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## APPTIVISM, FARMING, AND ECOJUSTICE ART EDUCATION

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Rapid, undeniable environmental changes and increased, forced migrations of communities of people and animals are all widely known phenomena. Despite mounting scientific evidence and credible data collected over a period of time, we see too little action in actual policy changes, and we witness slow ideological and concrete changes in education reform occurring globally. This insistence on stagnant ways of being, knowing, and functioning remains, even though there are plenty of reasonable arguments presented for the necessity and urgency of modified attitudes in people's relationship with nature, the use of natural resources, and the decrease in democratic and equitable attitudes. Recent years have, once again, presented individuals, communities, and nations with a wide and disturbing array of natural disasters, violence inflicted by extremists groups, and unnecessary violence or violating speech used by professionals supposedly in charge of peace and order. We have witnessed mass migrations of people to escape hunger, war, and violence, and we are witnessing ever-greater fights for resources for survival as well as steep increases of corporate colonialism. At the end of most days, one is left to wonder how to stay positive and how to maintain hope for the generations and individuals who currently attend our teacher education and K-12 classes, especially when most public debate and discussion either promotes further ignorance and denial or offers a rather pessimistic view of the future.

The social and ecological problems we face today are beyond the scope of art education to resolve. However, to remain distanced, critical without caring and empathetic openness to diverse perspectives, or isolated in institutions (schools or higher education) has never been proven to produce meaningful experiences that form platforms for transformation. Broadly thought-out change efforts, social justice campaigns, and activism-based projects that are designed with intent; that are conceptually responsive; and that form partnerships with

a range of individuals and instances, including corporations (ironic), nonprofits, funding agencies, activist groups, political agencies, scientists, schools, and care-facilities, can aid in rethinking the structures of our curriculum. As a result, we can make broader reconceptualizations concerning the epistemology and pedagogy in art education. When thinking more broadly and aiming at larger-scale impacts, students and other people involved can gain a truer sense of agency and empowerment. This realization that their studies and educational experiences prepare students to become true educational, cultural, socio-communal leaders and workforce members with unlimited potential to change things that they, or the communities they work with, deem urgent or worthy fosters hopeful and empowered attitudes. Aligned with many scholars writing about the need for curriculum change (e.g. Bowers, 2012, 2014; Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011, 2015; Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016), I argue that the current norm and standard-based curriculum is no longer sufficient in aiding individuals and societies to change beliefs, perceptions, and cultures toward sustainable and ethical attitudes and practices. Instead, “we need to rethink, reconfigure, and reinvent much of ‘what we know’ from an entirely different angle” (Ellsworth & Kruse, 2013, p. 14) and apply this to our research and practice. The paradigm shift being called for acknowledges the deeply intertwined and relational nature of all people and other living species or inanimate matter but also understands how injustice, domination, and violence are not separate from environmental concerns but are deeply rooted in cultural and economic crises and their history. My current thoughts concerning art education pedagogy during this era of increased concern for the environment and social justice are influenced by the EcoJustice Education approach and inspired by the research, teaching, and writings of those groups and individuals who address cultural and ecological justice in their work (Bowers, 2012, 2014; Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012; Martusewicz, 2013, 2016; Martusewicz et al., 2011, 2015; Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016; Shiva, 2005, 2017).

In this chapter, I first explore the concepts of diversity, democracy, and sustainability, and then discuss how the EcoJustice Education framework and art education pedagogy may benefit from close collaboration and assume an active role in individuals, institutions, and societies working toward strong democracy and cultures built on deep, mutual respect. Through this text, I propose an attitude of *radical relationality* as a democratic mentality and an orientation of self and explain how this relates to orientations of *commons* and *strong democracy*. Finally, I briefly share experiences from an art education course built on commons thinking, *apptivism*, and the idea of creating change toward sustainable farming by working together and utilizing critical thinking, empathy, advanced technology, and artistic forms of communication and expression.

## Diversity, Democracy, and Sustainability

EcoJustice Education (Martusewicz et al., 2011, 2015) names three concepts at the core of transitioning toward the pedagogy of responsibility: diversity, democracy, and sustainability. Diversity is defined as the “the condition of difference necessary to all human life” (2011, p. 22, italics removed). This difference is born and becomes apparent in relationships between two or more entities. In these relationships, in which difference is conceptualized as a “generative condition” (p. 22, italics removed), the foundation for democracy and sustainability is formed. This generative condition is important as it indicates that diversity is not about dividing people into mass groupings, based on genetics, for example, but an active creative space between people, things, ideas, etc., relying on Bateson (read also Martusewicz, 2016), further contemplates that nothing exists in isolation, and all diversity is born from subtle differences in complex relational forms of communication. To become aware of and sensitive to these diversities defined by relations is foundational for education and pedagogy that leads to embodied, felt, and ecological intelligence, and that is accepting of strong democracy that leads to more sustainable communities.

According to Shiva (2017), “humanity stands at an evolutionary cross road” (n.p.). It has become urgent to make joint decisions that will either lead to more violence, intolerance, and hatred resulting from increased domination and colonization of basic goods or allow us to live in “Oneness...celebrating our many diversities, interconnected through bonds of compassion, interdependency, and solidarity” (n.p.). Shiva, presenting an opposing view for the false “oneness” of forced assimilation, suggests a relational and interconnected oneness with the world and with all forms of life that she believes can expand consciousness and create possibilities for profound understanding and experiences of diversity.

Simply put, democracy is based on two principles: equal rights and equal responsibilities. The acknowledgment of and support for all forms of diversity to formulate in humanity, nature, relationships, knowledge, skills, intelligence, language, resources, and so forth is a foundational concept and a precondition for democracy. However, as people are always and inherently unable to comprehend the complex web of interconnectivity and the long-term impact of any decision, ethics of care should weigh heavily on contemplating the value and emphasis assigned to various contributions (Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016). Further, the cultures of domination over others, animals, and nature are so deeply rooted in the systems of thinking, language, and experiencing that much of injustice goes unnoticed or with minimal recognition at all times. Thus, much of the so-called democratic speech in societies and education is mere lip service embedded in terminology, language, and practices that deepen inequality rather than work toward real solutions (Bowers, 2012, 2014; Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012; Martusewicz et al., 2011, 2015).

Influenced by and working alongside, for example, Shiva (2005, 2017) and Bowers (2012) EcoJustice educators explore how a money-driven economy and global corporations have gained power over the basic human needs. Anthropocentrism, individualism, and false premises of progress, as well as the idealism that monetary goods equal happiness and status in life, have long roots in the Western history of thought. These attitudes destroy natural diversity among people and within natural environments as people have been slowly convinced that survival, knowledge, and happiness are tied to wealth gain and possession of advanced technology. Shiva (2017) writes about the “resurgence of the real”. The *real* Shiva refers to, the acknowledgment and appreciation of local and intergenerational knowledge, skills, beliefs, intelligence, resources, and experiences, is at the core of much writing on cultural commons (Shiva, 2005, 2017; see also Bowers, 2012, 2014; Martusewicz, 2013). It is also tied to the idea of oneness, and earth democracy, the understanding that all living and nonliving things are connected, have intrinsic value, and consequently have the rights and responsibilities of a person, derives from this awareness (Shiva, 2005, 2017). EcoJustice Education promotes the ideas that each member of a community has a right for participation and “strong democracy as a decision-making process and a way of life begins from the assumption that no matter what one’s ability level, every person’s integrity, capacity, and aliveness – his or her *being* – is to be *respected* equally” (Martusewicz et al., 2011, p. 40, authors’ emphasis). Within these communities or commons, in which strong democracy guides attitudes and participation, sustainability or the ability for the community and natural systems to regenerate can take place.

## EcoJustice Art Education

For decades, art educators have worked toward and articulated pedagogical models that would help establish environmental issues and social responsibility at the center of art education (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Anderson & Suominen Guyas, 2012; Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Gablik, 1991; Garoian, 1998; Illeris, 2012; Krug, 2003; Jagodzinsky, 1991; Mantere, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2004; Quinn, Ploof, & Hochtritt, 2012; van Boeckel, 2013). I believe that by sharing our articulations on how we engage in pedagogies that sincerely aim at finding solutions, we can collectively work toward improved curricula, practices, and societies. Arts educators and artists working with EcoJustice educators can help social and ecological justice-oriented activists and community workers in understanding how to meaningfully intertwine the arts into all learning and thus help learners reach learning that would be otherwise inaccessible. Many are looking to define caring, ethical, and activist notions of belonging and responsibility, and articulate locally contextualized but also potentially global pedagogical and communal movements. The arts and art education can make accessible and understandable some of the intergenerational, embodied, tacit, and curiosity-driven

learning that, for example, Bowers (2012, 2014) and Quinn, Ploof, and Hochtritt (2012) bring up in their writings focused on the commons.

My current thoughts on art education align with many others: to promote critical, feelingful, empathetic awareness and dialogue, solidarity, ecosocial justice, and liberation through responsible education in various forms and platforms—and to gradually cause a change in worldview toward more sustainable paradigm. In working toward more sustainable and holistic epistemology and pedagogical practices, I propose centralizing environmental sustainability and dignity as principles for art and education. Continuing on the notions and ideals of strong democracy, commons, and deeply intertwined and respectful relationality, I propose an attitude of *radical relationality* as a democratic mentality and orientation of self in relation.

Bowers (2014) and Martusewicz (2016), for example, understand that differentiating relationships create everything; in other words, difference is unavoidable and generative. In contrast, Shiva (2017) highlights the deep connectivity in oneness. I propose taking this attitude, a bit further, by altering one's self not only to encountering these relations but by allowing these evolving relations to change the perceived self. This orientation entails intentionally and willingly altering one's self into continued relations, relationalities, and encounters with perceived and non-perceived other(s). On a personal level, this means willingness and desire for openness and intentional flexibility of the perceived self.

In conceptualizing the relational and embodied self, I have been influenced by Ellsworth's (2005) notion of the "learning self." Ellsworth articulates a self and pedagogy in constant making. For Ellsworth, the learning self in the making is experienced "when my self and what I know are simultaneously in the making, my body/brain/mind is participating in an event that exist outside the realm of language" (p. 2). Further, Ellsworth locates "the experience of the learning self as a self not in compliance but *in transition* and *in motion* toward previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world" (p. 16, author's italics). Through radical availability, I perceive the self-in-relation surrendering to unperceived relationalities that may foster the emergence of previously unknown awareness and lead me to nonbinary thinking. Through the attitude of radical relationality, I cherish the potential for renegotiating the foundations of my being and knowing. This orientation and attitude is an attempt to expose the limits and vulnerabilities of my self-in-learning and to look for verges of knowing that may provoke further interfaces for understanding with others, things, and ecologies. The same orientation is then applied to professional practice, including curricula, pedagogy, and methodology (philosophy, practice, and intent or ethics). This may not seem radical to some, however, considering that participatory orientation to learning leaves the directions of learning, the forms it takes, the meanings that emerge from open-endedness initially undefined, altering one's private and professional self to be constantly evolving in relations adds a level of further vulnerability and ambiguity.

In the following section, I briefly articulate some perspectives and thoughts that currently guide my teaching in general. First, I believe that trying to accomplish something in isolation (e.g. teaching and learning in a closed-off classroom) or by relying on the efforts of very few is daunting. Much like in commons thinking, I support opening up to the community to recreate education and learning that makes immediate and direct connection to other aspects of life. Borrowing from Quinn, Ploof, and Hochtritt (2012), I intend to practice “an arts education *for* social justice that moves away from doing things for people and toward doing things in solidarity *with* them” (p. xxi, authors’ emphasis). Arts education built on the commons thinking within this context means that we learn and work in ways that are deeply ingrained in caring attitudes, empathy and responsibility, that value diversity and aim to care for the community in sustainable ways.

Second, in my experience, people using unconventional artistic methods or who are politically oriented activist or performing artists are great collaborators and specialists in what they do. As professional educators with knowledge of the research and pedagogy, we can participate in a broader education of communities and societies when collaborating with artists (and other individuals, communities, nonprofit organizations, and institutions) and build educational components around existing projects. Choosing collaborators who themselves challenge norms and normalized thinking or attempt to achieve the seemingly impossible is a fruitful foundation for alternative understandings to take seed.

Third, to meaningfully engage with sociocultural issues with the arts requires a profound appreciation for and at least a basic level of understanding of what it means to think, experience, perceive, understand, and exist with the arts. Curiosity, honesty, and openness for emergent relations need to guide learning with arts and one does need to be trained or skilled. This cannot occur if art is seen as a decorative element or solely another method to achieve predetermined learning objectives. I truly believe that participation in the arts and other forms of culture is foundational to healthy lives, and thus, it is my ethical responsibility to find and formulate ways to create opportunities for participation and learning within the arts for diverse groups of people.

Fourth, no meaningful learning can be expected to emerge from relationships and situations that do not motivate thinking and action toward learner-defined ends and needs. No matter how well-planned the units are, if the communal and individual purposes and goals for learning are not flexible and mutually supported, deeper levels of learning will not impact broader beliefs and actions.

Fifth, I propose that by balancing difficult concepts, information, and experiences with hopeful and positive learning components in a safe environment that gently challenges but does not forcefully push, the uncomfortable may have more potential for learners-motivated, long-term engagements and reflection.

Although I cannot provide solutions or definitive answers on how to form arts epistemology and pedagogy that helps educate more aware and just citizens,

in the remainder of this text, I wish to share a project description and some ideas that have challenged my thinking but also inspired me to imagine a better future. Similar to other educators who are endlessly critical of their practices and realize that real solutions are gems found only on rare occasions, I continue to search for better and more meaningful ways to learn and teach.

## Regenerative Farming, Global Campaigns, and Apptivism

After a few years of teaching higher education courses that focused on art, social justice, and environmental education, I realized that no matter how broadly or narrowly I focused the scope of each course (i.e. animal rights vs. combination of a variety of environmental issues), the learning was found somewhat impactful and meaningful but was still lacking in potential for long-term changes in worldviews, attitudes, and choices. While contemporary art has arguably taken a “pedagogical turn,” the field of (art) education is taking a turn toward radical, public pedagogy. As a professor of art pedagogy, I argue that learning deeply ingrained within the arts has great potential for facilitating change, especially when merged with a “pedagogy of responsibility” (Martusewicz et al., 2011, 2015; Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016).

The EcoJustice Education framework entails a “cultural ecological analysis of the roots of social and ecological violence” and “revitalizing the commons through care ethics and pedagogies of responsibility” (Martusewicz & Johnson, 2016). By facilitating learning that engages embodied, tacit, and sensuous modes of understanding the EcoJustice art education can create a viable path to engage students with pressing issues and community engagement in a ways that may lead to changes toward more sustainable communities. My current pedagogy involves joining environmental, economic, artistic, and cultural movements and campaigns that have ambitious goals but present realistic solutions to urgent issues. After I searched broadly to look for models or pedagogies that would provide applicable solutions, I have decided to try to teach jointly by partnering with a nonprofit organization and application-based campaigning effort.

The initial project completed a few years ago was to engage students in a critical study of the cultural and economic history of agriculture, global economics, the role of design, art, and education in social justice and environmental campaigns, and to critically examine public knowledge compared to the aims of public education and pedagogy. Lectures by specialists, campaign managers, and designers embodied engagements in farming, critical visual and text-based studies of websites, applications, and multi-platform campaigning as well as materials created to follow the Creative Commons principle tied learning to art education as a form of public, activist, hopeful, and participatory pedagogy. Technology, internet-based activism, and “apptivism” (application-based activism, or applications (apps) created for smartphones and tablets as a form of activism, to cause social and cultural change) were not presented as

neutral elements but rather studied with caution to further discrimination and marginalization and for their potential for further distancing from responsibility (“slacktivism”), action, and false promises of easy solutions.

The course was two weeks long and developed a partnership with a locally founded but globally spread nonprofit campaign that aims to support farming and agriculture toward sustainable and ethical practices. While this campaign began as a commercially produced app-product funded by wealthy individuals looking to reduce their carbon footprint, the project has now transitioned into a nonprofit functioning mode and enjoys protection and support from participating individuals and grant money. The project has gained its momentum through the hard work of invested individuals, and although much remains to be done, it provided a good example of how art professionals (application designers, animators, graphic designers, programmers trained in art institutions) supported by scientific data and knowledge can formulate campaigns and apps that have the potential to have a global impact. While it is a rather pressing issue for all public education to address the purpose, modes, and practices of education to maintain its relevance and status in cultures and societies, these kinds of partnerships with commercial and nonprofit organizations may allow us some insights into rethinking ontological and epistemological knowledge as it applies to learners at all stages of learning and life.

Students were brought to the project at the moment when the campaign had launched its educational projects. The application and campaign were also being reconceptualized for its identity, and the creators were looking for potential directions for the so-called second stage of its app-life. Our partnership was founded on a flexible course structure and open-ended goal-setting. To ‘give’ something to our partner but also to engage participants with real dilemmas facing the project, students were challenged to rethink possibilities for visual, artistic, and knowledge-based appivism, and more specifically in relation to this project, the potential directions for the campaign.

During the course, students explored the existing project including all the scientific, educational, and visual (campaigns, movies, multiplatform design) materials that support it. The design of the application and its host website was broken into conceptual, design, technical, and information segments, and the challenges constantly presented for the project were widely explored. Students were introduced to the EcoJustice Education approach as well as some activism-oriented projects in which scientists and artists worked in collaboration. However, much of the actual reading and inquiry was focused on the topic of regenerative farming and the artistic and visual materials surrounding and supporting it. The pedagogical structure and activities of the course were built on collaboration, direct and immediate possibilities for feedback and applicability, combination of critical information and thinking partnered with visual, artistic, and technical solutions that people have generated, and repeated sharing of responses, reactions, stories, and anecdotes. At the end of the course,



students presented their ideas for expansions and improvement to the manager and designer of the campaign. While the topic of the campaign is complex and the goals of the project ambitious, students also experienced how few invested individuals with skills in inquiry, analysis, technology, and art can achieve goals and audiences with rather minimal resources. Thus, the underlying theme was hope rather than overwhelmed devastation and shaming.

Perhaps not surprisingly, what was proven the most memorable component of the course was our joint visit to one of the partner farms. At the location, the farmers introduced us to the annual and daily functions of the farm operations, shared their perspectives on the economic, political, and philosophical issues involved, and explained the broader and contextual history of operations of farming including financial and managerial elements relating to each stage of farming life. After working a day at the farm's vegetable garden that provided produce for the food served at the farm restaurant as well as for the residing families, we ate together. In the past, I have been skeptical of the promotion of physical labor and sharing of meals as a form and foundation for meaningful engagement and understanding of the learned material. This experience partially changed my perception on the matter as planting seeds, raking, turning soil, watering, and especially spreading layers of manure and human compost evoked sharing of memories and lots of humor. And, the experience evened and relaxed the field of relational encounters. Although survival was by no means an immediate concern for my students or me, engaging in activities that are at the core of human survival, such as dealing with human and animal waste, manipulating soil, planting for food, or sharing a meal, are elements that promote complex face-to-face relationalities (Bowers, 2012, 2014) to emerge as part of the real (Shiva, 2005, 2017). While I do not wish to minimize the aspects of critical inquiry that guided the final projects for the course and that were intended to support the organization in their efforts, I am inclined to suggest that had the course content relied on studying from the print, listening to presentations, and identifying issues with the application and web-based campaign, this learning would not have struck any cord of possibly causing more profound sensitivity to the issues of the course.

What I learnt from this co-learning project is that pedagogical and curriculum units that are built in partnerships and that support learning beyond predetermined goals and objectives have the potential to engage students and other participants in continued contemplation and evaluation of beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Learning that is deeply and mutually respectful of participation, efforts, and contributions has potential for artistic and social and ecological activism that may lead to sustainable changes emerging from local commons but with potential for broader impact.

It must be acknowledged that much of this initial experiment to partner with a local and global campaign failed to reach its full potential, mostly because of the short duration of the course as well as the lack of readily built opportunities

for continued engagement. What proved to be as beneficial as anticipated was the course's limited focus on one campaign and its in-depth study as well as the developed understanding of the web of resources and people that are needed to come together in order to build an impactful project. Application technology and social media play a significant role in grasping the attention of the masses. However, no matter how well and artfully designed its ability to meaningfully and impactfully engage individuals and groups of people beyond clicking for clean consciousness or social acceptability or to change perceptions is slim.

Combined with the EcoJustice Education framework, art provides the means and ways of being and creating together and experimenting with thoughts, potentialities, and collective engagements that can empower and enable long-term changes. For several years, I was hesitant to articulate pedagogical thoughts that centralized love and care. Today, as I continue to develop my abilities to facilitate and encourage meaningful pedagogical engagements, I centralize the attitude of responsibility to guide ethical contemplations and analysis of historical discourses of injustice as well as the consequent actions that are taken to change attitudes and practices within and beyond commons.

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