

TROUBLING MONO-NATURALISM IN PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

“DE-COMPOSING” NATURALNESS AND THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLING



Critical Pedagogies
 “The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (hooks 1994)
 The traditions of Freire, hooks, many Black liberationists and other pedagogues centers the imperative that students be critical of hegemonic systems of power.



Environmental Pedagogies

Center nature or the local as a pushback against globalization and ecological degradation. Emphasize fostering stewardship, importance of being outdoors, and cultivating a sense of wonder. Often focused on the out-of-doors: gardens, wilderness, ecology, and “dirt-nature,” but can miss opportunities to address social inequities. Among many approaches, environmental justice is beginning to be centered more.



“Neoliberalism is a particular, historically-generated state strategy to manage the structural crisis of capitalism and provide new opportunities for capital accumulation.” (Lipman 2011)

Neoliberal Ideology in Education
 “[E]ducation policies are both embedded in a neoliberal social imaginary and are a means to reshape social relations and social identities” (Lipman 2011)
 Neoliberalism is manifest in educational reforms as market-based principles of *standardization, high-stakes testing, accountability, globalized competition.*

How does place-based education (PBE) function in relation to neoliberal forces in education? To what extent can PBE be a tool for pursuing radical changes toward social-environmental justice?

Situated in Portland-area public schools embracing alternative teaching methods
NAYA Early College Academy

- Alternative high school in Portland Public School District
- Relational worldview model
- Trauma-informed learning

Bolton Primary School

- Standard public pre-K-5 in West Linn/Wilsonville School District
- Place-based education focus
- Increasing use of garden and outdoors

Bolton’s PBE and NAYA’s community oriented, culturally rooted pedagogy make distinct claims to *place* within Portland, as they serve very different student populations. These divergences may illustrate the many ways of constituting place in pedagogy and teaching for radical change.

Critical Pedagogy of Place (CPP)

“Emphasizes the spatial aspects of place,” and seeks the objectives of **decolonization + reinhabitation.** To *transform* ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people, places; *Conserve and create* material places that teach how to live well in our total environments. (Gruenewald 2003)



Composing Multi-Naturalism at the root of pedagogy?

As naturalness is entrenched in how the purpose of school is formulated and reformed, I apply Bruno Latour’s compositionist view to place-based education to consider how to achieve a what bell hooks call a “liberatory classroom,” which requires a troubling of *mononaturalism* and *shallow multiculturalism.*
How is nature naturalized in place-based education?
 What would it mean to reframe “the flux” (Hayles 1995) with an idea of many kinds of nature, or even no nature at all? Can there be PBE without a garden?

Common sense is malleable, and normalized ideas shape individuals subjective view of the world, and how it can change. What kind of change could arise if we consider more than one nature?

More than replacing nature

Latour’s (2010) **compositionism** allows us to de/re-compose how place fits into pedagogy

Mononaturalism:

The idea that nature is a singular, discrete category, existing in a constant state, even if people experience it differently.

Environmental Movements 1950’s-present

Why is being green so white?

From Silent Spring to No Child Left Inside,

Essentialism– Strategic or not?



Romanticism & Transcendentalism
 mid-1800s to present, reimagined several times

- Writers, philosophers, and artists including:
- Emerson (1803-82), *Nature*, 1836
 - Thoreau (1817-62), *Journals*, 1906

Considers nature as a gateway to the sublime and “man and Nature” are opposite forces. The main ideological shift emphasizes aesthetic/spiritual benefits (to man) of Nature. Relies on elitist and binary standards, and is deeply tied to American Frontier ideology.



Place
 In critical geography, questions of “place/space” are central. Theories of place (Cresswell 2015, Massey 2009, Harvey 2006, Hayles 1995, Proctor 2009) help to question the de facto primacy of nature, how this is connected to power, and to consider the *naturalization* of ideas and spaces/places.

