

September 2023

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Recommended Citation

Mackie, Steven Wade (2023) "EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic, and Sustainable Communities," *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*. Vol. 24: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/mwer/vol24/iss2/7>

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EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic, and Sustainable Communities

R. A. Martusewicz, J. Edmundson, and J. Lupinacci (2011). New York: Routledge.

Reviewed by Steven Wade Mackie, Northwestern Oklahoma State University

In today's bungled notion of what constitutes "successful" and "excellent" public schools and colleges, such as accreditation reports, high stakes test results, and state and federal mandates, teachers and teacher educators can easily lose sight of why they do what they do. To be an educator concerned with such pressures (on top of educating students well!), it can be difficult to navigate the throngs of research and literature on how to do our work effectively *and* with good heart. Yet, every once in a while, a text appears that cuts through the educational dogma and gets to the crux of how and why to educate well. *EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic, and Sustainable Communities* does just that.

EcoJustice Education is an essential course of study for students of education, practicing teachers, and teacher educators in that the authors ask the right questions in a refreshingly unique and engaging framework: What is the purpose of education? What does it mean to be human? How might we learn to live well? What is community? What do all of these questions have to do with educating for a sustainable and viable future? Rebecca Martusewicz, Jeff Edmundson, and John Lupinacci challenge the reader to reflect on these questions and many others, while daringly unveiling the myths that shroud our lives. At the same time, they give teacher educators and students of education the tools to tackle the ecological and cultural crises in creative and hope-producing ways. Their call is one of reclamation. They demand it is time to reclaim relationships not just between human and human, but between humans, other living things, and the places that sustain all life, all the while making clear how and why these relationships are vital to teachers and students of education.

Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci's scholarship is experientially grounded in public school life. They are conscientious public school educators with deep and ever-lasting relationships with the public schools in their neighborhoods. Their active experience frames the text's discussions in practical ideas while simultaneously building an ecojustice framework to do "the good work." The authors cast nets that critique our current ecological and cultural crises and reel them back into the shores of how schools, classrooms, and other communities are affected by these crises and what we as teachers can do to curb the destruction. The book and its supported resources, including a companion website with lesson plans, are loaded with practical hands-on activities for educators to aid in bringing this discussion into the classroom.

In short, there is no ivory tower hoop-la while upholding the content to graduate and undergraduate level course standards.

From the beginning, the authors are clear in their purpose: "The overall goal of this book is to provide teachers and teacher educators with the information and classroom practices they need to assume the responsibility for preparing citizens ready to create democratic and sustainable communities in an increasingly globalized world" (Martusewicz et al., 2011, p. 18). They begin their charge in Chapter 1 by asking why school in a world seemingly committed to ecological and global destruction? And, what is the root cause of the environmental crisis? In response to such questions, the authors examine the environmental crisis through a cultural lens. They deduce that the root of our current ecological crisis lies in many of the West's destructive cultural beliefs and values. Here, the authors heed the call to understand and reclaim the relationship between ecology and culture by offering the ecojustice model to examine "the cultural roots of the ecological crisis" (p. 9). The ecojustice analysis is defined while comparing and contrasting it with other approaches such as environmental education, experiential/outdoor education, place-based education, education for sustainability, holistic education, and others. The chapter ends with a discussion of the main goals of the book while acknowledging other environmental and cultural theorists such as C.A. Bowers, Wendell Berry, Vandana Shiva, Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Wolfgang Sachs, and others.

What makes an ideal community? To answer such a question through the ecojustice lens, the reader is challenged to rethink the concepts of diversity, democracy, and sustainability. This challenge is the purpose of Chapter 2. The text frames the rethinking of these three concepts around questions of defining community. This discussion is carefully and purposefully unpacked by asking thought provoking questions, the telling of personal stories from the authors themselves, and including a careful explanation of ideas and terms while clearly defining guiding ecojustice principles. Here, the foundation is laid for the rest of the text. It is a carefully designed roadmap, and by Chapter 2's conclusion the reader senses that adventure awaits. However, this is no armchair journey. It is a journey, which requires active participation if we are to truly live well and in community.

Drawing on the work of Gregory Bateson, C.A. Bowers, Carolyn Merchant, and others, Chapter 3 invites a deep

discussion of the relationship between language and many of the West's cultural beliefs and values. The authors vividly make the connection between how our words and the ideas they represent contribute to our lack of an ecological understanding, which allows a license for our culture to abuse the living systems of the planet. The authors also deliver a set of tools, allowing the ecojustice student to reflect upon this abusive relationship, so that we may analyze our "cultural ways of knowing" by examining the metaphors we live out. Through this analysis we begin to understand the deep-seeded underpinnings of our anthropocentric, androcentric, and ethnocentric relationship to the earth. We also are given the tools to start rethinking, transforming and leading these metaphors towards sustainability.

Chapters 4-6 lay out the violent histories of gender, class, and race: an all too common yet essential discussion for the social foundations educator and student. Yet, the authors of *EcoJustice Education* take these discussions to a deeper understanding by examining each of these forms of violence through a cultural-ecological lens. This leads to an understanding of the logic of domination, or an analysis that clearly paints the direct relationship between gender, class, and race to the domination of other life forms. Each analysis is laid out carefully while making the contribution of how each relate to schooling.

Chapter 4 lays out how androcentrism is taught and learned in society and school, while providing a historical understanding of gender issues, including the history of educating women to current day LGBTQ issues. Chapter 5 examines the concept of social hierarchy by closely looking at issues of socio-economics, how SES affects testing and tracking, and understanding class and its relationship to the cultural-ecological analysis. This chapter also chronicles a thorough analysis of how and why class is reproduced in schooling while delivering reflecting exercises to personalize this discussion. Chapter 6 looks at race and how it is learned by carefully examining the history of racial justice and its consequences. The authors begin this discussion by asking why racism exists, and unpack the logic of domination and its relationship to science, or more specifically the taxonomic classification, Social Darwinism, and eugenics and slavery (both institutional and non-institutional forms). This leads to a deeper discussion of race and its relationship to public school life, such as zero tolerance policies and academic achievement gaps. As with all the chapters in the text, Chapter 6 concludes with the tools for educators to confront these problems in a culturally and ecologically responsive manner. There are also comprehensive lists of teaching tools in books, films, and websites that enrich student understanding.

The heart of *EcoJustice Education* lies within Chapters 7, 8, and 9. Chapter 7 pulls from the work of C.A. Bowers and explains the cultural and ecological commons and their enclosure. These concepts, the backbone to ecojustice education, are explained as:

[The commons include] the non-monetized relationships, practices and traditions that people across the world use to survive and take care of one another on a day-to-day basis. This included both the 'environmental commons' such as air, water, seeds, and forest, and the 'cultural commons,' which include practices, skills and knowledge used to support mutual well-being. (p. 247)

Furthermore,

...much of the process of enclosure involves making private property out of what was once freely shared. A central aspect of this 'privatization' involves the process of 'monetization'... 'commodification'... Internalizing these ideologies as 'truths,' we accept enclosure as normal and lose sight of the commons because we are immersed in a belief system that makes money and the accumulation of things more important and even more 'real' than protecting life. (p. 216)

By challenging these "truths," or this sense of reality that many of us in the Western world take for granted, we are forced to ask how we came to accept globalization and progress forward so blindly without asking questioning the long-term effects. To support such a question, the authors guide us through a brief history of enclosure and the logic of domination by giving us a primer on influential post-World War II "development agencies," such as General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT), World Trade Organization (WTO), International Money Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The chapter ends with a thorough discussion on how the commons and its enclosure relate to education by asking how schools are recreating the assumptions and habits that enclose the commons. The authors examine this question by presenting seven in-depth and moving global case studies that explain, in detail, globalization and resistance in relation to the commons and its enclosure.

Chapter 8 asks how we might learn about ecological sustainability from the wisdom of indigenous communities in order to shed light on possible alternative solutions to current problems. The authors make their intentions clear on the chapter's first page:

There are many, many cultures on this planet who for hundreds, even thousands of years developed highly complex ways of knowing and being that recognize the human interdependence with all the other creatures we share this world with; we cannot be them; we ought not speak for them, but neither ought we ignore what they have to teach us. ... We begin from the assumption that Indigenous cultures should have a right to exist as they see fit, like any other culture, without foreign cultures being imposed on them. But beyond this, they also offer alternative pathways and centuries-old wisdom for how to live on the planet, and as such they can offer

valuable lessons to an increasingly unsustainable modern world. (p. 250-251)

One area of indigenous wisdom this book reminds us as important to education is that of oral history. As Native American scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) points out, the “difference between the transfer of knowledge in modern Western education and that of Indigenous education is that in Western education information has been separated from the stories and presented as data, description, theory, and formula” (as cited in Martusewicz et al., 2011, p. 256). While encouraging teachers to become storytellers once again, Cajete suggests that a “curriculum founded on American Indian myths in science might revolve around stories of human relationships to plants, animals, natural phenomena, and the places in which Indian people live” (as cited in Martusewicz et al., 2011, p. 256).

There are plenty of scenarios detailing the friction between Indigenous and Modernist cultures to spawn educative debate in the classroom. Through these scenarios and the debates they encourage, the authors remind us of the following: the Western ways of being in our world are largely taken for granted and by no means shared globally by all people; while many technologies aid us, they need critique while understanding that ways to live sustainably do not need to be invented; Indigenous education is holistic, meaning sustainable living is taught through oral traditions in the native language about all subjects, and not just about schooling; it is vital to protect and preserve the commons, a source of important ecological wisdom (Martusewicz et al., 2011, p. 270-271).

Chapter 9 brings the previous chapters back home, literally. It asks how communities and schools are working to teach from an ecojustice framework while recognizing and reclaiming the commons to live well. This chapter continues to build the book’s message of hope as it identifies what educators and schools are already doing, so that the rest of us will heed the call to teach and live more sustainably while building community. To do just that, the authors weave personal narratives to help the reader identify the cultural and ecological commons in our own backyards. These narratives challenge the reader to think differently about what it means to be wealthy, successful, and well-off:

...more and more people are becoming aware of how tending to local relationships—economic, social, educational, and ecological—can help us to create

more sustainable communities. What we’re interested in here are all the ways people in communities the world over are working to revitalize traditional social patterns as an intentional way of addressing serious social and ecological problems. In the process, they are slowing down, spending more time talking with one another, creating important mentoring relationships that have deeply healthy consequences—for the individuals, for the groups, and for the planet. (Martusewicz et al., 2011, p. 283)

Once again, Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci warn of romanticizing the commons, while building a set of “guidelines” to reclaim the commons. To demonstrate these guidelines in action, eight communities are profiled and their inspiring stories told on how they have revitalized their ecological and cultural commons. A number of stories exemplify what is happening in schools that are educating for ecojustice and community-based learning. The chapter concludes with useful tips to teach for sustainable and democratic communities, or ecojustice.

The authors take nothing for granted, clearly defining terms and concepts in a variety of ways that leads to a deep understanding for both the inexperienced and seasoned ecojustice student. There is also considerable attention given to clarifying ambiguous terms such as democracy, diversity, racism, while tackling core and fundamental questions that lead to an understanding of the roots of the environmental and cultural crises.

This book is much more than an ecojustice manifesto and handbook for ecologically and culturally conscious educators. *EcoJustice Education: Toward Diverse, Democratic, and Sustainable Communities* rethinks what it means to be well-educated by asking deep-rooted questions that deliver an approach to education that demands educators and students of education to reclaim their communities and take local action while understanding global relationships. *EcoJustice Education* is a steroid shot, reminding us of the *deep-seeded* purpose of why we care about education, our communities, and the planet that supports all life. Its impact is handcrafted and designed to encourage us to reclaim not only our schools but all living beings, including ourselves.

