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Teacher Education in a Dangerous Time: (Re)Imagining Education for Diversity, Democracy and Sustainability

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Abstract

This article amplifies the importance of social movements like Black Lives Matter and diverse critical educator responses to social suffering, COVID-19, and related critiques of current dominant assumptions of teacher education and Western schooling. The author offers an ecocritical conceptual framework to support education to recognize the importance of how teachers, and teacher educators, can take action as leaders (re)imagining education in support of valuing diversity, democracy, and sustainability. This article calls for an ecocritical pedagogical (re)imagining of how teacher education might be (re)constituted through local activist teaching in collaboration with social movements and in support of social justice and sustainability. Defining an ecocritical pedagogy in teacher education calls for a particular kind of critical teacher supportive of social justice and sustainability.

Keywords

Ecocritical Education, EcoJustice Education, Teacher Education

Teacher Education in a Dangerous Time: (Re)Imagining Education for Diversity, Democracy and Sustainability

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This article amplifies the importance of social movements like Black Lives Matter and diverse critical educator responses to social suffering, COVID-19, and related critiques of current dominant assumptions of teacher education and Western industrial schooling. The author offers an ecocritical conceptual framework that aims to emphasize the importance of how teachers, and teacher educators, can take action as leaders (re)imagining education as supportive of valuing diversity, democracy, and sustainability. This article calls for an ecocritical pedagogical (re)imagining of how teacher education might be (re)constituted through more local activist teaching and diverse collaborations with social movements in support of social justice, multispecies equity, and sustainability.
Keywords: Ecocritical Education, EcoJustice Education, Teacher Education

Introduction

In 1963 James Baldwin addressing teachers and school leaders in "A Talk to Teachers" said:

> Let's begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time…We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced...from within. To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible–and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people–must be prepared to "go for broke." Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. (p. 42)

The first two decades of the 21st century have been an era in which many thousands of people have found themselves having to face survival on Earth (Islam & Winkel, 2017; UNICEF, 2020). While there is growing evidence that the ways in which heightened racism, sexism, and a fearful intolerance of queer and differently abled identities are inextricable from a white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal, ableist and industrialized consumer culture, what 2020 has put into clear focus—intensified by a rise in anti-democratic politics in the United States and the COVID-19 global pandemic—is that the dominant way of life for a political majority of humans in the planet is not sustainable, equitable, or socially just (Masci; 2019; Parveen, 2020; United Nations,

2020a; 2020b). The grim reality is that as a planet of diverse species we are experiencing a brutal loss of human and more-than-human life and a gross denial of civil liberties and human rights (Center for Disease Control, 2020; United Nations, 2020a; 2020b). However, this reality is bringing topics of social justice and sustainability into serious consideration more broadly and more and more of the world's people are taking action to resist the spread of such socially-unjust and unsustainable habits of living and demanding change from governments. As teacher educators. we are without question starting the third decade of the 21st century immersed in diverse and interrelated social and political movements that are calling for our creative efforts to support a resistance to regimes of tyrannical powers and to focus our efforts democratically on each other's well-being and with that a multitude of sustainable and socially just ways of living. It is imperative in a world where so many folks are fighting for their lives and the rights to do more than survive that teacher educators take seriously this moment to radically reconsider not only the purpose of that schools have historically served in society but also to critically imagining how the purpose of schools like freedom schools might serve in a different kind of society. In this essay, I will make the argument that teacher educators are in a unique position to be leaders in advocating that we take this moment to learn from and with social movements and radically imagine alternatives to status-quo practices in teaching.

Social Protest & Resistance

Building on a legacy of civil rights activism in the United States and around the world, Black Lives Matter (BLM) emerged from #BlackLivesMatter in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman—the man who shot and killed a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in 2012. The BLM Movement grew as protests emerged in response to the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Sandra Bland. By 2020, the kind of state sanctioned violence against Black and Brown people in the United States that had for too long been acceptable in too many communities has boiled over. Amidst a planetary pause that further illuminated systemic inequities brought about by COVID-19, the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and George Floyd called for extreme action in defense of not only Black lives but also of the issues outlined by the BLM movement. BLM affirms that racial justice is intertwined with queer rights, climate justice, and eliminating sexism and poverty for all suffering people by illuminating the ways in which White supremacy works to undergird and rationalize injustice. Black Lives Matter in 2020 became an even stronger resurgence of civil rights activism and did so with attention to the importance of solidarity against all the ways lives, especially Black lives, are systematically targeted around the world for their demise and often deaths. Similar in 2016, the #NoDAPL drew massive attention and support to the Standing Rock Sioux's grassroots resistance to the planned and approved construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline—a 1,172 mile long (approx. 1,886 km) underground oil pipeline in the United States. The Indigenous centered protest brought to the forefront of social activism the long-standing importance of water as life sustaining and sacred. In 2016, the world saw "Water Protectors" standing in the way of the bulldozing of sacred land attacked by police dogs and sprayed with water cannons in below freezing temperatures.

At a moment culminating from consistent civil unrest and protest often directed at the 45th president of the United States, the unjust policing of borders and bodies—including unjust imprisonment, incarceration, and murder, there are over 2.5 million COVID-19 confirmed cases and 126,000 deaths in the US as of the end of June in 2020 (Center for Disease Control, 2020).

Yet, tens of thousands of people at a time are protesting in support of BLM in major cities around the world (Parker et al., 2020; Braslow, 2020). These protesters are risking health and taking action to say enough is enough and supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and demanding political change—they are inarguably defenders of democracy. Protestors, and especially youth, around the globe are showing up for democracy, human rights, and climate change in large numbers with reports of 26 million people in the US participating in BLM protests in the summer of 2020 (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel, 2020). Fed up with the injustices of mass shootings, racial inequality, intolerance for diversity and continued disregard for human rights and the health of the planet, the youth voice from Standing Rock and BLM to the Parkland Youth and Climate Change Strikes has been loudly heard around the planet. For people in the United States, and around the world, these protests are a statement of solidarity in tumultuous times and evidence that as human beings we will take whatever action necessary toward ensuring diversity is valued democratically and together with human rights and sustainability on the planet. We are living in dangerous times and protesters are courageously pushing for radical change towards social justice and sustainability now.

James Baldwin (1963), in that same address quoted at the opening of this article, challenged educators and political leaders to consider utilizing schools to build a society in which racism and related social injustices were no longer woven into the very fabric of our daily lives. While his words were a call for an informed and bold response to addressing racism in 1963, the spirit of his message resonates strongly with message from abolitionist ecocritical educators and the Black Lives Matter protests in today's world. Baldwin emphasizing the power of educators in societal change said: "The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it–at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change" (p. 42).

As a teacher educator with a vested interest in democracy, human rights, and sustainability I feel strongly that what is needed is an educational revolution in this historic moment. Our challenge is echoing and amplifying Baldwin's plea, amplified by BLM and a need to do better in a pandemic. Furthermore, I feel strongly that the life force of such a revolution can be sustained in teacher education where teacher educators uniquely empower teachers to think differently about pedagogy, to learn from and with social movements, and to urge our educational leaders to strongly consider diverse and creative alternatives to simply returning to the status quo in our schools and communities. Foremost in this pandemic, educators are learning quickly that community is of far more importance than content as teachers are scrambling to make sure they stay safe but that also they are able to connect with their students and furthermore connect their students with other students. Teachers are learning quickly that this is a moment to rethink how we teach and with that how we assess student learning (Tyler, 2020). Lessons learned from a global pandemic, increased global climate change, and the current fight against racism in the past three months demonstrate calls for a path which deviates from the current practices of teacher education and offers a rare opportunity for systemic change—one with which our nation is not unfamiliar.

While what I share in this article are certainly not new ideas—nor ought they be attributed to originating with, or belonging to, any single author or academic camp—my hope is that they serve as powerful public testimony that there were teacher educators responsive to the world's needs, wants, and demands. As the research on educational trends in teacher education (Cochran-Smith, et al. 2008) and the impending crises we face in the next half-century (Strengers, 2015; DeLeon, 2019) clearly demonstrate, a refusal to understand and embrace

mutuality and interdependence is woven throughout the interconnected hardships of social suffering and environmental degradation (Bowers, 2001; Kahn, 2010; Martusewicz, et al., 2020). This refusal is embedded in a conceptual framework based on a system of exploitation and violence—a lens that serves as the dominant, shaping force regarding what it means to be a teacher. In this article, I will assert that a status quo educator—or a teacher self-focused on the individual in a socially constructed value-hierarchy of a teacher as framed by patriarchy and white culture that acts as a superior in control of students—must be examined and critiqued for its limitations. Following that call for action, I will suggest such an examination happen in favor of efforts in teacher education to move toward an *ecocritical* pedagogical (Lupinacci, et al. 2019) approach focused on the health and well-being of a broader human and more-than-human community—one in which the educator is a mediator in rethinking the foundational roots of unjust social suffering and environmental degradation together with students engaging learners in critically examining and changing society. In confronting this stark contrast, I emphasize Baldwin's (1963) call for teachers to take action as responsible in shaping present and future society. Rather than provide a list of small repairs for teacher education, I conclude directing us all toward social movements at leading us all in resisting the kind of cultural habits of domination that led us to where we are fighting for life, livelihood, freedom, and democracy in 2020.

Teachers are critical leaders, and especially as teacher educators, we have a responsibility to examine and address how schools create, support, and sustain the violence of social suffering and environmental degradation. When leaders are faced with such challenges, we must be willing to inquire into the ways that current forms of exploitation are rationalized, justified, and/or ignored. In accordance with this inquiry, the purpose of this article is to propose a possibility for (re)imagining *teacher* as part of a movement toward horizontal partnerships in our communities by presenting an ecocritical conceptual framework for teacher education. Calling for a particular kind of teacher leadership supportive of social justice and sustainability, I share an introduction to such a framework as it contributes toward ecocritical pedagogies. I conclude this article by calling for a particular kind of teacher leadership supportive of social justice and sustainability through direct action against the status quo that created conditions in which it is taking a global pandemic and continued violence against oppressed peoples, animals, land, waterways, oceans, and skies for school leaders, teachers, and teacher educators to confront.

Responding to the systemic violence and exploitation perpetuated by the current dominant social, economic, and environmental contexts in North America (similar to other nation states embedded in Western industrial culture), ecocritical educators examine and address how it is that schools in Western industrial societies create, support, and sustain the habits of mind that rationalize, justify, and (re)produce unjust social suffering *and* devastating degrees of environmental degradation. It is of utmost important that this work include a critique of white supremacy and tyrannical forms of government as ecocritical frameworks should not be confused with an ecofascist argument which utilizes climate change science to argue for exclusionary practices that rationalize authoritarianism and militarized actions to ensure continued unjust social superiorities. I want to be clear that action taken to address climate change or environmental degradation and domination as separate from racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and heteronormativity is part of the problem. Ecocritical work in teacher education asserts that addressing social and environmental justice as inseparable is paramount to future educators unlearning current dominant roles teachers and schools play in supporting or undermining the importance of diversity, social justice, and sustainability. When faced with such a challenge,

ecocritical teacher educators ask: *How is it that exploitation and domination is rationalized, justified, and/or (re)produced by schools and teachers?* Furthermore, ecocritical educators are committed to turning the critical lens inward and asking: *What can teacher educators, and teachers, do to teach in support of alternatives to Western industrial culture?* Or in the case of current politics in the United States, in support the BLM movement as inclusive of local health and sustainability. In an attempt to address these questions, I introduce an ecocritical pedagogy as one among many valued approaches to exploring the possibilities of diverse critical ecological perspectives in teacher education.

An Ecocritical Framework in Teacher Education

An ecocritical pedagogy addresses how education is influenced by systems of exploitation and violence, systems which rely on a refusal to acknowledge and embrace mutuality and interdependence (Garrard, 2010; Lupinacci, 2016; Lupinacci et al. 2019). Ecocritical scholars in education use diverse critical lenses—for example ecofeminism (Plumwood, 1993, 2002; Shiva, 1993; Warren, 1990, 2000) critical environmental education (Bell & Russell, 2000; Gkiolmas & Skordoulis, 2020; Jickling & Sterling, 2017; Lloro-Bidart & Banschbach, 2019), indigenous pedagogies (Basso, 1996; Cajete, 1994; Jacob & RunningHawk Johnson, 2020; McCoy, et al. 2017); place-based pedagogies (Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2014; Lowenstein, et al. 2018); ecopedagogies (Kahn, 2010) and ecojustice (Bowers, 2001; Martusewicz, et al. 2020) for addressing and rethinking dominant cultural frameworks. While there exists diversity among ecocritical perspectives in education, specifically focusing on teacher education and radical praxis of ecocritical pedagogies in teacher education, certain principles remain at the center of the work (Lupinacci, et al. 2018). Specifically rooted in and yet pushing the boundaries of the critical tradition, teacher educators positioned within the ecocritical movement recognize that social and environmental justice are inseparable and inextricably linked, and that these injustices rely on the perpetuation of cultural habits—like domination, individualism, and consumerism. Drawing on ecofeminist scholarship (Warren, 1990, 2000; Plumwood, 1993, 2002) they also acknowledge that such habits are deeply rooted in value-hierarchized, often dualistic, social thought—dualisms like culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, master/slave and reason/emotion—that influence collective attitudes and unexamined behaviors. To dismantle such injustices, these scholar-activist educators analyze the culturally-constituted value hierarchies our society is reproducing. This approach also includes exploring diverse knowledges and ways of recognizing and understanding difference that move beyond the limitations of Eurocentric (or Western industrial) thought and the complex tensions, double-binds, and even contradictions that exist within our modern cultures and so many of the short-term solutions. For example, this means taking real actions toward acknowledging the importance diverse Indigenous wisdom and relationships to land and ancestry specific to place and key to decolonial moves in our schools and communities. In another example, we often find ourselves consuming commodities in an effort to improve our lives and even support so called "green" practices, but our relationship to these goods, to the people who create them, and to the beings who supply the materials, often remains invisible and unquestioned. Our methods of consumption and participation in society are deeply influenced by our culture's hierarchies of value. As such, ecocritical scholar-educators ask: *How are our social practices and relationships dependent on privilege and exploitation, and in what ways might these practices and relationships be restructured to be more inclusive without exploitation and exclusion?* In other words: *How might we restructure practices and relationships to support feminist, anti-racist, decolonial classrooms and communities?*

Ecocritical pedagogical efforts framed by an EcoJustice Education (EJE) approach in teacher education strive to engage teachers in identifying and critically examining the role that education both plays, and ought to play, in transitioning toward supporting diverse, socially just, and sustainable communities. Drawing from an EcoJustice Education framework (Martusewicz, et al., 2020) and what Martusewicz (2019) defines a pedagogy of responsibility, and stemming from the growing field of ecocritical work in social and cultural foundations of education, EcoJustice education can be summarized by three tasks:

1. Learning to analyze the deep cultural roots of the social and ecological crises plaguing our world;
2. Working to identify the diverse cultural practices that encourage relationships of mutual care of both human communities and the natural world we depend on. We call this second task revitalizing the cultural and environmental commons;
3. Developing the capacity, skills, and imagination needed to recognize what are mostly unconscious ways of being that are harming the world, and to create solutions, not just for the future but now, in our present context (Martusewicz, et al. 2020, p. 18).

Simply put, through an ecocritical framework, teacher educators work to support scholar-activist educators in recognizing two conflicting and foundationally different worldviews—on the one hand, ecological worldviews of interdependence and interspecies equity, and on the other, a human-centered worldview informed by hierarchal capitalist, racist, and patriarchal relationships. Following the three primary tasks of an EJE framework, I argue that nested in the third task is important work for teachers to examine and identify how to teach or share skills, and habits of mind, that support socially just and environmentally sustainable communities. Simultaneously, this framework shapes research in teacher education that examines how those worldviews might be reconstituted—via education or ecocritical pedagogies—in ways that are local and in support of living systems.

Ecocritical pedagogies often include students and teachers examining how knowledge systems and the associated behaviors and mechanisms of human domination—in relationship to language, culture, and power—are culturally mediated, and how PreK-12 educators can play a role in reconstituting those understandings, behaviors, and mechanisms. Furthermore, with(in) ecocritical pedagogies, it is important to recognize that the role of teacher can be taken on by more-than-human members of any learning community. By highlighting how many dominant cultural belief systems, root assumptions, and narratives currently destroying the planet and prospects of peace are constructed and not simply ‘natural,’ educators can help students develop critical perspectives on these root beliefs. This undertaking also allows for the exploration of alternative belief systems and metaphors that facilitate different kinds of relationships with other people, other beings, and the land.

An ecocritical pedagogical framework also illuminates the systematic economic and political restructuring of lives that, while it might address immediate needs of human or environmental systems, ultimately often perpetuates unjust social suffering and extreme environmental degradation. For example, ecocritical pedagogies require moving beyond a simple critique of technological development that portrays technology, or humans, as the problem or the solution. Rather, on one hand being critical of the dominant systematic economic and political restructuring of lives in current hyper-consumerist Eurocentric cultures includes also recognizing how technologies like pace-makers and vaccines have been, and probably ought to be, valued contributions to addressing human suffering and understanding the impacts of pollution and the

importance of remediation and of green energy. However, ecocritical pedagogies require that teachers and students also ask how these valued technologies may or may not be sustainable and equitable via renewable resources and fair labor. Ultimately, addressing unjust suffering in society is important, but it must also include an awareness and analysis of the impact of any proposed solution on several generations of both human and more-than-human communities. What has become commonplace over the past century, and extending into the current, is the intentional restructuring of relationships to control and commodify lives in order to maintain and manufacture markets. For example, food and water are life-sustaining elements necessary for supporting healthy communities. However, the relationships to these "resources" have been enclosed—that is, they have been monetized or understood as commodities to be earned and purchased. This iteration of capitalism as a "supply and demand" economic system predicated on exploitation works to enclose living systems and can be understood as the globalizing force to commodify and privatize that which is common and public. Critiquing this kind of enclosure means reimagining the sorts of relationships humans can have with the more-than-human world and with each other, rather than simply trying to make human behavior 'less bad' by slightly reigning in current destructive practices.

In summary, ecocritical pedagogies center student learning on recognizing the importance of examining intellectual, environmental, and cultural practices and traditions in regard to how they either support or undermine living systems together with whatever content is being taught. Whether examining discursive practices or economic structures while learning mathematics, language arts, science, or social studies, a key feature of ecocritical pedagogies is the recognition that human knowledge systems are culturally constructed, have consequences for all living beings, and can be re-imagined in transformative ways (Turner, 2015; Lupinacci, 2017). Another distinguishing aspect of ecocritical pedagogies is that, whatever the lesson or activity, students and teachers together address the powerful role that their culture plays in the development of themselves, their values, and their diverse relationships. Such a framework examines, explores, and proposes diverse and collaborative pedagogical projects that respond to current dominant belief systems, and works to ensure that any responses are necessarily collaborative with diverse cultures in ways that are local, situational, and in support of decentralized living systems. In the classroom, this might include examining clips from news media to determine what root metaphors are at work in the way our culture communicates about the more-than-human-world. It might mean exploring personal relationships with nonhuman beings through art or creative writing. It might mean comparing historical writings about race, gender, and species. Or it might mean using interdisciplinary knowledge to investigate a local issue of environmental justice.

A primary premise in ecocritical work in teacher education that differentiates the approach from most other critical frameworks is the explicit recognition of the entanglement of human supremacy and Eurocentric culture–that is, the embedded worldviews and belief systems originating in Western traditions of thought, which have colonized much of the world. Ecocritical educators assert that situated at the root of social and ecological injustice is a fundamental—and problematic—assumption that humans, as a species, are understood (or self-identify) as superior to and somehow separate from all other living beings and non-living things. Thus, guiding ecocritical pedagogies is the understanding that the manifestation of a human-supremacist worldview is culturally constructed and inextricable from current Eurocentric (patriarchal, classist, ableist, speciesist, and racist) industrial dominant cultural assumptions about race, class, gender, ability, age, and so forth. A foundational tenet in ecocritical work in

education is that cultural habits of mind in dominant Eurocentric industrial culture are based on a system of human-supremacy—stemming from anthropocentrism—and that such a perspective is ubiquitous throughout dominant colonial culture and informs how we as humans in such a culture learn to interpret and assign value to differences.

Ecocritical work continues and pushes the boundaries of the work of social justice scholar-activists within critical education spaces by making clear the connections between human-supremacy, patriarchy, racism, and other forms of domination like ableism, ageism, and classism. Ecocritical scholars understand that each of these value-hierarchized structures of domination mutually reinforce one another, while they obscure the fundamental interdependence and interrelationship of all beings. These hierarchies inform dominant cultural assumptions in Western industrial culture, and they are all based on normalized logics of domination, which means that they are inseparable and intersect in complex and contextualized ways. For example, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan or the Water Protectors in Standing Rock protesting the oil pipeline illustrate the complex intersections of anthropocentrism, racism, capitalism, etc.

Lessons from Teaching in a Pandemic

The more that educators engage ecocritical pedagogies which encourage the recognition of and resistance to all forms of domination, the more potential there is for educational experiences to foster spaces where teachers and students learn together to recognize the harmful assumptions and actions that undergird social and ecological injustice. While on one hand it is important to admire, to value, and to offer firm support for a shared commitment to respond to the undeniable atrocities that we—as humans—enact on one another, these atrocities are inextricably connected to the cruelties we perpetuate against non-human animals and the environment. There is no way to separate the crisis of teaching in a pandemic from the already glaring inequities undermining social justice and sustainability in our classrooms, schools, and communities. None of these atrocities occur in isolation—and, as outlined in this article which is echoing the call from Indigenous educators and leaders in social movements like the Standing Rock, the Youth Climate Protests, the Women's Revolution in Rojava, and BLM, they are all interconnected. To confront human supremacy together with other forms of supremacy in education, it is paramount that educators work as committed allies to those suffering, while also challenging and confronting the systemic roots of oppression on our respective fronts to both address immediate ways human communities are suffering and center inquiry on all beings' interdependencies and interconnected rights and needs. In other words, we all have a responsibility—many of us as privileged members of society—to support those, including our more-than-human kin, who are suffering unjustly, in whatever capacity we can while recognizing that solutions to end such suffering must not include an unsustainable exploitation of one another and the Earth's finite resources and destroying that which sustains diverse human existence on the planet.

Responding to the enclosures of schooling by connecting the systemic roots of anthropocentrism to racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and so on requires attention to be turned toward the difficult necessity for cultural change. It is my firm belief as ecocritical activist–scholar educator that if we, enactors of dominant Western industrial culture, do not rethink the cultural framework rooted deeply in our language by which dominant meanings are socially constructed, then we are destined to re-create and perpetuate many of the problematic relationships that we as radical educators often set out to change. Inspired by movements to address unjust suffering for our human and more-than-human kin, I am suggesting that it is of

utmost importance that we listen to and learn from social movements and the activist leaders like the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement, The Women's Revolution in Rojava, or the Water Protectors on occupied Native territories together with taking some actual steps in our studies and enactments of pedagogies in our classrooms toward cultural change. These suggestions that I am concluding with are aimed at supporting a paradigm shift from rational, mechanized, and human-centered, white-male-heteronormative thinking to discourses—and the closely associated discursive practices—that are local, situational, and supportive of all living beings.

As an ecocritical scholar-activist educator influenced by anarchism it is impossible for me to suggest or outline any practical steps without including the importance of a fundamental shift in the very common assumptions, cultural relations, and traditions that define schooling. Drawing from my experiences with ecocritical pedagogies within teacher education, I can share steps that can be used to help students value pedagogical practices that work together with activist networks to resist what is outlined in the article as a logics of a particular kind of domination in favor of recognizing and valuing differences. These pedagogical suggestions are in support of diverse, decentralized communities where decisions are made with close consideration for all those species and groups directly impacted by the decision. Although I recognize the importance of localized responses and understandings, below are some preliminary suggestions for how teachers, and teacher educators, might begin to utilize an ecocritical framework in their lives and in their classrooms.

- Engage in teaching and learning that explores diverse projects to rethink the dominant assumptions influencing how we, as humans, construct meaning and thus how we learn to relate to each other and the more-than-human world. Further, make the commitment to critically and ethically examine how, as teachers, we individually and collectively understand educating, organizing, and taking action toward supporting healthy communities that include all beings and the intrinsic value of recognizing, respecting, and representing the right of all beings to belong to and live in peace within an ecological system. For example, critically engage in questioning how we language our world. Ask: *What does it mean to refer to natural gas and oil reserves as "natural resources"? What are we ignoring when we commodify the environment in this way?* Asking also: *What language further perpetuates social inequalities and undermines human rights in our communities?* Furthermore, as future teachers, think about how we might frame lessons that include ecocritical essential questions like: *What does it mean to be human beings in our diverse communities of life? Who/what benefits and who/what suffers?* Teachers might ask: *How are learning relationships in our classrooms influenced by value-hierarchized dualisms and cultural assumptions about students' abilities*? Utilizing an ecocritical framework, ask*: What does it mean to teach toward the abolition of superior/inferior (either/or) thinking and decision making and in support of anti-racist and feminist teaching?*
- Engage in critical and ethical examinations of community. As notions of community are all too often defined in terms of white supremacy, patriarchy, and human-centered exclusion, it is important to work to reconsider community in terms of who and what is included in our definitions of this construct and how those definitions contribute to either supporting or undermining the right of all beings to coexist in peace. For example: *Who and what might we be ignoring when we think about who is considered in decisions in our neighborhood community? What animals and plants live and make*

homes in our community, and how are we interrelated to them? How are we dependent upon these animals and plants? What are we doing to practice reciprocity with our diverse human and more-than-human neighbors? Furthermore, imagine how students could be prompted to recognize, consider, and value diverse cultures and species when learning about citizenship and voice. Teachers can work with students to imagine how decisions might be made that consider more broadly that all voices matter in given a historical dominance of White male voices how important it is to center diverse voices, ideas, abilities and experiences. How might we begin to expand our understanding of voice to mean more than utterances of human language systems that rely on words? Consider engaging students in learning to listen and be responsive to diverse language systems like breathing, smell, diverse sounds, gestures, and weather, climate, water, soils, birds, insects, fungi, forests, and other mammals and animals. Specifically, work to identify—or seek out—a more-than-human teacher (something/one you learn from and intentionally engage in a learning relationship). At first, this is just about making a commitment to learning from this different kind of teacher–student relationship in a way that interrupts habits and assumptions of anthropocentrism and human-supremacy. Then, journal over the course of the semester and share your experiences with how you learned from, and in many cases learned to listen to, your ecological surroundings. Commit to learning about the ways in which oppressed communities have suffered and survived the extreme violence of white-male heteronormativity and to not reproducing or existing in complicity with these atrocities.

- Engage in examining community in terms of inclusion and the diverse ways in which our living relationships can be recognized, respected, and represented through teaching and learning among all members. Specifically, engage in recognizing the role activist networks play in alleviating and eliminating unjust suffering in our communities. Build networks of solidarity with these organizations. How can single-issue social justice groups make alliances with other social and/or environmental justice groups? For example, what commonalities and bridges might there be between Planned Parenthood, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Sierra Club? A great entry point for this intersectional work is food and water. Everybody eats, and we need water and are made of water! How could teachers connect with and start conversations between organizations, our classrooms, and communities? As teachers, this starts with learning about who is already attempting these conversations and how their attempts might be supported. Additionally, think about shifting classroom communities in order to encourage collaboration rather than competition. As teachers, focus lessons on fostering and developing skills of community collaboration rooted in mutual aid and interdependence. School and community gardens can be a site of such teaching and learning. Ask: *How might we learn to teach from the Black Lives Matter at Schools resources?* Or, *What might it be like to teach or be a student in Rojava?*
- Engage in supporting the diverse approaches to taking up resistance and healing from Western industrial culture and, in solidarity, show respect for epistemologies that differ from the current dominant discourses of Western industrial culture. Support the ways in which diverse forms of resistance work to challenge value-hierarchized dualisms that perpetuate value-hierarchized thinking. For example, explore the ways in which local groups in your community are fighting against past and present acts of

> colonization, both in the United States and internationally. Imagine how educators might teach lessons that challenge and question progress rooted consumerism and global market ideology. For example, have students explore barter and trade in efforts to make explicit that economic systems do not require capitalism to exist. Have students identify non-monetized activities that exist in the community. Additionally, have students explore the gendered dimensions of non-monetized caring work and how that work upholds and strengthens communities.

Above all, and in addition to the attempts to disrupt institutionalized Western industrial culture that is perpetuated through and within educational spaces, at the individual level, we can also commit to the daily effort of making critical friends with other humans and non-human animals, engaging with adversaries, and sharing stories of hope and resilience while critiquing local and international relations of domination and hierarchies. In such volatile, authoritarian times, it is important that critical educators challenge dominant perceptions of what currently constitutes schooling, education, and knowledge to collectively imagine with open hearts and minds what is possible. Through friendship and critical dialog, we can resist white-male heteronormative human-supremacy and reject the illusion that as humans we are separate from and superior to each other and all other beings on the planet. We challenge human supremacy when we make friends with other humans and especially when we teach one another to make friends with more-than-humans—be it animals, trees, a river, the food that we grow, or the mycelial networks in the soil that give us life. It does not matter who or what exactly we befriend. The point is that we learn compassion, dependency, and different ways of listening and communicating when we understand in an ecological sense what it means to be friends—to recognize and value that we are in relationship with a vast variety of diverse beings and that we owe our existence to these relationships. We learn what it means to belong without framing that understanding within anthropocentrism, whiteness, patriarchy, capitalism, etc.; rather, belonging becomes the relationality that we enact in our everyday lives, existing within healthy and mutually supportive ecosystems. It is through these friendly and mutually sustaining relationships that we learn to overcome the isolating ills of Western industrial culture, and we are called to action with our diverse sisters and brothers to teach in support of living systems and together to face what Baldwin (1963) suggested will be met with "the most fantastic, the most brutal, and most determined resistance." He reminds us in that in teaching in these dangerous times of crisis: "The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to chant it and fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change."

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