

Book Review

Hensley, Nathan. (2011). *Curriculum Studies Gone Wild: Bioregional education and the scholarship of sustainability*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

ALISHIA A. VALERI

University

In *Curriculum Studies Gone Wild*, Hensley leads the reader on a journey in which his life experiences become the basis for a curriculum that fosters a sense of place, community and ecological revitalization. Hensley pushes the boundaries of what it means to learn in place and space and joins curriculum and sustainability studies together into what he calls “eco-curriculum”. Underscoring from the start the importance of nature immersion and exploration, one of Hensley’s many goals is “to forge an education that will enable students to...ecologize everything” (p. 7). He invokes a passion, deep interest and moral responsibility for all citizens to “realize the social, ecological, and interconnectedness between all phenomena” (p.7).

Hensley begins by calling attention to the overconsumption patterns of our current state of being on the planet. Further, he points to the disconnection that exists between students and nature, a pattern that he understands is a result of the lack of experiential opportunities presented within the classroom. To remedy this disengagement, Hensley argues

that students should get outside and encounter and/or experience nature and therefore learn experientially about our interconnection with natural phenomena. This educative step however, needs to be coupled with reflection, processing and synthesis, so that is it not merely stepping outside but an immersion in the place in which one lives. Immersing ourselves into place can raise awareness of both positive and/or negative elements, which in turn can foster democratic ideals of participation and civil engagement, as students may be moved to act upon what they see within their communities.

The name of Hensley's book, *Curriculum Studies Gone Wild*, signifies the potential of curriculum as a medium to reestablish education as method in which students and nature coalesce to form a new sustainability paradigm. By calling for a "de-carbonized" curriculum, he advocates for a curriculum premised on the notion of students learning to live or tread lightly upon the Earth. In essence, Hensley is suggesting that education is a catalyst for change, bringing new ways of thinking, doing and acting as they relate to living on the planet—for example, trying to minimize a carbon footprint. As Hensley nears the end of the first chapter, he lays the groundwork for a more in-depth discussion of sustainability as it is tied to a bioregional context. Citing a reverence for life as the lens to which sustainability is to be enacted and understood, the reader is led to an understanding of Hensley's underlining message of an eco-curriculum.

While the first chapter touches upon sustainability and education, the second engages the reader with an in-depth exploration of curriculum studies research as it intersects with ecology. An influential concept for Hensley is the idea of a curriculum of abundance (Jardine, Friesen and Clifford 2006), which describes an abundance of opportunities to explore in the places in which we live and to "live well within our place" (p. 34). The author utilizes this idea as a platform to imagine education to be one, which cultivates an ethics of sustainability. Furthermore, he sees

education in a manner which views students as more than consumers, but as advocates for ecological-social change. Hensley also works with the concept of *currere*, stated by Pinar and Grumet (in Pinar et al., 2004), noting how reflecting autobiographically upon one's experiences can lead to eco-consciousness. The concept of *currere* is a vital aspect within this text and is used by the author to clarify and enrich the discourse surrounding a "complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2004) such as ecological revitalization. Lastly, Hensley reflects upon the work of several curriculum theorists such as Dewey, Bowers, Noel and Annette Gough, and Gruenewald, who influentially shape his vision of a watershed bioregionalism.

Hensley's review of these works culminates in a unique vision wherein concepts of ecological revitalization and intergenerational knowledge sharing (Bowers) are blended with a critical stance of the potential of sustainability studies as it relates to curriculum (Noel and Annette Gough). More so, he merges democratic ideals of civic engagement and participation (Dewey) with the idea of getting to know the place in which one lives for the purpose of advancing inquiry and activism (Gruenewald). Hensley's vision is based on advancing an understanding of sustainability as it relates to new forms of curriculum—curriculum that focuses contemporary discourses "into a bioregional framework" (p. 15). Moreover, Hensley wholeheartedly believes in the ability of curriculum studies to help "protect Earth and advance the sustainability movement" (p. 20).

The author's originality of thought centers on his proposal of illuminating the inherent anthropocentric thinking maintained by following what has always been done in education. Hence for Hensley following what has always been done is perpetuating a carbon copy curriculum. He proposes to de-carbonize this existing curriculum within schools by advancing a bioregional understanding of place. Examining place (as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) is in the hopes of

fostering place consciousness, and a deeper sense of self in relation to the larger idea of living in an interconnected world.

Thus far in the book, the author articulates his ideas in a cogent manner as they apply to curriculum studies and sustainability and his projected vision of education. Additionally, as a reader I see the significance of Hensley's use of the bioregional framework as this could be applied (as he does state only briefly) to any place not only to natural settings. It is relevant and important to highlight this point—in that not everyone has had the same outdoor educational experiences as Hensley, nor may they feel the pull or call of the wild. Even more so, depending on where schools are located, students and teachers may not have easy accessibility to untouched natural environments. Therefore, the author's arguments are convincing and could be applied to understanding the world's continuous push towards urbanization, and how to live sustainably within this movement (Benton-Short & Short, 2008).

In Chapter 3, Hensley discusses the current material world as it relates to educational systems and environmental degradation. The current American educational system, as stated by Hensley, is stifling the implementation of an eco-curriculum. Educational systems premised on the industrial model of schooling coupled within a social efficiency paradigm create a carbon copy curriculum that emphasizes linear, compartmentalized thinking and relegates direct experiences to the periphery of learning. Further, the carbon copy curriculum as illustrated in its title produces copies of the same ways of thinking and acting amongst students, which "emphasizes training, uniformity, and conformity" (p. 50). Also, Hensley likens the concept of a carbon copy curriculum to a river not running its natural course. When a river, like a student is "controlled" or "channeled" to run a fabricated path, both the river and students are steered off their paths of natural inclination. Both, he argues results in heighten negative consequences—more flooding and erosion, and the hampering of genuine interests, intellectual curiosity

and lived experiences of students. Education, with a mechanistic worldview tunnels our vision to see only fragmented, narrow pieces of our planet, thereby reinforcing perceptions that disenfranchise notions of community, sense of place and sustainable living.

Although I am in agreeance with the author, I feel that changing the pervasive ideologies in education is a lofty goal. Nevertheless, change can occur and to implement Hensley's vision will require dedicated practitioners and, I would argue people genuinely concerned about the welfare of the planet. His aims are imperative and will require a coalition of like-minded educators, students and advocates to act in the pursuit of social justice for a healthy planet and population.

As a suggestion Hensley proposes to reinvest in intellectual exploration via the arts. The arts, for instance can connect us back to nature, and to ourselves by exploring our autobiographical narratives. Seeking a more authentic self reconnects us to "our personal river" (p. 63), one in which we can work towards "greening [our] imagination" (Doll, 2000 as cited in Hensley, 2011, p. 59), and work towards regenerating our identity as ecological stewards of the Earth. I feel that the implementation of autobiographical narrative adds to the richness of the text, as it highlights Hensley's experiences as an outdoor educator. While I read through the chapter the autobiographical narratives pushed me to reflect upon my own experiences in the places in which I have dwelled and currently dwell. Therefore, the author's desire to have education infused with self-reflection for the purpose of self-realization is insightful. It is also effective because it allows us to reflect upon our behaviour and who we are in comparison to others and our place in the world.

Hensley puts forth the notion that "to live sustainably, the human vote must be considered as just *one* of the many votes cast from the millions of species that compose this planet. Thus, living sustainability involves looking at the world ecologically" (p. 97). This quote

exemplifies the aim of his fourth chapter, which is to outline the history of sustainability as it intersects with education. In addition, Hensley discusses his view of curriculum as an ecological text. This notion is premised on the blending of sustainability and curriculum studies as a tool to foster a transformative educative potential. For Hensley, perceiving education through the lens of an ecological worldview rather than a mechanistic one deepens our thinking about human-Earth relationships and their inherent connectivity.

As a reader, I am intrigued by Hensley's belief in sustainability as a conduit for the advancement of healing and vitality. When we think about education serving as a basis for ecological healing of the planet, the more-than-human, and ourselves we can see the impact of learning that "valorizes the importance of being connected to our bioregion" (p. 113). A last comment which by no means closes the informative stance of this chapter, is Hensley's potential plan to answer the Earth's S.O.S. He states that incorporating a curriculum solidified as an ecological text, developing eco-literacy in students and cultivating a land ethic can "position environmental intelligence at the top of our educational priorities (p. 133).

Working toward ecological revitalization and sustainability will require fostering a sense of place. In Chapter 5, the reader is guided through definitions and examples of what constitutes a sense of place and its inseparable connection to place-based education. Referencing works by Gruenewald & Smith (2008), and Sobel (2004)—to name a few—Hensley highlights the tenets of place-based education as a way to explain and foreground the importance of learning from and within the place in which one dwells. Further, he coins the term "bioregional poiesis", which "denotes a profound connectivity with place" (p. 146). Bioregional poiesis is a concept that utilizes the uniqueness of each place with its surrounding ecological and social contexts as a springboard for educational experiences. Some of the desired outcomes of focusing on

place are the development of authentic interest for one's community, to make meaning with place, and the re-engagement of youth in place-specific work such as restorative ecology.

In addition to bioregional poiesis, Hensley proposes a unique watershed approach to education that forms part of the larger eco-curriculum of place framework. This approach builds upon place-based education by adding a component of educational experiences tied to learning about the watershed that resides in one's bioregion (or place). A watershed is defined in the text as "an area of land that drains to a common body of water" (p.158). The purpose of incorporating such a framework for Hensley is to unify action amongst all people worldwide, yet to provide an education that is "contextualized to fit our place, the place we inhabit" (p. 158). Examining education through the watershed perspective is to expand the idea of interconnectivity as it links to sustainability. For instance, polluting one area of a watershed will ultimately pollute the common body of water. Hence, learning to live in harmony with our bioregion requires that people are "fully implicated" in our current and future solutions to environmental emergencies (p. 159).

Turning to the last chapter, *Trudging Towards Sustainability*, Hensley continues to demonstrate his passionate voice in his mission to share the power and significance of thinking and acting sustainably. Particularly interesting in this final chapter, is his attention toward sustainability by finding our way back to a human tempo, one which calls for us to slow down and pay acute attention to the patterns that we see out in nature, and to tap into a "human rhythm—a cadence of inquisitive proportions" (p.182). By tapping into this human tempo, we can start to re-listen and find our "human speed not machine speed" (p. 182). Leading from this thought, as one amongst many, Hensley eloquently connects sustainability to a prayerful act. Theorizing about sustainability is a prayerful act because its focus is on a "way of being—it is an ethics" (p.

188), a guiding principle by which humans “live lasting and lovely on the planet” (p. 188). Even further, sustainability as a prayerful act moves action because of intention, it is our intentions as humans to stop thinking about the Earth within a Cartesian scientific worldview, but acknowledging and calling to the centre spirituality and aesthetic perspectives.

Although Hensley alludes to a carbon copy curriculum and its dismantling, he discusses his idea in more detail by suggesting that curriculum can de-carbonize a carbon copy curriculum. In general, to de-carbonize a carbon copy curriculum requires a move towards an organic educative paradigm, a paradigm that fosters a “spontaneous and natural form of educational discourse” (p. 203). Education based in experience as it ties to one’s bioregion can cultivate biophilia—a love of nature. Once a student connects emotionally, spiritually and physically to the place in which he or she dwells, they can develop a strong sense of community, sense of place and sense of self. The hope for a new eco-curricular framework for sustainability will ultimately require an educative movement to teach, and subsequently “equip our youth with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to forge viable solutions” to face head on the “prospect of an anthropogenically generated ecological collapse”(p, 204). To connect or reconnect spiritually to the Earth provides a mystical element to Hensley’s curricular conception. And this element I believe is desperately needed in education and in wider society. Connecting in this manner can forge a deep respect for and commitment to change. Moreover, connecting spiritually, emotionally and physically contains the potential of developing deep-rooted feelings of affection for the more-than-human.

Hensley posits that the fields of curriculum and sustainability have the potential to transform the future of this planet. Curriculum theorists are a “community of healers...charged with the task of restoring the balance”, offset by contemporary educational forces based in biophobic

views of the planet (p.218). Embracing humanization is a “step towards sustainability”, one couched in the creation of self and eco-literacy as a way to “read the world and the word” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Lastly, when humanity realizes that we inhabit this planet as partners with the more-than-human, we can then advance towards a more holistic, unified ecological community. The strength of utilizing a place-based method has merit as a transformative movement, and as one reads Hensley’s text one is convinced of the potentialities of investigating the boundaries within space and place, and of education’s continued capabilities for long-lasting alterations for the planet.

As an educative text, *Curriculum Studies Gone Wild* provides the reader with clear explanations of the intersections between the fields of curriculum and sustainability studies. The possibilities of Hensley’s arguments are far-reaching for education. For instance, due to the non-prescriptive nature of Hensley’s eco-curriculum for sustainability, it is transdisciplinary and approachable, and thereby applicable to all levels of education. Hensley reviews complex topics but presents them in a manner that is easily assimilated by the reader, thereby making his text a valuable addition to curriculum, and education. Even for a novice reader new to the concepts he puts forth, one can take away a deeper understanding of the importance of place, as well as how to cultivate an ethics of caring and become stewards of the Earth. Lastly, Hensley illustrates with passion the potential of education to be the vehicle of change in today’s uncertain environmental future. Further, his educational perspectives provide hope to live better, and more attuned to nature, others and society—as the conditions of Earth affect all aspects of how we live and where we live (economic, political, cultural), regardless if we choose to see them or not.

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