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ABSTRACT

Whether in reference to sustainability education, or environmental work, educators today find themselves reassembling the fractioned knowledge that has been cemented in traditional scholarly models. Framed and organized around competitive strategies in pursuit of “expert” knowledge, higher education is still effectively in need of a transformational pedagogical shift in order to empower students to become agents of change.

This presentation will discuss pedagogical practices rooted in sustainability that have guided the author’s constant renewal of an environmental humanities curriculum, for 15 years. The context is Latin America, a region rich in diverse forms of practical and adaptive knowledge developed across its many cultures, which paradoxically cannot escape high indexes of poverty and inequality, or its colonial legacy. Grounding pedagogy on sustainability facilitates rethinking eco-pedagogy as an opportunity to build knowledge collectively and collaboratively, while integrating disciplines, transnational contexts, and the embodied and emotional knowledge of human experience. Three examples from 2020-2022 illustrate the student-centered approach that evolves towards collaborative practices and a biocentric understanding of the world. “Teaching Climate Crisis at a Time of Crisis,” an interdisciplinary course that employs a range of perspectives and topics from coloniality and agroecology, to circularity and biocultural diversity, exemplifies a semester-long progressive shift in classroom practices towards collective learning, which on the onset of the pandemic had to respond to students’ demands for hope. A 2020 ecocriticism course illustrates pedagogical challenges in building safe spaces for conversation in which one’s vulnerability can be collectively and safely shared. The task included in transnational-transcultural discussions, between North American and Chilean students, following reflective practices about shared readings. Language and Sustainability, 2021, is an example of how illustrated youth and children’s literature from the Southern Cone enabled a biocentric approach to critically reading eco-literature, where students creatively addressed complex problems from diverse perspectives and frames of reference.

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