Justice, Democracy, & Sustainability

Developing a Critical Pedagogy for Sustainability Education

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Overview

I. Political Ecology
II. Critical Pedagogy
III. Cases for the Classroom
Political Ecology

• Political economy + ecological analysis
  – Capitalism
  – Asymmetries of power
  – Conflict & struggle

• Ecological distribution conflicts
  – Material conditions of production
  – Access to natural resources or burdens of pollution
  – Ecological values
  – Uneven distribution of risk/hazard

• Social justice & democracy
Thinking critically about the concept of sustainability

Currents of environmentalism (Martinez-Alier 2002):

1. The cult of wilderness
2. The gospel of eco-efficiency
3. The environmentalism of the poor
Overview

I. Political Ecology
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III. Cases for the Classroom
Critical Pedagogy

• Critical theory of education
  – “Banking education”

• Critical pedagogy
  – Problem posing
  – Dialogical

• ‘Eco-pedagogy’

Paulo Freire, 1921-97
Pedagogical challenges

Anticipating student reactions:

• **Standardized mindset:** “Tell me *the* answer (so that I can regurgitate it on a test).”

• **It’s not my job:** “If it’s not related to my major, I don’t care (I’d rather be a thoughtless drone who manufactures widgets).”

• **Disconnect:** “How does it affect me?”

• **Othering:** “It’s *their* problem.”

• **Guilt:** “I feel sad, and helpless.”

• **Individualizing the problem:** “The poor are lazy.”

• **Capitalist competition:** “Survival of the fittest.”

• **Imperial worldview:** “Our way of life is better.”
Pedagogical challenges

• Recognizing multiple forms of inequality:
  – gender, race, class, sexuality
• Recognizing the systemic nature of inequality
• Promoting both individual and structural transformation
Pedagogical challenges

• How do we bring the “system” into view – that is, the interaction of social, political, economic, and ecological factors?

  – Sociological imagination
  – Global, structural inequalities
  – Historical contexts
  – Cross-cultural perspective
  – Self-reflection
  – Becoming comfortable with uncertainty
  – Evidence-based analysis
Overview

I. Political Ecology

II. Critical Pedagogy

III. Cases for the Classroom: Problem-Posing Education
How are individual consumers tied to global environmental problems?

Examine the “socio-ecological biography” of a commodity:

- Resource extraction
- Production conditions
- Distribution, consumption, waste
- Trace connections, envision ourselves as part of a system
- Cultural meanings of commodities
- Consumption and self-identity
Is “green consumerism” a contradiction?

Identify and deconstruct “green” advertising:

• “Nature” as accumulation strategy
• Raise questions
  – profit motive
  – externalized costs
  – social and environmental impacts
What environmental hazards do workers contend with as a result of their position within the global economy?

Analyze conditions of production and links to environmental health struggles:

• Manufacturing plants on the U.S./Mexico border
  – *Maquilapolis*, 2006 film by Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre

• *iEconomy*, 2012 NYT series by Charles Duhigg and David Barboza

• “Resource wars”
  – coltan mining in the Congo
How has “nature” been used to justify inequality (especially social hierarchies built on notions of race, gender, & sexuality)?

• “Every social hierarchy claims to be founded on the nature of things. It thus accords itself eternity; it escapes change and the attacks of innovators. Aristotle justified slavery by the ethnic superiority of the Greeks over the barbarians; and today the man who is annoyed by feminist claims alleges that woman is naturally inferior.”

— Robert Hertz, 1909
How “natural” are natural disasters?

- Hurricane Katrina
- Race, class, and geographies of risk and vulnerability
- Environmental racism
- Environmental justice movements
How are we connected to ecological distribution conflicts in other countries?

Evaluate international campaigns against Chevron/Texaco in Ecuador
- “Crude,” Joe Berlinger film, 2009

Explore themes of:
- colonialism, post-colonialism, North/South conflicts
- Development, dependency, “development of underdevelopment”
- indigenous rights struggles
- livelihood conflicts
- constructions of nature (“Amazon”), etc
What ecological distribution conflicts affect my local community?

Assess ongoing conflicts over frac sand mining:

• Definition of environmental and health risks
• Uneven distribution of costs and benefits
• Competing ecological values associated with landscape
• Connections to broader political economy of natural gas extraction
Political Ecology Sources


Critical Pedagogy Sources


