

Considering Lived Position in the World

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What brings me to submit some ideas for discussion at this conference is a continued concern with modes of learning and teaching, as opposed to subjects of learning, especially around themes of sustainability.

Some of the courses I teach address the concept of sustainability directly. I see sustainability as linked to an indigenous (*autochthonous*) way of being in the world. I also see the concept as necessarily linked to the course I teach in environmental science. All of these courses are *land-based*, *inquiry-based* and *experiential*, to varying degrees, depending on the number of students and particular parameters of the courses. What follows is a brief introduction to how these modes play out in my teaching.

- ⤴ To name just a few examples, about half of the classes in the environmental science course which I taught in the 2014 winter term were held outdoors. And, in the first half of the fall term in 2014, about half of the classes in my three courses in Aboriginal perspectives were taught outdoors. *Land-based*, then, when linked with *sustainability*, leads naturally to an outdoor classroom. Location, though, is only part of the picture in a land-based approach; understanding the world as co-teacher (Blenkinsop, S. & C. Beeman, 2010) is a much bigger jump. I mention this only because, for many of my students, the simple act of learning outdoors led to a significant shift in their conceptualization of teaching practice.
- ⤴ Another, very natural move in teaching sustainability, is to let student questions become the innovators and motivators for learning (*inquiry-based*). The role of the teacher becomes much less the dominant species in an ecosystem, as it were, and much more the occupant of a particular niche in an ecosystem of learning, with links to other aspects of the ecosystem. The niche in this case is at least partly to be understood as the asker of good questions. And in a faculty of education, this role also entails the teaching of the asking of good questions, through the consideration of the process of asking good questions.
- ⤴ *Experiences* naturally arise and occur in a setting that is not a classroom, because the unplannable world offers constant entry points that invite its consideration. Recent research in neuro-science corroborates the significance of the natural world in learning, especially at key moments in the development of the brain. A brain shaped in conjunction with lived experience in the more-than-human world may influence overall health in through later life. Carefully designed experiences allow for “tuning” of the brain may enable its most intricate generation and establishment of neural pathways. Experiences also enable a learner to comprehend otherwise inaccessible ideas.

Despite the above-noted ideas, there are more significant questions that need to be addressed in deepening learning around sustainability. I am concerned that what is most crucial to the teaching of sustainability is not the kind of ideas raised above which involve beginning to conceive of the world as co-teacher and adopting modes of learning suited to themes of sustainability. (And all of these things are at present considered rather a stretch by most teachers at almost any level). I believe that what is most crucial in understanding sustainability issues is precisely what takes the learner from the position

of objective, external judge, to an active participant, without special privileges, within an ecosystem. In other words, I think that in considering really successful teaching for sustainability, what is at issue is the capacity for a teacher to enable the changed *position*, in ontological terms, of the learner. And this can only occur – in much the same way that questioning the asking of questions, noted above – through a change in the teacher themselves. This challenges the idea of education in the global west, and so represents a much more significant challenge for sustainability education.

I would argue that the changed position of the teacher is contingent upon that teacher's experience of an altered position within an ecosystem, which takes the teacher outside the realm of *homo mobilis*, and into the realm of non-anthrocentric position within an ecosystem. To make this case, I refer to experiences and conversations with Aboriginal elders, and to my own experiences in and with the more-than-human world. A significant aspect of altering this position is engaging in labour that meets life needs directly, which continuing to ensure the well-being of the ecosystem.

Given the need for brevity in this document, allow me to list just a few of the possible moments in this process of this presentation:

Introducing *homo mobilis* and consideration of the thoughts possible for *homo mobilis*. (I challenge whether sustainability, except superficially, can be considered).

Introducing the possibility of other ways of being in the world, with reference to lders describing other ways of understanding, interacting with, and living in the world.

The significance of labour and the meeting of life needs directly through interaction with the ecosystem as a means of changing position within it.

What sustainability might look from a changed ontological position.

What sustainability education might like look like from a changed ontological position.

References:

Blenkinsop, S. & C. Beeman (2010). The world as co-teacher: Learning to work with a peerless colleague. *Trumpeter*, 26 (3), 26-39.