never constituted a homogeneous whole, but rather a dynamic conceptual territory constantly under construction.

However, following the 1992 Rio Declaration and the 1997 Thessaloniki Conference, environmental education was gradually reoriented towards the paradigm of sustainable development, adopting an increasingly market-driven approach. As Jos   Antonio Caride and Pablo   ngel Meira (2018) point out in their analysis of the evolution of ‘environmental education’, this process of institutionalisation marked a shift away from critical environmentalism—which sought to challenge the structural foundations of the socio-economic model—towards environmentalism, centred on adaptation and the technical resolution of problems without challenging the logic of growth. This shift entailed the loss of its critical and emancipatory potential and generated resistance, particularly in Latin America. However, as Caride and Meira (2020) caution, this drift does not exhaust the complexity of the field. EE retains a profoundly political, pedagogical and social foundation which, far from being reduced to instrumental environmentalism, can contribute to an ‘alternative globalisation’ oriented towards socio-environmental justice. From this perspective, the contemporary challenge does not lie “in labelling a form of education, but in transforming all forms of education” (Caride and Meira, 2020, p. 21) to address ecological and civilisational risks.

More recent declarations, such as the 2021 Berlin Declaration, as well as climate change education promoted following the 2015 Paris Agreement and COP26, reinforce participation and awareness, but continue to focus on sustainable development. In this context, EE has been progressively replaced by education for sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals, whose internal tension between economic growth and climate action highlights, as Sauv   (2024) warns, a persistent ideological trap. Underlying this is neoliberal rationality, which has colonised the world of life, naturalised the market and commodified nature, transforming EE into an instrumental tool serving economic interests (Gonz  lez Gaudiano, 2024).

Beyond the complexity and tensions surrounding the EE, discourses questioning the compatibility of economic growth and environmental preservation are gaining ground at the international level. The IPCC reports — including the AR6 Synthesis Report (2023), which warns of increasing impacts and the need for rapid and deep emissions reductions — reinforce the urgency of moving towards scenarios of degrowth, lower consumption and greater equity. Added to this are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Reports, which show stagnation or regression in numerous SDGs and cast doubt on the viability of a growth-based development model. This framework opens up the possibility of freeing environmental

assessment from the developmentalist approach that has dominated international agendas for decades.

Despite this, education systems continue to give limited space to environmental issues, with scant institutional support for teachers. Structural problems persist, such as a lack of training, curricular rigidity and weak interdisciplinarity, which, as González Gaudiano et al. (2020) warn, encourages a 'soft' form of environmentalism centred on individual actions, technological optimism and the downplaying of the ethical and political dimensions of climate change. In response to this, there are calls for an 'emergency curriculum' aimed at training critical eco-citizens.

Within this context, various authors highlight the commitment, creativity and boldness of teachers and actors in non-formal education, particularly NGOs, as well as young people's demand for a more situated and transformative education (Sauvé, 2024; Carvalho et al., 2024). Overall, EE is a field shaped by institutional advances, structural resistance and committed educational practices, which reinforces the need to deepen research and strengthen its critical and emancipatory dimension.

2. THE SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND THE UNSUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL-CAPITALIST MODEL OF PRODUCTION FROM AN ECOFEMINIST ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

The socio-environmental crisis of our time cannot be understood as a mere accumulation of ecological problems, but rather as the outcome of a structurally unsustainable production and development model. This model, with its industrial-capitalist roots, has become entrenched over the last century as the dominant paradigm, articulating a worldview centred on the unlimited exploitation of resources, technological acceleration and boundless economic expansion (Rosa, 2016, 2019). Within this logic, growth is presented as a necessary condition for progress, whilst the ecological, social, and ethical impacts it generates are rendered invisible (Mellor, 2007; Fraser, 2023; Hickel, 2023). This conception has contributed to the disruption of ecosystem balances, the exacerbation of global inequalities, and the commodification of life.

Grounded in an instrumental rationality, this model conceives of nature as an object or commodity, ignoring the interdependent relationships that sustain life (Shiva, 2024). The culture of domination and extractivist logic have created a profound disconnect between humanity and the environment, fuelling fragmentation and ecological indifference (Orr, 1990; Louv, 2005).

The consequences are clear: climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, desertification, and growing social inequality linked to environmental degradation (Shiva, 2024). But beyond the visible symptoms, this is a crisis of meaning, a rupture in the ethical bond between humanity and nature. As various international organisations warn, this climate emergency demands urgent responses from all sectors, including education.

In this regard, from an ecofeminist perspective, this crisis cannot be addressed without questioning the power structures that underpin it. The industrial-capitalist model is not only ecologically unsustainable but also ethically problematic, as it reproduces logics of domination that particularly affect feminised, racialised and impoverished bodies. In response, ecofeminism proposes an ethic of care, reciprocity, and environmental justice as the basis for rebuilding our human-environment interaction (Gaard, 2011, 2015; Puleo, 2011, 2019). Only through an education committed to eco-social justice will it be possible to imagine and build sustainable futures.

3. *ECO-EDUCATION AND ITS DIMENSIONS*

Given the variety of meanings the term ‘environmental education’ has taken on over its more than fifty-year history, drawing Lucie Sauvé (2005, 2017, 2024), we propose using the term ‘eco-education’ in this paper. The first point to make is that eco-education does not aim to solve the problems that humans cause to the environment. This constitutes a reductionist view of the “problem-solving approach” (Sauvé, 2005), which was very much in evidence in UNESCO’s International Environmental Education Programme between 1975 and 1995, and which conceives of the environment as a collection of problems. On the contrary, eco-education focuses on the human-nature relationship, because it understands that this relationship is the crucible of personal development. Indeed, “the environment shapes us, distorts us and transforms us, at least as much as we shape it, distort it and transform it” (Cottreau, 1999, p. 11). It is our bonds with the environment that constitute the fundamental ontogenesis of human beings. Eco-ontogenesis seeks to characterise and differentiate specific periods in terms of the types of relationship with the environment and to associate specific environmental education practices with them (Berryman, 2003).

The ontogenetic dimension of eco-education is closely linked to its ethical and political dimensions. From an eco-educational perspective, one could say that eco-ontogenesis consists of an eco-onto-gen-ethics, that is, an ethics embedded in the development of the bonds of being-in-the-world. Thus, *eco-pedagogy* delves into the close relationship between our human reality and nature and in this way “invites a critical analysis of social dynamics and power relations to denounce alienation and promote emancipation” (Sauvé, 2017, p. 270). *Eco-pedagogy* has a clear component of ethical and political commitment, because it refers to the anchoring of ecological identity and emphasises the proactive nature of commitment. It is therefore not a matter of echoing a pragmatic environmentalism, which in one way or another may end up being swallowed up by an economic, developmentalist, anthropocentric and monocultural rationality that follows a unilateral form of sustainable development. On the contrary, it is about liberating ecology from the framework of biological science and its naturalistic limits, thereby transcending a limited concept of environmental

education and committing to ecological education or eco-education, which makes explicit the relationship that people and societies maintain with the environment, with the living world, in short, with our *oïkos*. It is, therefore, an exploration of the dimension of identity insofar as we are beings-in-the-world, or rather, “beings that form part of the world: the living world in constant transformation” (Sauvé, 2024, p. 114), aware that our ethical, political and, ultimately, human identity is embedded in this bond with nature. For this reason, when we delve deeper into this ecological identity, it becomes difficult—and in a sense arbitrary—to draw a dividing line between ourselves and our surroundings, because we weave a web of inextricable links (Latour, 2021).

In light of this constitutive ecological identity, education for citizenship is an education for *eco-citizenship*, because it involves political, critical and ethical dimensions (Sauvé, 2015, p. 16). It is a matter of moving beyond particularistic moralism and advancing towards a more reflective and substantive ethics, centred on our relationship with the world—both social and ecological. The space we inhabit is our home (*oïkos*), and to the extent that social bonds constitute us as ‘political animals’ (*zoon politikon*), the city (polis) is literally the space inhabited by people, that is, the *oïkos* of the human being.

In Sauvé’s view, in addition to the epistemic, ontogenetic and aesthetic dimensions, education for eco-citizenship must inseparably develop ethical, critical, heuristic and political competences. On the one hand, *ethical competence* enables the formation of judgement through the questioning of norms, values and the common good. “It is not a matter of transmitting an environmental social morality [...] but rather the construction of an environmental ethics through discussions, debates and experimentation” (Sauvé, 2024, pp. 117–118). Ethics is not conceived as a mere theoretical projection of values, but as practical coherence between the values that are professed and the actions that are carried out. It is therefore an act of clarification and discernment (this is the original meaning of the root *krinein* in the term ‘critique’).

Building on this argument, ethical competence leads us to *critical competence*, which involves “the ability to decode power relations and situations of injustice, and a desire to reconstruct socio-ecological realities” (Sauvé, 2017, p. 272). Eco-education not only develops a critique based on social denunciation of the socio-environmental crisis but also constitutes a transformative practice that connects critical awareness with transformative action. Critical capacity from an ethical perspective is both a denunciation and a proposal for improvement; in other words, it is constructive criticism (Gracia Calandín, 2020, pp. 114ff). This is why it is so important that nonconformism does not settle into passive complaining but rather leads to proactive forms of criticism and discernment. To this end, it is essential that criticism be accompanied by creative imagination.

Consequently, thirdly, *heuristic competence* is closely linked to the previous ones and leads to the possibility of imagining and envisioning other possible worlds,

creating real alternatives, resisting conformism and expanding real possibilities. It is essential to move from settling into unproductive complaint to a responsible concern that stimulates the imagination and proposes alternatives.

Finally, political competence consists of the “ability to argue and communicate in the public sphere, to engage in democratic processes, and to deploy appropriate and effective strategies for action” (Sauvé, 2017, p. 273). Political competence is key because eco-citizenship is rooted in a territory, which allows for the development of a “collective territorial responsibility” (a striking example is that of the socio-ecological struggles against extractivism). “The political-pedagogical project of eco-citizenship calls for a committed pedagogy, a pedagogy that fosters engagement” (Sauvé, 2024, p. 122).

Beyond a confrontation between ecology and politics, ecological identity gives rise to a convergence that focuses on politics as the space where personal bonds and human development are forged, and which must therefore integrate the environment. The contradiction arises when politics acts turns its back on and acts against ecology: a part of our identity and our bonds with nature is severed. Conversely, when it responds to nature and the constitutive bonds that we maintain with the environment, politics recognises the ecological identity that constitutes us as human beings. However, the aim is to move beyond particularist and privatised moralism and to recognise a more reflective and substantive level of civic ethics by placing the focus on our relationship with the world—understood in both its social dimension (people) and its ecological dimension (the environment)—and on the projection of that relationship in terms of collective territorial responsibility. In this regard, one might even speak of an ‘ecological democracy’ (Bourg and Whiteside, 2010).

4. ECO-EDUCATION FROM AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Ecofeminism, like ecosocialism or eco-development, is an eco-ethical and eco-political movement that allows for a greater degree of specificity in the development of eco-citizenship. The feminist movement is one of those identified by Sauvé (2005) in his illuminating ‘map of environmental education’. In ecofeminism, the emphasis is placed on the power relations and oppression exerted upon women in certain contexts, and on the need to integrate feminist perspectives and values into modes of governance, production, consumption and social organisation that must also transform relations of domination with the environment (Gough et al., 2024). It highlights a close link between traditional practices of domination over women and those exercised over nature. Ecofeminism critiques the dominant rationalist approach in most environmental theories and values intuitive, affective, symbolic, spiritual and artistic perspectives. From an ethic of care and responsibility, it promotes attention and affectionate commitment towards others and the environment, to a greater extent than other strands of critical theory do (Hatten-Flisher and Martusewicz, 2018).

The term ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974) and has its roots in the activist social movements of the time—particularly anti-nuclear and pacifist movements—and in the growing awareness of sexism and gender blindness present in other environmentalist groups. Ecofeminism emerged as both a political and intellectual movement, in which the union of ecological and feminist ideas challenged gender power structures, social and economic organisations, and scientific paradigms, as well as traditional ways of conceiving the relationship between humans and nature. Although it was criticised in the 1990s for alleged essentialism and ethnocentrism, it has resurfaced in recent years, with renewed interest in the convergence of feminism, social justice and environmentalism (Gaard, 2011; Gough and Whitehouse, 2018; Gough et al., 2024).

Karen J. Warren (2000) defines ecofeminist philosophy as a perspective that employs sex/gender analysis as a starting point for critiquing the “isms of social oppression” (e. g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism and ethnocentrism), and as a stance that “employs ecological and environmental perspectives on the non-human world and the interactions between humans and nature in its theory and practice” (Warren, 2000, p. 43). These interconnected and hierarchical power structures, in the form of patriarchy and capitalism, interact with ecological exploitation to exert dominion over marginalised groups and nature. Ecofeminism constitutes a type of “feminist environmental philosophy” characterised by: (1) exploring the nature of the connections between the unjustified domination of women and nature; (2) critiquing canonical Western philosophical views with a male bias (assumptions, concepts, assertions, distinctions, positions, theories) regarding women and nature; and (3) creating alternatives and solutions to these male-biased views (Warren, 2015).

Within the framework of ecofeminism, we find theoretically significant proposals for early childhood education, such as Forest Schools, nature-based spaces that can challenge hierarchical power systems and foster more inclusive pedagogies (Garden, 2025). Unlike traditional classrooms where the roles of students and teachers are clearly defined and certain gender stereotypes are often reinforced, outdoor schools encourage greater flexibility and interaction, allowing gender roles to be redefined (Garden and Downes, 2024). This proposal highlights the enormous potential of new outdoor learning spaces, as the context in which learning takes place is particularly significant for shaping learning processes (Schwai, 2024). “Creating inclusive and safe spaces is critical to redefining gender norms and fostering a sense of belonging among all participants” (Garden, 2025, p. 5).

However, other proposals for ecofeminist education applied to the university setting can also be found. One example is the development of ecofeminist awareness through ecofeminist pedagogy in literature classes (Wiyatmi et al., 2023).

4.1. *Moving beyond essentialism in the fifth phase of ecofeminism*

Ecofeminism is not a homogeneous movement, but rather a diverse field of thought and action that has evolved in dialogue with various historical, cultural and political contexts. The different strands of ecofeminism share an ethical concern for the sustainability of life, but differ in their philosophical foundations, political strategies and ways of linking the feminine with nature. Some perspectives have been criticised for reproducing essentialism, whilst others have adopted a relational and constructivist approach that challenges traditional dualisms. Understanding these strands allows us to map out the tensions and possibilities of contemporary ecofeminism, particularly in its application to the field of education.

The first phase of ecofeminism is linked to grassroots environmental and feminist activism, particularly in rural and community contexts, where a connection is established between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. In some cases, this link is expressed through a spiritual (Starhawk, 1979) or essentialist (Daly, 1978) approach, which associates the feminine with the natural, reproducing symbolic imaginaries that reinforce the identification of woman with nature. One strand of the movement had insisted that women had an inherent affinity with the natural world (often in relation to child-rearing and care), “thereby homogenising women and reifying restrictive notions of gender as biologically innate and fixed” (Piersol and Timmerman, 2017, p. 11). Ecofeminism was criticised for being essentialist, elitist and ethnocentric, and was “effectively dismissed” (Gaard, 2011, p. 26).

The second stage is characterised by the philosophical development of ecofeminism, with authors such as Karen Warren (1987, 2000), who propose a relational ethics grounded in a critique of ontological and epistemological dualisms –culture/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine– and in the interdependence between human beings and the natural environment. This phase seeks to overcome essentialism through more inclusive and argumentative conceptual frameworks.

The third stage of a constructivist nature, delves deeper into the critique of essentialism and proposes a cultural and historical reading of the relationships between gender and the environment. Val Plumwood (1993, 2002) is a key figure in this phase, questioning the hierarchical dualisms underpinning modern rationality and proposing an ‘ecological rationality’ that recognises interdependence as an ethical and political foundation. This stage incorporates influences from poststructuralist feminism and environmental philosophy and focuses on how the categories of gender and nature are socially constructed within specific historical contexts. The emphasis is no longer on ‘feminine nature’, but on a critique of the structures of thought that legitimise the domination of bodies, territories and knowledge.

The fourth stage advocates for a critical ecofeminism, which broadens this perspective from an intersectional, decolonial and multispecies viewpoint. Authors such as Alicia Puleo (2011, 2019), Greta Gaard (2011), Noël Sturgeon (2009) and Barbara Noske (1989) articulate approaches that link queer feminism, environmental justice, animal liberation and a critique of anthropocentrism. This phase is characterised by a theoretical openness towards dissident ecologies, transcorporeality and radical interdependence, challenging the hegemonies of neoliberalism, patriarchy and colonialism. Ecofeminism ceases to be a homogeneous current and becomes a plural and dynamic space, where multiple voices, territories and struggles converge.

Following Lisa Siegel (2024), this evolution has given rise to a fifth stage of ecofeminism, characterised by an expanded intersectionality that integrates the dimensions of gender, species, ethnicity, class, territory and affectivity. This stage proposes a situated praxis, which recognises shared vulnerability and the need to build alliances between human and non-human liberation movements. This new narrative rejects the essentialist vision of early ecofeminism and posits that subjects are “epistemologically, ontologically and ethically entangled with each other and with the matter of the earth” (Davies, 2021, p. 132; cited in Siegel, 2024, p. 339). Inspired by Karen Barad’s (2007) concept of ‘intra-action’, Siegel introduces the term ‘intraconnectivism’ to describe a paradigm that recognises that individuals and things do not exist independently but emerge through their relationships. As the author states, “absolutely everything is entangled”; “intraconnectivism is trans-disciplinary, trans-temporal, and acknowledging of all ethical-onto-epistemic understandings of interconnectedness” (Siegel, 2024, p. 329). Contemporary ecofeminism thus emerges as a critical tool for addressing the eco-social crisis from profoundly transformative ethical, political and pedagogical perspectives.

Siegel acknowledges that this fifth stage represents an aspirational narrative, yet one that is necessary to confront the structural violence of the present and build an education system committed to social and ecological justice. In her words:

Ecofeminist thinking and action continue to support the fight for systemic change (Gough and Whitehouse, 2021) and as such, will always be a crucial theoretical framework to continue to work through and support. Moving towards that aspirational story, however, requires additional ways of thinking, being, and acting— and that is exactly what intraconnectivism, and intraconnective education, can offer not only the field of environmental education but all fields of education that are grounded in social and ecological justice (Siegel, 2024, p. 340).

Intraconnectivism is an emerging educational approach that promotes a holistic view of learning, based on the deep connection between the cognitive, emotional, physical, ethical and spiritual dimensions of the individual. Unlike connectivism – which focuses on external information networks and digital learning– intraconnectivism

proposes a pedagogy of inner life, consciousness and personal transformation. This perspective recognises that knowledge is not merely the accumulation of data, but rather a relational and meaningful experience that connects the individual with themselves, with others and with their environment.

Intraconnective education is intertwined with approaches such as ecofeminism, the pedagogy of care, decolonial thought and ecological ethics, by proposing an education geared towards cultivating a critical, sensitive and life-committed consciousness (Siegel, 2024). Within this framework, learning does not merely mean accumulating knowledge, but also *being, feeling* and *coexisting*.

This proposal stands apart from an education for or about the environment, such as that advocated by UNESCO (1977), which is geared towards promoting sustainable learning without integrating the ethical, relational and transformative dimensions demanded by the current ecological crisis. In contrast to this limiting form of environmental education, intraconnective education, or 'education as environment', proposes redirecting our focus towards a pedagogy that recognises the co-belonging and interdependence of all living beings. It also draws on the ancestral knowledge of indigenous peoples, who have long understood that "we are part of, not separate from, the environment" (Tapia González, 2018). Building on this foundation, intraconnective education seeks to overcome the dualisms (human/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine) that structure modern Western culture and to propose a more inclusive, equitable and relational form of education, sensitive to differences and to social and ecological justice. Finally, this proposal is linked to the theoretical framework of Macy and Brown (2014), who distinguish three dimensions of ecological change: immediate actions to halt environmental damage, structural transformations of social systems, and shifts in consciousness and values. Intraconnective education aims to integrate these three dimensions, offering a pedagogy that is more conscious, cooperative and in balance with the Earth.

From this perspective, possibilities open up for developing pedagogical approaches that recognise eco-dependence, interdependence, shared vulnerability and the urgency of nurturing individuals capable of caring for and preserving life through an ethical, critical and transformative consciousness.

4.2. *The principles of ecofeminist ethics as pillars of eco-education: care, interdependence and socio-environmental justice*

Anne Stephens (2013) identifies several fundamental principles that underpin ecofeminist ethics. These principles guide theoretical reflection and provide practical frameworks for educational, political and community action.

Care as a central value: In contrast to the logic of domination, ecofeminism champions care as an ethical and political principle. This care is not limited to the domestic or private sphere, but extends to ecosystems, interpersonal

relationships and multi-species communities. To care is to resist structural violence and affirm life. Thus, care is conceived not only as an affective practice, but as a political stance that recognises shared vulnerability as the basis of a committed, sensitive and transformative rationality (Gracia Calandín, 2023). For this reason, we must proceed with care—never has this been more apt—for this is not a matter of altruism but of justice. It is worth recalling, with Herta Nagl-Docekal (1994), that care, properly understood, not only does not negate the cared-for, but establishes a relationship that transcends domination and avoids paternalism, reinforcing the autonomy of the person being cared for. Not an individualistic autonomy, but a relational and even eco-social one (Pulkki and Ketto, 2022). Care in ecofeminism is a demand for justice that removes the blindfold to see the needs of every being, extending even to those beings that are not human, to nature as a whole.

Secondly, *the interdependence between human beings and nature*: Ecofeminism challenges the idea of individual autonomy as an absolute ideal. Instead, it proposes a relational view of the subject, which acknowledges their vulnerability and their dependence on ecological, social and affective networks. This interdependence forms the basis for an ethics that promotes cooperation and shared responsibility. Interdependence rejects the notion of the human being as an independent subject and proposes a relational view, in line with ecofeminist criticism of the model of instrumental rationality that has separated humanity from nature. It is within the framework of this interdependence that we must understand the ecofeminist critique of various forms of hierarchical dualisms—culture/nature, male/female, rational/emotional. This framework has served to justify the subordination of the natural and the feminine and must be dismantled in order to build an inclusive and non-hierarchical ethics.

This second principle is also crucial for eco-education because it once again highlights the constitutive identity link that nature represents for human beings. In this regard, the cultivation of these constitutive links with nature has a very positive effect and is key to the formation of children's identities (Gutiérrez-Pérez et al., 2024). For their part, Adams and Beauchamps (2021) highlight the opportunity offered by natural spaces to engage in reflection and introspection, emphasising the liberating potential of 'biophilic experiences' that enhance the perception of nature and self-knowledge. This interdependence between people and nature is evident in the influence that nature exerts on educational contexts, shaping children's values, behaviour, and the development of gender identity (Mycok, 2018; Garden, 2025).

The third pillar of ecofeminist ethics is *socio-environmental justice*, understood as the redistribution of ecological impacts and the recognition of historically silenced voices. Ecofeminism links environmental and social justice, recognising that ecological damage disproportionately affects women, indigenous peoples,

impoverished communities and other marginalised groups. It therefore demands recognition that the impacts of climate change are not distributed equitably, affecting in particular those communities that are least responsible for causing it in particular.

These principles shape an ethics that is not limited to denunciation but proposes alternative ways of relating to the world. An ethics built from the margins, from vulnerable bodies, from the everyday practices of resistance and care. In the field of education, these principles can guide the development of pedagogies that are sensitive to human and non-human suffering and committed to social and ecological transformation. Thus, incorporating these values into education and turning them into sustainable habits involves shaping individuals capable of ethical compassion, solidarity-based responsibility and transformative action, committed to a relational and eco-social ethic (Suárez Montoya et al., 2024).

By placing care, interdependence and environmental justice at its core, ecofeminist ethics challenges not only hegemonic models of development, but also the educational structures that perpetuate them. In this regard, it is worth recalling what David Orr warned several decades ago: “the ecological crisis is a crisis of education, not in education, and minor adjustments will not solve the problem” (Orr, 1994, p. 8). We must therefore bear in mind that many of today’s ecological problems have been caused by highly educated people following patterns that have subordinated eco-ethics to technology and production. This reveals that technical knowledge, divorced from an ethical conscience, can prove profoundly destructive. See Table 1, which graphically presents the dimensions, principles, and competencies of ecofeminist eco-education.

TABLE 1
DIMENSIONS, PRINCIPLES AND COMPETENCIES OF ECOFEMINIST ECO-EDUCATION

Dimension	Ecofeminist principle	Eco-educational competence
Eco-onto-genetics	Ecological Identity, vulnerability	Relational Ethics, vital coherence
Ethics	Care, relational autonomy	Solidarity-based responsibility
Politics/Eco-citizenship	Eco-social justice	Participation
Aesthetics/Affect	Bodily awareness	Heuristics, imagination
Ecofeminist (cross-cutting)	Interdependence	Critical and transformative
Intraconnective	Co-emergence	Relational ecological consciousness
Degrowth	Sustainability	Eco-social habits

4.3. *Towards an education based on a clear-sighted, environmentally conscious anthropocentrism that fosters eco-social autonomy*

In the field of environmental ethics, anthropocentrism and biocentrism represent two opposing moral approaches to the value of non-human nature. Strong anthropocentrism holds that only human beings have moral significance, whilst strong biocentrism extends this consideration to all living beings. Between these two extremes lies a range of ethical positions, such as animalism and sentientism, which recognise the value of non-human animals, particularly those capable of experiencing pleasure or suffering. Individualistic biocentrism assigns value to each living being as an individual, whilst holistic biocentrism broadens this perspective to include species, ecosystems or biological communities, proposing a more inclusive ethic.

Within this framework, the category of ‘wise anthropocentrism’ –a variation of weak anthropocentrism– proposed by Martín Sosa (1997), affirms humanity’s complicity with the rest of nature, with the aim of curbing growth and learning to live differently. In the author’s own words: “It is necessary to adopt the perspective of a wiser anthropocentrism, which can give way to a ‘life-centred ethics’, an alternative to ‘ethics centred exclusively on the human’” (Martín Sosa, 1997, p. 124).

The contemporary socio-environmental crisis demands a re-examination of the place humans occupy in relation to non-human nature. In the face of dominant anthropocentrism –which has legitimised extractive practices, power relations and an instrumental rationality– there is a growing need to construct a lucid anthropocentrism: a perspective that recognises human agency without detaching it from ecological interdependence. This approach involves assuming the ethical responsibility of care, regeneration and respect for living processes, integrating diverse forms of knowledge and pedagogies sensitive to the territory.

In this vein, the proposal for Eco-Rational Education (Thornton, 2023) is particularly relevant. This approach advocates a pedagogy of lucidity that seeks to disrupt the colonial structures and Eurocentric discourses that have dominated educational theory and practice. Through a critical and territory-sensitive EE, it proposes to reconstruct students’ experience through dialogue with multiple knowledge systems, including indigenous and ecofeminist knowledge. This pedagogy recognises the Earth as a teacher and promotes a profound reflection on the relationship between individuals and their environment, paving the way for an ecological rationality that challenges dominant anthropocentrism and advocates for eco-social justice. By situating learning in dialogue with the territory and with multiple systems of knowledge, it enables students to reflect critically on their connection with the more-than-human world and to move towards a rationality that directs human agency towards care, regeneration and shared responsibility in building sustainable futures.

From a critical ecofeminist perspective, environmental degradation represents not only an ecological crisis, but also a profound educational challenge. Addressing it requires a radical transformation in ‘more-than-human relations’, that is, those

that link human beings with the whole range of living entities and ecosystems that cohabit the planet. Throughout history, education has contributed to reproducing socio-ecological waste by legitimising hierarchies among terrestrial beings, rendering invisible the bodily, affective and ethical bonds between humans and non-humans. Within this framework, Hyena Kim (2023) proposes a more-than-human education conceived as a trans-species responsibility, embodied in forms of sensory kinship with the world.

This proposal, which intertwines ecofeminism with other critical approaches, invites us to rethink human autonomy from a relational and situated perspective, recognising that our way of inhabiting the planet is interwoven with bonds to other living beings and with the persistent traces of environmental degradation. In this context, so-called ‘waste-bodies’ –those marginalised or treated as waste by social and ecological systems– reveal a structural crisis in the ways in which we reproduce and sustain life. Faced with this rupture, the pedagogy of the ecotone emerges: an education situated on the margins, which values the richness of the liminal and promotes more-than-human forms of coexistence based on care, interdependence and eco-social justice (Kim, 2023).

In contrast to the ideal of a competitive society that “presupposes individual autonomy and the need to defend oneself” (Pulkki and Keto, 2022, p. 75), eco-social autonomy promotes social interaction based on cooperation, the recognition of shared vulnerability, and ecological responsibility. This form of autonomy draws on ecofeminist epistemologies, which challenge the logic of domination that permeates both gender relations and the relationship between humans and nature. Eco-social autonomy does not mean that we should discard rational self-control but rather expand the concept of autonomy to include multi-species eco-social communities, so that we may also take responsibility for our actions within these environments (Pulkki et al., 2020). Thus, moving towards eco-social autonomy in education involves transforming educational ideals through an ethic of care, interdependence and sustainability, in dialogue with situated knowledge and the experiences of the vulnerable bodies that inhabit the world.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Environmental education conceived as a means of raising awareness of planetary boundaries was initially subsumed within the discourses of sustainable development and neoliberalism, being reduced to a functional tool for economic growth. In response to this, a degrowth-oriented, ethical shift is proposed to restore education’s critical and emancipatory potential. This shift recognises that the ecological crisis is not merely environmental, but civilisational, and demands a profound change in the ways we think, produce, live and educate. EE cannot be limited to the transmission of technical knowledge or individual ecological behaviours; it must foster a cultural transformation that challenges productivist rationality and promotes sustainable,

supportive communities that are conscious of their interdependence with life; it must become an eco-education encompassing all its dimensions and competencies, as Lucie Sauvé points out.

Within this framework, eco-education from an ecofeminist perspective emerges as an integrative approach that goes beyond instrumental sustainability and is oriented towards eco-social justice. This eco-educational approach insists that our relationship with the environment is not merely an object of knowledge, but the ontological, ethical and political foundation of human existence. Educating ecologically involves rebuilding the bonds of reciprocity between human beings and nature, restoring the affective, ethical and responsible dimension of that relationship. From this perspective, learning is understood as an experience of connection and shared responsibility with the world, where the ethics of care, interdependence and socio-environmental justice constitute its fundamental pillars.

Ecofeminism, in particular, offers an ethical and political framework capable of articulating a critique of patriarchal, capitalist and colonial domination while also proposing for a pedagogy of care and of relational and eco-social autonomy. Its evolution towards a fifth, intersectional and intraconnective stage allows us to conceive of an education that recognises the shared vulnerability and co-emergence of all living beings. This education does not separate reason and emotion, knowledge and life, but rather cultivates ecological lucidity and affective commitment as the foundations of a new rationality: ecological, critical and based on solidarity.

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