PARISS GARRAMONE

6. "DIGGING WHERE WE STAND"

Unearthing Race, Place and Sustainability in Ontario

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is situated in the current debate surrounding the role of education in sustainability. If we are to use education as a meaningful and effective tool to stop and reverse the trend of environmental degradation, all of our research and pedagogical efforts need to begin with an understanding of sustainability that encompasses restructuring social, physical and economic relationships in more equitable ways (Bell, 2002; Sandilands, 2001). My research examines the curricular and pedagogical aspects of sustainability education for teacher candidates. In particular, this chapter focuses on examining the ways critical place-based pedagogy, as developed by David Gruenewald (2003) for its uses in sustainability, can develop dialogues of empire and a focus on *affect* in order to fully engage with the more than human (Haraway, 1991). I begin by investigating an undergraduate university course I taught, where pre-service teacher candidates used a local eco-racial controversy to deepen their understanding of social justice, eco-racism and globalization in order to understand the complexities of sustainability. Sustainability education seeks to promote strong communities, social equity, and engaged citizenry through investigative, inquiry-based educational processes that are tantamount to student understanding and motivation (Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008). In this project, I examine how my class of pre-service teachers engaged with archival material (a documentary film, writings, photographs and digital stories) from the Black Settler community on the Old Durham Road, in Southern Ontario. The eco-racial controversy that was "unearthed" was the intentional destruction of the only Black Settler cemetery in the area during the 1940s and 1950s and the contested (partial) recovery of that cemetery that began in the late 1990s. Through the students' narratives, and classroom observation, I examine how the students engaged with issues of race, colonization, and social and environmental justice, and linked this to their ideas about sustainability. I demonstrate how critical place-based pedagogy was used by students to design and implement their own lesson plan projects. What this research revealed was the important role of *affect* in the students' narratives and the class dialogues, which I argue must be the central focus of critical place-based pedagogy. In particular, I demonstrate how *affect* was engaged with through the use of writing

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notebooks and how the use of creative approaches to writing (writing from the non-human perspective) developed a diffractive writing practice that performed critical place-based pedagogy in our post-human times.

PERSPECTIVES

The Sustainability Report (2004), an initiative of the York Centre for Applied Sustainability, describes sustainability as, "living and working in ways that meet and integrate existing environmental, economic and social needs without compromising the well-being of future generations." Yet sustainability has most often been centred in science-based environmental education, both formally in school programming and in non-formal education such as adventure outings (Orr, 1992). Many environmental education programs in the past did not adequately address community development, social justice and citizenship in connection with sustainability. The sustainability crisis is larger than *educating for* environmentally sustainable practices (Orr, 1992), which assumes that given enough information individuals will make rational decisions to act ethically. Implicit in these pedagogies is the privileging of objective, rational, scientific knowledge at the exclusion of people's lived experience as a way of knowing and being (Bowers, 1996; Gough, 1999; Haraway, 1991).

By framing sustainability as "the fit between humanity and its habitat," Orr (1992, p. 83) suggests that ecological literacy is a way for education to address the dilemmas of sustainability. The importance of personal experience with the environment is central to David Orr's *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to the Postmodern World* (1992). For Orr, the intimate connections individuals have to the environment can lead to sustainable ways of interacting in the world that work towards equity and peace. He illustrates how autobiographical writings, such as Thoreau's *Walden* and Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, demonstrate a sense of connectedness and the pedagogy of place (Orr, 1992, p. 126). This connectedness that Orr describes involves rethinking the role of education. In particular, he sees the disconnectedness of the curriculum as problematic and suggests integrated learning as necessary for the connectedness he is calling for.

Since Orr's groundbreaking work in the early 1990s, sustainability education (SD), also known as Education for a Sustainable Future (ESF) has advocated a process of lifelong learning (Gough, Walker, & Scott, 2001) that expands the idea of curriculum as it draws on everyday activities and local sites as "places of learning" (Ellsworth, 2005; Gruenewald, 2003; Greenwood, 2010). In particular, Orr's (1992) call for rethinking the curriculum has been addressed by the work of critical pedagogues who have expanded and theorized transdisciplinarity (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004; Mitchell, 2010). As Giroux and Searls Giroux state, "transdisciplinary work provides a rationale for challenging how knowledge has been historically produced, hierarchically ordered, and used within disciplines to sanction particular forms of authority and exclusion" (p. 102). The pedagogical approach I have taken

for my education course for pre-service teachers is focused on challenging the ways that disciplinary thinking has disconnected, and limited the questions we ask about sustainability by marginalizing different types of knowledge making. Curriculum theorist Grumet (1995) illustrates that *affect*, our feelings, memories and desires are left out of most of our teaching about the environment when we only give space to scientific knowledge and facts. By engaging a transdisciplinary approach for this course my hope is to encourage "teachers and students to raise new questions and develop models of analysis outside the officially sanctioned boundaries of knowledge and the established disciplines that control them" (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004, p. 102). As Canadian geographer, John Robinson (2008) notes, it is not only the working within and between disciplines that is complicated for sustainability research and education, but also the important goal of linking this work to the academy with real-world lived experiences. A transdisciplinary approach stresses "the relational nature of knowledge," (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004) and by using this approach to study a local eco-racial conflict, my hope was to allow different questions to be asked in order to bring the creation of identities into discussions of the environment. "Transdisciplinary approaches stress both historical relations and broader social formations, while remaining attentive to new linkages, meanings, and possibilities" (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004, p. 102). As a result, sustainability education can focus on how to build more equitable relationships through valuing different ways of knowing the world, which have been marginalized.

There are three major themes emerging from literature on sustainability education: focusing on developing effective ways to include social, environmental, and economic balance; questioning how to move beyond the classroom for community buy-in and collaboration in order to make permanent social change; and using constructivist, problem-posing, and critical consciousness raising education to enable students to become engaged citizens capable of achieving social change in their communities (Hill, 2009; McKeown, 2002; Nolet, 2009; Orr, 2004). This has translated into a focus in sustainability education on social equity and the discussion of topics such as racism and resource distribution, with a community or local dimension (Hill, 2009; McKeown, 2002). The emphasis on local communities is for students to become actively involved in efforts to improve their surroundings, and learn from their community members and leaders (McKeown, 2002). Sustainability literacy is articulated as the "ability and disposition to engage in thinking, problemsolving, decision-making, and actions associated with sustainability" (Nolet, 2009, p. 421). While issues such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age have been traditionally left out of sustainability and environmental education (Hart, Jickling, & Kool, 1999; Russell, Sarick, & Kennelly, 2002) new approaches, such as place-based pedagogy by David Greenwood (formerly Grunewald), have focused on incorporating critical theory through the use of critical pedagogy. Grunewald (2003) argues that by developing a critical pedagogy of place, environmental educators bring together eco-justice

tenets with those of critical theory. Critical pedagogy is a method to incorporate multiple histories (dominant and marginalized) and the *intra*-relatedness of humans with the more than human world. For Greenwood, a critical pedagogy of place begins with the work of Paulo Freire (1970/2010), who stresses problem posing, inquiry based approaches to learning versus the traditional "banking model" of education. Greenwood also acknowledges that, "people must be challenged to reflect on their own concrete situationality in a way that explores the complex interrelationships between cultural and ecological environments" (Freire, 2010, p. 6) He draws on the ways critical pedagogues engage with reading the world, maintaining that "the 'texts' students and teachers should 'decode' are the images of their own concrete, situated experiences with the world" (Freire, 2010, p. 5). Greenwood's focus on texts is broad enough to include experiences both in and out of the classroom.

From this, critical place-based pedagogy develops two important objectives, "decolonization" and "reinhabitation," which are based on challenging ecological racism, changing the ways we interact with the environment, and supporting different cultural ways of engaging with the environment (Furman & Grunewald, 2004). These objectives are engaged through critical pedagogy and are brought together with the eco-justice tenets advocated by Bowers (2001) to form an approach to place that is about connections to each other and the world around us. The tenets of eco-justice include challenging ecological racism, changing the ways we interact with the environment, and supporting different cultural ways of engaging with the environment. Many scholars have identified an individual's own lived experience – "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1991) – as a starting point to facilitate this dialogue (Ellsworth, 1989) or complicated conversation across difference (Pinar et al., 1995).

This project rethinks environmental education in order for it to more fully engage students in a dialogue that works to restructure our relationships with each other and the places in which we live. Invisible and erased histories play an important role in Canada's history and geography. The Black geographies in Canada are narratives of resilience and erasure that are at once constructions of the past and present (McKittrick, 2002). The aforementioned eco-racial conflicts in Nova Scotia and Ontario illustrate place as a process and not simply a location that is experienced and understood differently (Gregory, 1994; Massey, 1994; McKittrick, 2002).

The invisibility of "white socio spacial epistemologies" has become so normalized within environmental education that when environmental knowledge is shown to be racialized it is often resisted, seen as difficult and shocking or surprising (Farr, 2004; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Yancy, 2004). The resilience of the narratives of erasure and the power that they have to interrupt the dominant nationalizing narratives must be included in our teaching about sustainability as they link globalization and the history of colonization to the local. Current scholarship in curriculum theory argues that curriculum is a process of negotiating narratives which opens spaces for the working through of these contingent narratives of the self (Grumet, 1998;

Miller, 2004; Pinar, 2004). Phillip Payne (2000) develops the concept of ecological identity and how bodies, as sites of meaning, need to be the focus of environmental education. Ecological identity is how individuals relate to the more than human world and this cannot be separated from their embodied experiences of race, gender, sexual orientation, ability and class (Payne, 2001). The importance of an ongoing dialogue that reveals how Black geographies and histories are a process and not historic objects to be exoticized and fetishized must be included in environmental education that works for social justice.

The eco-racial conflicts of Africville in Nova Scotia, the reclaimed Black Settler cemetery in Priceville, Ontario, and the controversy over the attempted renaming of "Negro Creek Road" in Grey County, Ontario, all illustrate "the material places of inclusion and exclusion" and these act as "evidence of what is beneath and beyond the landscape" (McKittrick, 2002, p. 29). However, as McKitterick (2002) further states, Black geographies in Canada are not "simply archival pinpoints on a map," place making is a relational process that is multi-vocal and goes beyond geographic boundaries (p. 30). Environmental education can fail to allow students to examine the personal experiences of place-making and how historical distinctions of imperial power continue to inscribe their bodies and lives (Willinsky, 1998). This project addresses the importance of students' own experiences and draws together environmental education, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies with critical whiteness studies and critical race theory.

By studying how my class utilized a local eco-racial controversy, I explore how issues of empire and affect are engaged. From my study I make suggestions for ways to expand critical place-based pedagogy that take into consideration the lived experience of students and the ways that they use local history and controversy to make sense of sustainability issues.

MODES OF INQUIRY

To address my concerns regarding theory and practice, my research asks: How is sustainability taken up by teacher candidates through a local eco-racial controversy? Of particular importance, I also pose this question: What kinds of experiences are needed for people to learn how to perceive, critically analyze, and act on their human and non-human environments and relationships? I am interested in how teacher candidates develop an understanding of sustainability from their environmental education courses that include critical Black Canadian geographies and histories. With this project I am interested in developing both curricular and pedagogical insights from the learning experiences of these students who engage with the material culture of Black history in Ontario as part of place-based environmental education.

In particular, my work looks at teacher candidates, and focuses on how these would-be teachers come to understand sustainability through the local landscape. According to Grunewald, Koppelman, and Elam (2007) place-based pedagogy

"uses the local environment as a context or 'text' to prompt direct experience, inquiry, knowledge and skill development" (p. 234). During my course I begin by problematizing education and include working with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970/2010). With this project I am interested in developing both curricular and pedagogical insights from the experiences of teacher candidates who are faced with the task of implementing the new Environmental Education guidelines across the curriculum.

By using ethnographic research and narrative inquiry to study students in an undergraduate university course of pre-service teacher candidates, I was able to examine how these students engaged with a local eco-racial controversy. In addition, by studying the use of this local event/history, I was able to investigate how an inquiry-based process, often deemed integral to sustainability education, works in terms of students' learning. I explore how students' ideas of sustainability changed throughout the course through a writer's notebook. I also examine students' narratives on their use of archival material (a documentary film, writings, photographs, and digital stories) from the Black Settler community on the Old Durham Road, in Southern Ontario. Through students' narratives and classroom observation, I examine how the students engaged with issues of race, colonization, and social and environmental justice and linked this to their ideas about sustainability. From the students' narratives I examine the aspects of critical place-based pedagogy used by students to design and implement their own lesson plan projects. This research also revealed what was left out of critical place-based pedagogies.

Objects

The data that I collected is in the form of students' written narratives and ethnographic observations. I also draw on the archival materials used by the students, which includes the documentary film *Speakers For The Dead* (Starr, Holness, & Sutherland, 1999), the article "Dig Where You Stand" (Norquay, 2002), photographs, maps, and the digital stories on "Breaking the Chains: Presenting a New Narrative for Canada's Role in the Underground Railroad" (Harriet Tubman Institute, 2010). In particular, I focus on examining students' writing notebooks and the creative writing done by students from the perspective of animals and plants.

I began this examination by drawing out themes through coding the student's written reflections with NVivo. Drawing on my work with arts-based or arts-informed inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2001), poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997), and my experience with ethnographic interviews, I also realized that I needed to be cautious about turning the written responses into "data" that removes the words from the context of a given student's response. What these written responses revealed were emotional engagement with the complex material, and an important goal was to focus on the overall tone and emotional response being developed by the student. Coupling both coding and poetic transcription allowed multiple loci of connection to be made linking many of the students' responses.

RESULTS

From my examination of students' narratives, many stated how they had never thought about the ways race and the environment were linked. As part of their narrative reflections one student said:

> The questions these materials raise is how do we know what the real histories are? So much of the Eurocentric mentalities have distorted the history of the Black Settlers and exaggerated an entitlement to the core of settlement histories. Although, we have managed to unearth the histories of the Black Settlers of some areas like Priceville, how many more histories are still and may always be erased from historical records? It puts our collective history into a more accurate perspective when we include it in Environmental Education.

While these students were very insightful about both of these texts, they also recognized the limitations of the current Ontario curriculum. As one student notes:

> We know, however, from the breaking the chains website and Norquay's "Dig Where You Stand" that Black people were a part of Canadian history and played a role in developing this nation. These two sources aim to uncover those untold, misinterpreted stories. The difficulty here, which is one shared by other environmentally focused curriculum, is that these stories do not feature a great deal in the general curriculum; often only as a themed month and only in schools with a majority of Black students.

An important finding was the linkage of the personal for synthesis of this material. Another student wrote:

> I will begin, just as I began an earlier reflection, by saying that I have had very little education of any kind regarding the presence and experiences of Black Settlers in Canada. The material presented in this course including Naomi Norquay's "Dig Where You Stand": Challenging the Myth of the "White Pioneer" as well as the film "Speakers for the Dead" served, sadly, as an introduction to this poorly documented part of Canadian history. The first thing I learned from this material is how little I know.

They commented that by thinking about the role colonization has played, they were able to see the global linkages that create and maintain our environmental crisis. In addition, many of the students' narratives focused on the emotions they felt and their knowledge that social change only happens if people feel personal responsibility. As one student wrote:

> In the film, "Speakers for the Dead", a gentleman says something to the effect of not wanting to discuss the topic of the cemetery because it will bring bad things to the surface. While the language used is very simple, the idea is very complicated and interwoven into the fabric of society. It continues to echo the notion of burying the parts of history, which will potentially upset, incriminate,

> or enrage citizens. However, aren't these emotional contributions necessary in creating social change? How can we stop burying them?

This attention to affect and the role of emotion in environmental education is a key finding and one of the ways that I see the use of local eco-controversies as a crucial addition to sustainability education.

One of the most striking results from this research can be seen in how a group of seven students created and preformed an in-class activity, where these students developed narratives for human inhabitants (past and present) and the non-human inhabitants of the Black cemetery in Priceville. This group of students began with the performance and then followed up with a discussion of the difficulties of "speaking for" the inhabitants and they made it clear that their activity was a creative exploration that was "incredibly complex, and really emotional." What this project revealed was a deep emotional connection that these students engaged in by asking "what if" – which had been a guiding question throughout the course. These students also revealed the highly complex nature of imagining "into" another's (both human and non-human) experience and that they found using this type of artistic or creative expression to be the best way they could find to explore and communicate what they were feeling.

One student expressed how being engaged in this performance art had allowed him to think much more deeply about his connections to his own history. As this student states:

> Emotions do have a place in environmental education. The empathy that humans spread to "greater-than-human" beings, must also be extended to other humans if we are to begin to dismantle the terrifying an ongoing social issues related to environmental racism.

DISCUSSION

The students' narratives and class discussions indicated the important role of empire in their understanding of sustainability. David Greenwood (2010) has extended his work on critical place-based pedagogy with his article "Nature, Empire and Paradox in Environmental Education." Through this article he argues that empire, as the organization of power, must be deconstructed within practices of critical place-based pedagogies. Greenwood (2010) urges sustainability and environmental educators to "face up to the eco- and genocidal politics of empire, politics we're all complicit with everyday in our cosmopolitan superprivilege. We need to embrace paradox because as heady academics and well-meaning activists, we can easily forget the gift of our own embodied and earthy existence" (p. 10). This paradox, while difficult to discuss because, as Greenwood (2010) points out, we are all implicated in continuing inequitable power relations, is the important linkage of local to global and past to present in teaching about sustainability. As he further states, "nature and empire

are two poles on a continuum that shape the cultural and ecological contexts of life and learning" (p. 10). Greenwood's attention to this continuum of nature and empire signals to me the type of *intra-action* Karen Barad and other critical feminist technoscience scholars and new material feminists, such as Haraway (1991), and Hayles (1999) have developed as posthumanist theory.

The results of this research make the case that sustainability research has much to draw on from the work of new materialist feminists, whose work has grown out of a post-structuralist feminist focus on representation, language, and social constructionist perspectives to a concentration on *affect* and the performance of "material discursive" practices; that is, how bodies and natures are co-constitutive, or how nature and culture *intra-act* in and through each other as active agents (Barad, 2003). By examining my students' narratives we can see how central the concept of linked. The history of colonization and its continued force on bodies and nature, or how bodies and nature are co-constitutive through material discourses is one key aspect that sustainability education can draw from the work of new material feminists.

In terms of affect Madeleine Grumet (1995), in her essay "The Curriculum: What Are the Basics and Are We Teaching Them?" argues that what becomes ignored in the pursuit of the basics in education, such as scientific facts about nature, are feelings, relations, and memories – affect. Through her discussion of teaching seventh graders about black holes, Grumet illustrates how the frightening aspects of nature are ignored and there is never room in the class for how a student feels about black holes and the relation they make with representations of nature that show destruction and horror. As Grumet (1995) suggests, giving students more scientific facts about nature will not address what is left out of our teaching about the environment – our feelings, our memories, and our desires. From my findings, I argue that *affect* must be a focal point within critical place-based pedagogy. In particular, what the students' narratives demonstrate is how *affect* can be engaged with through narrative reflections. Furthermore, the use of creative approaches to writing (writing from the perspective of the non-human) allowed students to develop a diffractive writing practice that performed critical place-based pedagogy and enabled students to engage with their emotional response to curricular objects encountered in the course.

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