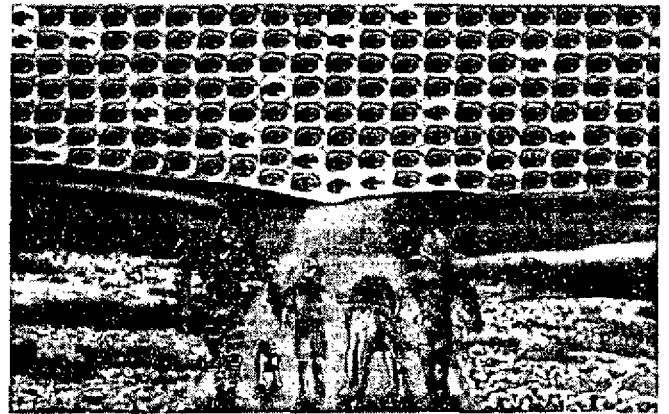


Gesturing Toward an Intercultural Conversation in Environmental Education

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they write about 'working with' us except 'us' becomes 'them' first person plurality becomes third person (aka first person) singula in other words third person becomes first person first people have not even unbecome who we are alphabetically we mostly come after them in terms of authorship because we are both place of data collection as well as secondary or tertiary author/ities no matter what our surname begins with or theirs (Cole 1999), In-SHUCK-ch/N'Quat'qua (Stl'at'lmx) Nation.

Considering global revisioning and reshaping of the relationships between and among people, other living things, geographies, epistemologies and ways of (re)presenting the world, environmental education might benefit from a more diverse knowledge community. The conversation in environmental education has been largely articulated by science educators and others schooled in the ways of the West. Indigenous communities have not been an integral part of the conversation, rather indigenous epistemologies have been absented or whited out (and otherly hued) and now virtualized in the Net/scape.

According to John Willinsky (1998), the legacy of imperialism in the West is that we are schooled in differences. We are taught how to divide the world and to construct borderlines of discrimination and privilege between the West and 'the rest'. In this context difference is seen as negative. Willinsky (1998) argues that students have a right to know that exclusion of 'other' is 'not simply an oversight but a feature of how the disciplines ... have gone about dividing the world since the age of the empire' (p. 250). Furthermore, Noel Gough (1998) writes that Western education attempts to generate global knowledge for all and 'all around the world,' but it is the economic interests of 'developed' nations [and, I would add, the interests of the political/economic elite of 'developing' countries] which are reflected 'obscuring the exploitation, domination, and social and political inequities underlying global environmental degradation' (p. 511). Gough continues:

[I]f global warming is understood as a problem for all of the world's peoples, then we need to find ways

in which all the world's knowledge systems—Western, Blackfoot, Islam, and the like—can jointly produce appropriate understandings and responses... I am prepared to assert that a coexistence of knowledge systems is unlikely to be facilitated by the adherents of any one system arbitrarily privileging their own criteria ... and therefore laying claim to producing 'universal truth regardless of cultural context'.

Who is legitimate and who legitimates? Where are the foundaries of authority? Who are its foundlings? What about those written off as being *pre*-historic by Western academia? Who are the writers of history? Who are the speakers of *pre*-history? Is history itself not a Euro-construct?

Mary Bryson & Suzanne de Castell (1994) suggest that educators need 'to seek out those stories that are not being circulated, to stop *making sense*, to look for ... technology's version of Foucault's *subjugated knowledges*' (p. 217). How might it be possible to do this without appropriation and creating yet another 'hybrid global soup' (Vasquez 1998)? The popularized term 'hybrid' for many indigenous scholars, including Grimaldo Rengifo Vasquez, is another form of orthodoxy, a form of colonization of indigenous epistemologies in which difference dis-appears. Indigenous knowledge and spirituality are being appropriated, pirated, trivialized, trinketized and marketed for assuaging the soullessness of the West and filling corporate coffers. Indigenous people's sensibilities, cultural meanings and connections become lost in the transformations and transactions. Wannabes are the world's largest tribe, and especially in academia where they eclipse those whose light they borrow. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990) cautions that '[t]he margins, our sites for survival, become our fighting grounds and their site for pilgrimage' (p. 330). For bell hooks (1990), it is important that the 'margins not to be collapsed, they are important positions, to recover ourselves and move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer' (p. 342).

Eduardo Fernandez Grillo (1998), a member of PRATEC (Proyecto Andino de Tecnologias Compesinas, Andean Project

of Peasant Technologies) calls for a 'mutual intercultural conversation' at the local and world levels, denouncing the aggressive nature of imperialism. Mutual learning is living respectfully and reciprocally within the world. Grillo refers to such living as 'equivalency' in which 'this living world relates with each one of the others.' This way of being in the world is non-oppositional and non-vindictive, refusing a victim stance. It is not about gaining concessions from the state, validity from the academy or creating universal truths. Neither does it preclude alliances and dialogical coalitions with those schooled in Western ways, nor is it an wholly anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist metanarrative. It is regeneration of traditional knowings and rejection what the West calls 'development.' 'The dynamic of regeneration emerges from the attitude of loving the world, as it is, as a parent loves a child, not wanting to transform him or her into someone else (Apffel-Marglin 1998, p. 40).

Such a conversation is incongruous with Western (con)quest for knowledge which has been about accumulating and commodifying, differentiating and hierarchizing humans and other living things. Although environmental education has tended to lean toward representational thought separating people from environment, there has been recent dialogue concerned with this 'aboutness' of environmental education (e.g. Cole 1998, Gough 1997, Jickling & Spork 1998). For Frédérique Apffel-Marglin (1998) '[t]he anthropocentrism of representational thought is how the organism/environment dualism manifests itself in the field of knowledge... . The relationship is not mutual; it is not a conversation' (p. 27).

Members of the Maori, In-SHUCK-ch/N'Quat'qua Nation, PRATEC and many other indigenous communities have been working to re-enact mutual learning communities. For example, in Aotearoa, Russell Bishop (1998) speaks of 'epistemological racism' in education and calls for a 'spiral discourse' in which Maori become *main* characters in collaborative negotiations to re-construct the curriculum from Maori knowledge. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1998) calls for a 'dynamic interactive cycle' of dialogue, a 'relational positioning' with the community. Peter Cole (1999) maintains that '[w]e are all indigenous. We are the land' (p. 12). For him, indigeneity is about community, fidelity to the land, and honouring one's relations. Cole (in progress) writes that 'integrating cultural motifs such as spiral, circle, dreamtracks, rows of corn kernels, ovoid, and other indigenous 'art' forms, technologies and spiritualities as interactive isomorphic epistemologies is a way of engendering and enacting reciprocal relationships between how we feel, what we think, and what we do.' For him, 'ovoid conversation' involves shared-/multi-centres, movement within and between how people, trees, rivers, stones, animals feel, think and act—a dynamic between artifact, metaphor and performance.

A diverse knowledge community in environmental education would require collectively-made and mutually-accepted conversations, consisting not only of people, but of all our relations, including what Western science tells us is not alive. These conversations might lead to a cultural politics of

difference which is neither oppositional nor transgressive, but a place where more thoughtful and caring discourses take place, and with them more thoughtful and caring learning communities. ☺

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