

Ecological mindfulness and cross-hybrid learning: a special issue

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More than 3 years ago we began exploring the idea of co-editing a special issue on what we envisioned might take some priority in environmental and science education given the stake of the planet, its diverse social and ecological communities, and the next generation of youth who will inherit the inescapable past. We believe that thinking across boundaries is paramount for diverse cultures and communities that will increasingly deal with big changes and complex challenges, on the planet, in societies, and in the very nature of what it means to be a person and a learner. During the past 3 years, the conversation of guest editors, authors of papers, the more-than-human-world, and others, coalesced into effervescent emergences of ecological mindfulness and learning at the intersections of ontological hybridity (Fig. 1).

Underlying this issue on ecological mindfulness and cross-hybrid learning is the idea that the field of education has spawned proliferating “adjectival educations,” and that the proliferation of educational subfields potentially works against the interdisciplinary and cross-hybrid learning needed to foster scientific and cultural understandings, as well as action for socio-ecological change. Big changes are upon us; more are coming. With the changing climate in cultural and physical landscapes, there will be Earthly collisions from global and interstellar scales, to political and ecological scales, to genomic and nano-technological scales—which in turn will be interpreted by a vast meshwork of cultural and epistemological diversity and hybridity.

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Raindrops spread circles
spawning salmon carcass
wavers, blends

Fig. 1 Spectacles of wild salmon ecology. © 2014 Michael Mueller, Haiku by David Greenwood

Science education, environmental education, outdoor education, experiential education, place-based education, community-based education, culturally-responsive education, democratic education, sustainability education, health education, Aboriginal and indigenous education, critical pedagogy, social justice education, ecopedagogy, ecojustice education, humane education, imaginative education, social learning, problem-based learning, etc.—all of these adjectival educations, and many others, make significant contributions to a broad educational discourse that promotes understanding and relating to the cultural, physical, and ecological environment. Practitioners often associate with one or more of these subfields, and academics often build careers defining how one subfield differs from, or is superior to, another. In books and articles, the effort to differentiate between perspectives often takes precedence over making connections between perspectives. When this happens, differentiating labels and protecting turf sometimes become more important than making connections and building educational alliances—in the service of common work. In this issue we promote the idea that integration and blending of thought, rather than disintegration and separation, should be a meaningful purpose of ecological mindfulness.

Correspondingly, these academic tensions may inadvertently perpetuate adjectival pedagogical practices that may conceal more than they reveal. Consider the ways that secondary teachers continue to be prepared to think within educational subfields or to teach within self-contained classrooms, which are largely apart from their colleagues in other disciplines and disconnected from diverse communities outside of the school. Often, educators experience few chances for meaningful collaboration. Potential entry points for cross-hybrid learning also become obscured and, even erased, as the livelihoods, inter-generational knowledge, and industries of local significance (think fisheries and subsistence) are falsely separated from school. The adjectival and largely sequestered education of youth and their teachers is highly problematic in light of the most pressing questions surrounding the future of communities and environments in many nations. Whether it be the tensions of consumerism in militarized nations, a heightened reliance on technology, science, or government to solve the world's problems, misplaced trust in others investing our money for retirement funds, or ignorance around where one's food comes from or the people and places harmed in its way—people who do not know how to deal with problems in more integrated ways will face serious challenges.

Consider the thinking of people who go to a farmer's market and complain that organic food prices are sometimes higher than corporate supermarket prices, while never learning the shortcuts taken by food corporations. It takes some learning to understand the high costs of low price, such as social and economic injustice for many people in the labor force, the inhumane treatment of animals, the degradation of the ecosystems, and the dependency of industrialized food on the paradoxical neoliberal combination of corporate welfare and anti-regulatory consumer policies (such as the lack of comprehensive food labeling). How many people know about and learn to challenge the relationship between farm-raised fish in the supermarket and the decline of wild stocks? Where does one learn to consider the absence of Omega-3s that lead to health declines, along with dyed pink flesh used to comfort and deceive consumers into purchasing a food that appears by all accounts "safe" to eat? What about the shampoo bottle that shows a label with a peppermint plant on it—is the real plant part of the ingredients or is there a pseudo chemical concoction designed to make us think it so? Where did all the parts of my computer come from, whose garbage heap do they eventually befoul, and what are the real social and ecological costs of the treadmill of production needed to keep the consumer economy moving? Why does media coverage of the Occupy Movement, Idle No More, or rampant police brutality tend toward drama rather than substantive political analysis? These examples are just several of many that can be explored to discuss the authentic contexts that individuals find themselves in throughout the world as we become more globalized and confused. While there appears to be hope that people are coalescing around community and environmental problems, the educational literature has stunted the growth of more integrated holistic perspectives that can help "all learners" understand the impacts of meshwork's of emerging cultures on people, place, and planet.

Despite attempts by academics to pigeon-hole particular (adjectival) types of learning, most of us participate in a myriad of integrated, mindful activities that we share with others—within our communities and physical environments, and even within ourselves. These human activities can bring about a balance in our lives, bodies, and minds. Mindfulness as we understand it here is an emerging situated mosaic of heightened perceptual awareness, cultural attunement, geographic and ecological consciousness, and humility, recognizing a breathing Earth. Dancing, yoga, kayaking, gardening, karate, fishing, hunting, mountain climbing, surfing, cooking, music and other cultural arts are all forms of mindful practice that strengthen and condition our educational balance. Civic engagement through activism and environmentalism is also a heightened form of mindfulness that involves the chemistry of the brain, the politics of multiple communities, as well as the health of the bodies and ecological systems.

Premised on the relational, conversational practices of this journal, we now embark on a special issue particularly well suited to address concerns of an increasingly fragmented educational discourse by embracing authors, co-authors, or discussants, who practice forms of mindfulness, alliance-building, intersectionality, and cross-hybrid learning between diverse educational fields, and between diverse sectors of the larger ecosociocultural lifeworld in which we all live, learn, and die. This issue's dialogue is enriched with the expansive, inclusive, and accessible ways of writing and research that demonstrate people taking risks—the kinds of risks that are disallowed when academic labels and fiefdoms determine the kinds of questions asked, regulate methodologies, and demand compliance rather than encourage creativity. Equally important, this special issue's dynamic and multifaceted array of papers work to unveil the world we are living in, generate nuanced understandings and perceptions, and inspire action, relationship-building, hope, outrage,

and transformation. These papers weave a larger narrative of democracy and companionship in our new world.

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