

Re-imagining education in times of planetary crises: How transdisciplinary ecopedagogies come to matter

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In an era defined by climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, and deepening global inequalities, there is an urgent imperative for Education to be more deeply political than ever. It needs to reach beyond asking what children should learn, to investing in a radical re-imagining of learning itself. The concept and practice of *transdisciplinary ecopedagogies*, as explored across two issues of this guest edited journal, offers a compelling and timely response: collectively the papers assert that education must move beyond disciplinary silos, beyond Western-centric frameworks, and beyond anthropocentric assumptions if it is to attune and respond to the pressing demands of a rapidly changing planet.

Ecopedagogies are diverse but what unites them is the direct challenge they pose to long-standing beliefs that humans stand apart from nature. Anthropocentrism is deeply embedded in many dominant educational systems, and as such can be understood to have contributed to the creation and maintenance of the current ecological crises we are confronted by. By positioning ‘nature’ as little more than resource to be controlled and exploited, traditional models of education have effectively reinforced systems and processes of environmental harm. Ecopedagogies, by contrast, insist on interdependence where learners are invited to understand themselves as part of complex ecological networks, where human and more-than-human lives are entangled and mutually sustaining.

This is more than a philosophical shift – it is an important pedagogical one. Too often, environmental education has been reduced to surface-level engagement: recycling initiatives, outdoor activities, or lessons about ecosystems – all of which fail to adequately interrogate the political and economic structures that drive and accelerate ecological destruction. In contrast, transdisciplinary ecopedagogies demand deeper engagements with planetary collapse. They call for critical engagement with systems of power – patriarchal capitalism and colonialism that underpins contemporary education must be subject to interrogation; and the relentless pursuit of competitive, human exceptionalism needs to be actively dismantled. This involves pedagogies that prioritise and enable children to be curious and to cultivate creativity through active world-making practices. Education in this sense becomes a site of lively, dynamic transformation rather than the transmission of narrow and instrumentalist bodies of knowledge. A defining strength of this approach is its insistence on praxis: the integration of theory and practice. Learning is not confined to the classroom or the textbook; rather, it unfolds in and around us – through bodies; in rivers, on beaches, across urban streets, and through encounters with materials as commonplace as plastic or bread. Transdisciplinary ecopedagogies are sensory, embodied, and relational and serve to free children from being framed as passive recipients of knowledge, instead the young child is celebrated as active participant in meaning-making as they engage with the world through sensing and creating.

Equally important is the recognition that knowledge itself is plural. Transdisciplinary ecopedagogies draw on diverse cultural perspectives, particularly those from the Global South, thereby challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies. Transdisciplinary ecopedagogies consciously and persistently amplify marginalized voices, including those of Indigenous communities and the non-human; that is, perspectives frequently excluded from formal education. Consequently new ways of understanding and responding to planetary crises are created. This plurality extends to method; rather than offering a single model or framework, transdisciplinary ecopedagogies embrace experimentation and (k)notty-(k)not-knowing – arts-based practices, speculative thinking, and ‘world-making’ are valued as legitimate and necessary modes of enquiry. Images, materialities, and environments are not merely backdrops to learning instead they are understood as active participants in research and pedagogical encounters. The ebb and flow of a river, a fragment of text, a grain of sand, or a sheet of recycled paper become sites of knowledge, prompting reflection that radically reshapes understandings. Such approaches underline the fact that learning is never only cognitive but always made up of inherently affectively charged embodied encounters.

The implications of transdisciplinary ecopedagogies for educational spaces are profound since they disrupt the boundaries between indoor and outdoor, formal and informal, human and non-human. Educators are invited to make the familiar strange, to think expansively about learning as emplaced – beyond classrooms, across landscapes, and within digital environments. By attending to local contexts and relationships, learners develop what might be termed ecological literacies: abilities to read, understand, attune and respond to the interconnected systems that sustain (and sometimes destroy) life. Yet perhaps the most radical aspect of transdisciplinary ecopedagogies lay in their orientation towards the future. In a time often characterized by despair and ecological anxiety, this collection of papers gestures towards a cautious optimism grounded in an activist sensibility – the vital commitment to making a worldly difference. Transdisciplinary ecopedagogies insist that education holds the potential to cultivate deepened awareness that can equip children with confidence, creativity, and critical capacities to (re-)imagine and so enact alternative futures. This is not about providing ready-made solutions but about fostering the conditions for collective problematising and hence ethical engagement.

Such a transformation is not optional – as this double themed issue makes clear, responding to planetary crises requires an ‘everything change’. Education systems must be rethought at their foundations, from curriculum design to pedagogical innovation to the sensibilities and sensitivities generated from being in the thick of the non-innocence of Anthropocene childhoods. This involves an urgent shift toward environmental justice, recognizing that the impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed and deeply intertwined with social (and worldly) inequalities. It also involves a commitment to recognising and celebrating co-dependence and multispecies relationalities – as practices of wit(h)nessing – histories, genealogies, geologies, geographies, soil, water, air, and all forms of life – as everyday praxis.

This themed issue makes visible the myriad ways in which transdisciplinary ecopedagogies emphasize the importance of nurturing curiosity, encouraging creativity, and activating ethical response-abilities. Critically, this vision celebrates children as active in imagining the world

otherwise. Children must be understood as more than simply future citizens; they are active in world-making, with capacities to radically shape both environments and communities. By engaging in meaningful, relational learning experiences, education can support the emergence of new ways of thinking and being. Ultimately, transdisciplinary ecopedagogies provoke a rethinking, not only of education, but of human relationships with the world itself. They ask us to ‘world differently’ – to re-imagine and to enact forms of living that foreground complex relationalities that are in pursuit of justice to come. This is a demanding task, requiring humility, openness, and a willingness to *un*learn deeply ingrained assumptions. But it is also generative – offering vital opportunities to create educational practices responsive to the complexities of the 21st century and capable of fostering more liveable futures on a damaged planet. If education is to remain relevant in times of crisis it must embrace this challenge.