

ECOPEDAGOGY

What is Ecopedagogy?

Ecopedagogy is a discourse, a movement and an approach to education that has emerged from leftist educators in Central and South America including Paulo Freire, Moacir Gadotti and Leonardo Boff that seeks to re-educate “planetary citizens” to care for, respect and take action for all life. How can we, as citizens of the planet, participate in the creation of a world that we want instead of simply observing how those who are profiting off of extraction and exploitation create our world for us? What does an education look like that can encourage people to face what is happening, take responsibility for ourselves and work to create healthy, vibrant resilient communities that serve everyone, no one excluded? What kind of education is really relevant today, given our current social and ecological crisis? How is traditional environmental education *not* relevant? These are some of the questions that are asked by ecopedagogy, to which it attempts to respond.

Ecopedagogy Principles

As a movement and an approach to education, Ecopedagogy is alive; it is open and fluid to be defined by its practitioners who critically engage with it. In this way it remains continuously relevant. There are however, some basic principles outlined in the Ecopedagogy Charter, which have been elaborated on and interpreted by subsequent works. Some of these principles include:

- ★ **Social, Ecological and Climate Justice:** Not one or the other - but justice for all life, centering the voices of those who are most impacted by our current injustices. Ecopedagogy is a critique of environmental education which draws false lines between “nature” and society, ignores the economic and social oppression at the core of environmental destruction and invisibilizes environmental racism.
- ★ **Popular Education:** Ecopedagogy is an extension of Paulo Freire’s seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Many of the concepts of power and oppression are expanded to include the non-human world as oppressed as well. As an heir of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Ecopedagogy is grounded in popular education in which power is shared, participatory dialogue is the key methodology, learning leads to action and learning starts from and responds to the learners’ lived experiences.
- ★ **Post-Issue activism:** Issues of social and economic justice, democracy and ecological integrity intersect and are interdependent. Ultimately none of them are possible without all of them intact. Educators can choose whichever issue their learners are most personally connected to as an “entry point” or location to start from in order to then move towards an integrated understanding of the



others.

- ★ **Planetary Citizenship:** Our lived reality is becoming globalized, we should globalize our sense of community, responsibilities and our commitments as well.
- ★ **Art Education:** Ecopedagogy encourages people to develop the capacity to feel, intuit, imagine, create, relate and express themselves. In this way we move from object to subject, able to participate in articulating and creating the world we want. This implies that the multiple languages/intelligences of theatre, music, visual art, photography, dance, etc. are fundamental to engage as tools of expression and creation in the educational project.
- ★ **Care:** Dis-care of each other and of the planet has contributed to our current planetary crisis. Care can “conjure the strength to search for peace in the midsts of conflict”, “rescue the dignity of the condemned” and “permit a revolution of tenderness to prioritize the social over the individual.” - Leonardo Boff, *Saber Cuidar*

A Brief History of Ecopedagogy

Paulo Freire, Moacir Gadotti and Francisco Gutierrez were having lunch in Sao Paulo one day in the late 1990s and came up with the word and basic concept of Ecopedagogy. Along with organizing the International Meeting, “The Earth Charter in an Educational Perspective”, all three of them then set out to write books on the subject. Gadotti wrote *Pedagogy of the Earth*, Gutierrez wrote *Ecopedagogy and Planetary Citizenship*, Freire however passed before he was able to write another book. Since then Leonardo Boff of the Liberation Theology movement and multiple others have joined them in Latin America to form what has become an Ecopedagogy movement, based out of the Paulo Freire Institute in Brazil. There are currently 3 Ecopedagogy centers in Brazil, one in Costa Rica and multiple articles, practices and resources in Spanish and Portuguese on the internet. Richard Kahn published the first book in English on Ecopedagogy: *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement* (Peter Lang, 2010) and says that Ecopedagogy is:

“(A) blending of critical pedagogy and environmental education that will allow each to overcome their previous theoretical limitations towards the realization of a more inclusive, critical and transformative ecopedagogy” ~ Richard Kahn, “Towards Ecopedagogy”

ECOPEDAGOGY AND PLANETARY CITIZENSHIP

by Francisco Gutierrez and Cruz Prado

Translated excerpt by Natalia Bernal and Levana Saxon.

“Pedagogical Keys”

The keys to the vitalization of the inherent educational processes of ecopedagogy:

1. **You make the road by walking.** If pedagogy is a process, then it is made daily. Pedagogy does not exist as a premeditated theory to learn, but as a course to personally discover and create. The steps taken to create the pedagogy are lasting, once taken. Pedagogy is an opening of new paths that are dynamic, unrepeatable, meaningful, and spiritual.

2. **Walking with meaning.** From the dynamic, creative and relative perception, we learn that education can only be a process of elaborating meaning. The beacon that guides us in this process is not a near or far goal, but an aspiration that we have to create inside of ourselves. Feelings, intuition, emotion, and understanding of our life experiences are these guides for creating a reality we want to live. Walking with meaning signifies giving meaning, sharing meaning, impregnating daily practices with meaning, and understanding the meaninglessness of other practices that people will try to impose upon us. Every step of the educative process has to hold personal meaning.

3. **Walking with the attitude of learning.** One is in the attitude of learning when one is open, receptive, and searching for learning. In other words, when one is acting as a conscious subject of the process. Applying pedagogy requires the ability to; feel, intuit, vibrate emotionally, imagine, invent, create and recreate, relate and interconnect, organize self, inform self, communicate, express self, localize, process, and use the immense information of the planetary platform, search for causes, predict consequences, criticize, evaluate, systematize, make decisions and think holistically.

What does the development of the above capacities imply? It implies breaking stereotypes, and valuing the development of the human being and social transformation. It implies that the educator, without letting go of her or his role as “student”, concern her/himself with meaningful learning aimed towards the formation of environmental citizenship and a planetary society. It implies the formation of a consciousness that goes from the individual to the collective in order to create social transformation.

4. **Walking in dialogue with one’s surroundings.** Education is a process of exchange and interactive communication between the educand, her/his surroundings and the educator. Education is a process of communication, co-participation, co-production, and co-understanding with those involved in the education as well as with the environment the education is taking place in. At this level of sharing the educational process, one should be empathetic with their co-learners.

5. **In walking, intuition is the priority.** Intuition, (subjective life experience, feelings,

emotional expressions, and imagination) plays an essential role in the learning process. Feelings motivate us much more than reason or logic. They give our lives significance. To learn is much more than comprehending or conceptualizing a subject. It is to care for, share, give feeling to, interpret, express, and live. Traditional education considers rational thought the most important form of knowledge. The “new education” needs to support (in addition to rational thought) other forms of perception and knowledge as being equally valid and productive. In experiential education, emotional intelligence (knowledge of intuition, feelings, emotions, and imagination) can balance the use of rational intelligence and should be valued and taught from childhood.

6. **Walking as a productive process.** The educative process must have immediate and permanent results, derived from practice itself. Education is productive when the subject constructs knowledge and expresses it, re-elaborates information, experiments with it and applies it. One needs to be conscious of what “products” are being obtained. Therefore it is important to document the learning, to keep a written, graphic, or audiovisual testament of the daily process in which the search for more knowledge along the themes of study can continue. This documentation is not simply a collection of completed given exercises, but a daily account of the information found in the street, the newspapers, radio, television, and cultural, artistic, technical and scientific manifestations.

7. **Recreating the world as you walk.** Expression is synonymous with education. In that sense, it is contrary to repression, depression and suppression. From the moment in which the student becomes owner of their expression we can speak about education. Coercion and obedience are contrary to free personal expression and autonomy. Communication, expression and the use of language that is “alive” can elevate the quality of education and liberate external controls. Creative expression enables the establishment of an environment that gives psychological security and helps to develop creative talent.