

**Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement:
A Book Review Symposium**

Richard Kahn, *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010.

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A Review of Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis

Environmentalism today is at a crossroads. Given the catastrophic nature of further capitalist development, it becomes less and less visibly clear as to whether or not environmentalists work to protect the environment, or merely to advance their careers by staging “environmentalist theater” consisting of technologized public relations efforts while the defoliation of ecosystems continues unabated.

In this regard, abrupt climate change appears to be a stage for “environmental theater.” Most of planet Earth’s nation-states have become signatories of the Kyoto Protocol, thus admitting, implicitly, that there exists a problem with excessive atmospheric carbon dioxide. Yet the Kyoto Protocol is itself broadly ineffective at halting accelerating carbon dioxide emissions (Raupach et al., <http://www.pnas.org/content/104/24/10288.full>), and the Summit in Copenhagen of last year was incapable of producing further restraint.

Abrupt climate change, however, is merely one facet of a multiple crisis. A general accounting of out-of-control aspects of the global environmental crisis can be found in John McMurtry’s 2002 essay “The Planetary Life Crisis: Its Systemic Cause and Ground of Resolution” from Miller and Westra’s *Just Ecological Integrity: The Ethics of Maintaining Planetary Life*. All of McMurtry’s statistics, moreover, can be updated to the present year: thus, for instance, the oceans are predicted to suffer ecosystems collapse according to a recent article in *Science* magazine: (<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/328/5985/1523>) just as the first five months of 2010 were the hottest on record (<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2010/0707/Global-heat-wave-hits-US-reignites-climate-change-debate>). As McMurtry argues in summary: “Stripping of the planet’s natural resources and life systems by unregulated and deregulated global market activities will persist and increase in the future without effective intervention. Synergistic interrelations of these simultaneously increasing loads will, in addition, compound their destructive toll.” (181). Humanity is consuming the planet toward some solemn, desertified end.

For Richard Kahn, author of the groundbreaking new book *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis*, the planetary environmental crisis presents an opportunity for deliberation, to be learned through environmental education. However, author Kahn views this effort as so far having resulted in failure:

...while it may be unfair to lay the blame for social and ecological calamity squarely on the environmental movement for its inability to generate effective pedagogy on this matter, it must still be noted that the field of environmental education has been altogether unable to provide either solutions or stop-gaps for the ecological disasters that have continued to mount due to the mushrooming of transnational corporate globalization over the last few decades. (6)

This, then, is a book with the most meaningful of intentions: how to make environmental education “real” to the extent that it could be a positive agency dealing proactively with the environmental crisis. Kahn’s domain of inquiry is broad in this regard: he suggests a practical critique of standard practices in environmental education, as well as a critique of everyday life. Thus in the first chapter he enters into a critique of the Zoo School as well as the Shundahai Network’s Peace Camp (at the Nevada Test Site) – and on the end of more general social criticism linking the everyday and the political: ecopedagogy for Kahn is “political education and educational politics” as well as a force for transforming the lifeworld:

... a northern ecopedagogy must be concerned with the larger hidden curriculum of unsustainable life and look to how social movements and a democratic public sphere are proffering vital knowledge about and against it. (22)

Thus, the potential for ecopedagogy – that it will uncover a “hidden curriculum of unsustainable life,” an anti-nature social tendency which impedes our attempts, either real or feigned, to deal with environmental crisis.

In doing so, Kahn moves swiftly to construct the problem of environmental crisis as a problem of pedagogy, of placing human-nature relations in the domain of “ecoliteracy.” Environmental knowledge is thus dethroned from its high perch as the domain of experts. Citing Bob Jickling,

Kahn argues that

it is extremely worrisome that a major emerging trend within education for sustainable development is to treat education as a mere method for delivering and propagating experts' ideas about sustainable development, rather than as an opportunity to work for participatory and metacognitive engagements with students over what (if anything) sustainable development even means. (14)

Of course, this book is “about” ecopedagogy – but the leap made at the beginning of Kahn’s book is from discussion of physical fact (“the world is in an ecocrisis”) to a discussion of pedagogy (“the promise of environmental education needs to be realized”) and the implied assumption bridging the two precipices of discussion is that, no, the experts can’t solve the problem of ecocrisis all by themselves, thus the educators must intervene on behalf of the public. To play with Kahn’s logic here: if “education for sustainable development” were a “mere method for delivering and propagating experts’ ideas,” what harm would it do? Readers may ask: how do we know the experts can’t solve our environmental problems for us? Why construct environmental problems as educational problems?

This book, then, might have found it useful to make the connection given by Kees van der Pijl (1998) as regards the “cadre class,” the class of professionals empowered to make major decisions about society. The “cadre class” must create managerial solutions to social and environmental problems while at the same time pleasing the corporate and political masters – for Kahn, then, such an explanation would help to make the not-obvious connection between environmental expertise and neoliberal economics.

After reading chapter 1, then, we are left on the “ecopedagogy” side of the precipice, with the “hidden curriculum of unsustainable life” viewed as a barrier to global sustainability. This is not to be legislated out of existence, but rather to be unearthed through a hermeneutic of suspicion, presumably so that radical action can be planned. Kahn’s hermeneutic of suspicion enjoins an ecologically radicalized version of the critical theorist Herbert Marcuse:

I would like to imagine that Marcuse would have built on his ecological philosophy and politics to become a tireless promoter and organizer of a sort of

ecopedagogy that is not a simple addendum to standard curricula, but rather an attempt to raise education under capitalism in favor of a pedagogy of the repressed that seeks to wage revolutionary political struggle toward a future culture based on radical notions of sustainability and a humanized nature that can represent values of tolerance, beauty, subjectivity, and freedom on a cosmic scale. (140)

I suspect, though, that Kahn's critique of a "matrix of domination" in mainstream ecopedagogy (9), borrowing from Patricia Hill Collins, also (later) suggests the Marcuse who opposed the "performance principle" and "affirmative culture" as manifestations of capitalist discipline.

Kahn's tour-de-force presentation of radical ecopedagogy in this vein is achieved on many levels. Chapter 1 offers a critique of the educational model of paideia, researched and critiqued from its origins in education in classical Greece. Chapter 2 critiques "technoliteracy" as it has been delimited in terms of computer-based vocational education. Chapter 3 discusses "technoliteracy," again, in light of the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire and of Ivan Illich. If we are to understand how we are consuming the planet to death, we must seize the "opportunity to critique present-day technopoly" (62) as Neil Postman called technology-worship.

Chapter 4 is about traditional ecological knowledge and the extent to which it and mainstream science interact. The stakes of this chapter are revealed in the project of "reconstructing science with traditional environmental knowledge" (111) in which science is granted a perspective (here, of course, for human defense of Earth's ecosystems) rather than being merely imagined as a "view from above" imitating traditional views of God looking over His world.

Chapter 5 is about a "Marcusean pedagogy," bringing together radical ecopolitics and Herbert Marcuse's theories. In such a vein, Kahn discusses the Earth Liberation Front, PETA, and the Battle of Seattle (1999) as manifestations of protest and of conflict between different visions of the natural world. Overtly, Kahn chooses Marcuse because Marcuse offers a theoretical bridge between a "positive utopianism" (127) of respect for nature with the struggle against ecocide carried out by environmental radicals. The book as a whole concludes with a memorial to Judi Bari, an ecological activist whom Kahn regards as epitomizing the sort of agency he would like to see in the world.

In writing this book, Richard Kahn points importantly to “ecopedagogy as political education and as educational politics,” (137) suggesting that environmental knowledge can be distilled across the board for its political worth as an aid to the domination of nature or (hopefully) in the direction of action toward a sustainable society. The way forward from Kahn’s analysis would be in an investigation of the effectiveness both of mass political action in defense of the environment, and of environmental knowledge (starting, perhaps, with chapter 4 of Kahn’s book, agroecology and its models of sustainable land management, and conservation biology, with its concern for biodiversity) for its position in the ongoing war on nature.

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Ecopedagogy through Comparative Education and Freirean Pedagogy Lenses

Although fluid in its definition, ecopedagogy is inherently progressive, in which critical education and praxis towards transformation which betters both society and the environment, are central tenets. The comparative (and international) education field and Freirean pedagogy are important frameworks to deconstruct oppressive social systems, deconstruction actions of environmental devastation, deconstruct current environmental education pedagogies, and then construct effective ecopedagogies and praxis. In this article, Kahn's book will be viewed through these frameworks to review his work.

It can be argued that ecopedagogy's roots are from popular education traditions of Latin America stemming from Freirean pedagogy - defined in its function to construct knowledges by dialectically determining the politics of knowledge development which often is line with and seldom questioned dominant ideologies. However, the claim of invention for the field is a problematic one because there have been countless cultures, in all parts of the world that have learned and taught others of socio-environmental links. What ecopedagogy allows for, the pedagogy that Kahn develops in his book, is how to learn and teach these links in an increasingly globalized-from-above society in which negative effects of environmental devastation is being felt by those far away who benefit¹. The pedagogy that Kahn constructs is one that allows teachers and students to deconstruct structures of present society which cause devastation and views the oppressor/oppressed relationships between humans, non-human beings, and all else which is the planet.

The field of comparative education, defined by its interdisciplinary and comparative nature, offers tools to construct ecopedagogies and associated research. Ecopedagogy develops out of

¹ Giddens defines Globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 1990). Persons who benefit from environmental devastation are often far away from those who most feel its negative effects. For example, persons who benefit economically from inexpensive soy in the North does not feel firsthand the negative effects of deforestation in the South with ever increasing demand for more and cheaper soy needing more and more land.

pedagogies that compare and contrast how the environment/nature is constructed through a society's education (formal, non-formal, informal, public pedagogy, etc.), critically analyzes the politics of oppressive systems, and dialectically develops praxis which counters the dominant knowledges which are deemed as socially and environmentally unjust. Comparative approaches critically question the reasons and costs, within social and environmental frameworks, to construct learning for effective praxis to emerge toward effective and sustaining solutions for decreasing/ending environmental devastation. Freirean pedagogy, in addition to allowing for horizontal dialogue to develop knowledge of both teachers and students for critically questioning what is seen as "truths" through oppressive education, it gives the needed hope and love which helps to break fatalistic thought that society is non-transformative and there is no alternative to environmental devastation's path.

Comparative education focus upon "...explaining how and why education relates to the social factors and forces that form its context" (Epstein, 1992, p. 409). The field of comparative education gives the tools in helping students² to understand the complexities between environmental devastation and social conflict. The field's interdisciplinary and dialectical nature allows educators and researchers to view these complexities from multiple perspectives and disciplinary frameworks to gain greater critical understanding- aiding in the development of more effective pedagogies. (Crossley & Watson, 2003; Foster, 1998). For ecopedagogy, comparative education aids in revealing the connections between education, mis-education, and non-education of links between environmental devastation and social conflict. In addition, international education gives a comparative perspective similar to the scope of many environmental problems - an international one with their problems not respecting social, political, and often geographical borders³. In addition, linkages between social and environmental injustices are difficult to determine because various perspectives are ignores such a viewing problems within a much larger time period framework because negative effects are often insignificant or dormant for very long periods of time⁴ and a non-anthropocentric⁵. The

² The term "students" is used here loosely as anyone who learns inside and outside classrooms. Education here is defined within the realm of formal education, informal education, and non-formal education.

³ For example, air pollution does not only affect the area near polluting sources. Pollutants are carried with wind without regard of local, national, or international borders.

⁴ For example, it often takes several generations for ill effects of toxic waste disposal to become apparent due to long period of container degradation, or slow seepage to surface.

field of comparative education gives the advantage of being “literally constituted by border crossings, and comparative educators, by necessity, roam[ing] far beyond education” (Klees, 2008, p. 309).

Kahn’s book is comparative in nature, throughout using comparisons between ecopedagogy and tradition environmental education developed through current dominant politics. Many current environmental education programs focus on knowledges developed from non-transformative frameworks including: constructing sustainable development, a contradiction in terminology itself, somewhere between a economic, anthropocentric framework and traditional conservationism; the use of solely Western Scientific⁶ knowledge and methods for teaching and research; the belief that future technologies will solve all environmental problems; and, most disconcerting, that current economic, political, and social constructs are “natural” and transformation against them is impossible and inherently unnatural. These are only a few that Kahn critically and dialectically discusses throughout his book, allowing the reader to determine the tenets of ecopedagogy to transform society by their deeper understanding through reading and rereading current politics and the environment- Freirean in essence.

Alternatives to the current reality, constructed by dominant ideologies, are not spelled out in the book. If someone is looking for a textbook which gives a linear understanding of what ecopedagogy is and a step-by-step guide on what needs to be completed, this book is not a good match beyond the introductory chapter. Kahn has written a much more intriguing book than this- developing rich critical analysis of a few topics that illustrate the complexity of diverging issues such as the ones mentioned previously. He compares and contrasts these contested terrains to allow the reader to understand how differing characteristics of the same issue both, as Freire critically examined throughout his own work, oppress and transform towards social justice; dominate and empower; and strengthens the sense of fatalism and utopia in its education.

⁵ For example, species extinction is often not directly negatively affected by humans but there is an intrinsic right for a species to not become extinct, beyond a framework determining how such an event would negatively affect humans.

⁶ The term *Science* is written with a capital “S” to indicate dominant and often oppressive Western Sciences as compared to non-dominant sciences which are often non-western (Harding, 2006).

Freire stressed in his work that horizontal dialogue needs to be full of love and understanding so there can be progress to “recreate the world” towards a better world, with actions defined from the dialogue’s conclusions. Freirean praxis⁷ allows for people to theorize, dream and dialogue about a better world, and then go out into the world to transform it. Without the ability to dream of a possible utopia, the belief that there are better alternative to current oppressive societal systems, the sense of fatalism towards a devastated planet seem like the only pathway, without any alternatives. Ecopedagogy needs to embrace the dream of a utopia both environmentally and socially through horizontal dialogue that talks about possible pathways to it⁸. Freire stressed the need for praxis. Ecopedagogy must not only facilitate *conscientização*, but also encourage appropriate action determined through open dialogue. Socialization, which includes traditional educational environments, involves inherent inequality (Mezirow, 1991). Freirean pedagogy stresses that both the teacher and students are equals within the classroom, with both of them deciding what and how learning will take place within a non-threatening learning environment (Freire, 1998, 2005; O’Cadiz, Wong, & Torres, 1998). Oppressors develop a sense of fatalism in the minds of the oppressed that environmental degradation is a necessary evil. Empathy is needed to consciously construct better alternatives, by breaking free from the *false consciousness* that environmental destruction is necessary and beneficial⁹. Kahn constructs ecopedagogy in which positive changes towards social and environmental justice is possible; however, current influences on society develop an ideology what is current is natural and any change is unnatural. He deconstructs current environmental pedagogies and other societal systems to see how students and teachers can learn from one another to deconstruct the oppressive ideologies forces upon them, hidden or unhidden. This focus of possibility of change is developed throughout the book, framed within a variety of subject. For example, the passage below uses theories of Marcuse to construct uses of technologies to critically determine oppression rather than be a tool

⁷ This is social progress through education. Freire expressed this idea by writing, “...human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world” (1970, p. 125).

⁸ Dialogue needs to be full of love and understanding, so there can be progress to “recreate the world” for the better; and so there can be action following from what conclusions come about; to reject fatalism and to have *hope* about being able to dream for a utopia (Freire, 1992, 2005; Freire & Freire, 1997).

⁹ This mental process is often difficult for oppressed peoples to comprehend because they often lack the efficacy to recognize viable alternatives as realistic possibilities. Empathy and efficacy increase, by having the masses recognize their oppression, and by encouraging their ability to break hegemonic rule. Freire described how a sense of humanity in an environment of dehumanization initially seems to be an impossibility; however the masses must realize that this dehumanization is only a construction created by their oppressors (Freire, 2005). The need for environmental destruction is only a construct of the oppressor- the need is not tangible.

for oppression.

That is, reality should be seen as complex and contested by a variety of forces, rich with alternatives that are immediately present and yet ideologically, normatively, or otherwise blocked from achieving full realization in their service to society (Marcuse, 1972, p. 13). It is therefore the utopian challenge to radicalize social practices and institutions through the application of new diagnostic critical theories and alternative pedagogies such that oppressive cultural and political features are negated, even as liberatory tendencies within everyday life are articulated and reaffirmed. (2010, p. 83)

Although environmental devastation is a key effect and cause of social conflict (Gadotti, 2008, 2009), this fact is often systematically hidden and thus ignored by most of the population (Commoner, 1971; Gadotti, 2008) or political hidden curriculums to systematically sustain/increase hegemony (Giroux, 2001). Environmental devastation always benefits a few and a main goal of ecopedagogy is to determine the politic behind how do they educate persons to hide the negative aspects and promote it as necessary and even, at times, beneficial to the masses. Kahn's comparisons between education to develop dominant ideologies and ecopedagogy, stresses the development of a critical pedagogy of dominant views of the environmental and the interactions that develop dominant ideologies in which humans take and destroy nature in the name of progress. Progress in this sense is defined not centered on social well-being or the inherent "goodness" of the earth holistically, but one of economic progress which sustains and often increased hegemony. Throughout the book Kahn stresses the reasons, theories, and often cites specific examples on how the public is systematically educated by those who benefit from the destruction. This is a key aspect that is told and re-told throughout the book that without a society constructed around the idea that progress is only able through the oppression of the earth, with Gadotti's idea of planetary citizenship in which the earth is the most oppressed citizen of them all. Citizenship must be extended in multiple dimensions for ecopedagogy to be effective. Planetary citizenship views Earth as a whole, recognizing humans as a *part* of Earth, rather than seeing Earth as something to be exploited and dominated by humans. Citizenship must also be intergenerational to "...cover our responsibility for the long term effects of environmentally harmful behavior and the primary goods of future citizens... reach[ing] beyond the moral community of those living at present" (Postma, 2006, p. 25). Freirean pedagogy provides a

framework for an environmental caring and responsibility constructed inside and outside of an anthropocentric framework, allowing one to view the planet holistically as a biosphere. It must be intergenerational due to the longer time spans of environmental problems. As seen in the passage below, Freire viewed love and hope as necessary for progressive and revolutionary education, something not to be limited to human beings, but for the entire Earth holistically.

...the notion seems deplorable to me of engaging in progressive, revolutionary discourse while embracing a practice that negates life- that pollutes the air, the waters, the fields, and devastates forests, destroys the trees and threatens the animals. (Freire, 2004, p. 120)

Although some readers might forget that that ecopedagogy is main subject at the different points of the book, seeming at times to developing red hearings, ecopedagogy is developed by Kahn, incorporating ideologies from educational scholars, classic and modern philosophers, myths, and various indigenous knowledges. Kahn writes in, what I believe, to be a circular fashion such as Freire did, developing a complex background of ideas to, at the end, wrapping up the importance of ecopedagogy to understand what is told at the beginning. He allows the readers to dialectically understand the complexities of environmental devastation, society, and nature (beyond humanity) and then compare what being taught by most programs currently and the need for changes towards a more progressive environmental education. In addition, he stresses the need praxis and provides many examples throughout his book. For example, his own qualitative research with the Shundahai Network's Peace Camp, among others, in which we critically questions the dominance of Western Sciences with the indigenous knowledge learned at the camp. Kahn forces the reader to critically question his or her own assumptions of the environment, nature, and society's advances, and the current traditional environmental education systems that are so prevalent.

This book is sure to be dismissed by many who profit off of nature's destruction because the development of questions raised by the reading lessens their dominate strangle hold. Others will dislike the book because in some sections it calls for the end of unbiased teaching that must show both sides of the environmental fence. Although traditional and progressive environmental education seeks to form an ideology that lessens nature's devastation, a construction of education

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that is usually criticized among progressive educators, this type of education is counter-hegemonic.

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Book Review: *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement* by Richard Kahn

Critical pedagogy has been fueled by its propensity for continuously problematizing the purposes and practices of civic education. In large part, it is a discourse firmly dedicated to agitating for conceptions of justice and democracy as part of our collective answer to the question: *why is it that we educate?* In this new text *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement*, Richard Kahn joins the chorus of critical educators attempting to answer this provocative question, but does so in a very unique, impassioned and important way. He urges educators and citizens to realize the importance of placing ecological concern and care not only at the forefront of their pedagogical endeavors, but of their personal lives. To be thus concerned, Kahn argues, entails the radical reconstruction of societal institutions in all of their deeply educative capacities, with particular emphasis on the need to transform the dominant worldview of global speciesism, a reified order of unsustainable technologies, as well as an anti-democratic and colonialist scientific tradition.

There are a growing number of educational theorists, practitioners and asserting (at least rhetorically) that the enhancement of democracy is a central aim of civic education. However, there is little consensus with respect to defining democracy, even less regarding what this looks like in practice, and fewer still who privilege the placement of ecological concerns at the center of the struggle. This is the ultimate gift of the book – its powerful mapping of a new multiperspectival edu-political paradigm which moves us beyond a focus on humanity to centering on life in all of its forms.

The text begins with a terrifying description of the state of the world's ecosystemic collapse, including the mass extinction of marine species, many species of megafauna, birds and amphibians, the conversion of forests, wetlands and prairies for agricultural purposes, as well as exponential rise in global warming. We are confronted then with the speciesist worldview that has inculcated countless generations to believe that it is "natural" to dominate nature for the purposes of producing human desires. When Kahn juxtaposes this ideology, that has prompted

such startling ecological trends, with the state of mainstream environmental education programs the problem becomes starkly clear. While acknowledging the important achievements of environmental education over the last half-century, Kahn's critique is to contextualize the field by illuminating its ineffectiveness at a macro-level where it has been "altogether unable to provide either solutions or stop-gaps for the ecological disasters that have continued to mount due to the mushrooming of transnational corporate globalization." (p. 6)

Kahn's survey of the deficiencies within environmental education is coupled with an indictment of the trend by transnational corporations to co-opt movements for sustainability for the purpose of masking predatory and inherently unsustainable practices associated with globalization. This prompts his call for the creation of mandatory cross-curricular eco-educational programs rooted in a thoughtful philosophical, theoretical and ethical base, which have the potential to ultimately cultivate "ecoliterate planetary citizens." To this end, ecoliteracy is conceptualized as constituting three interrelated forms of literacy, namely technical literacy (working knowledge of environmental science and functional survival-oriented competencies), cultural literacy (knowledge of how cultural practices either promote or hinder sustainability), and critical intersectional literacy (knowledge of the oppressive and emancipatory potentials located within existing socio-political and economic structures based on an analysis of power).

Kahn's representation of ecopedagogy calls upon educators to acknowledge then a kind of tripartite challenge in front of them – they must, at once, teach *in* the world, *about* the world, but also *for* the world. Representing a sort of Hegelian triad, teaching *in* the world means being honest in the assessment of the ecological catastrophe currently underway and humanity's role in the domination and evisceration of nature. Teaching *about* the world entails the careful outline of differing epistemologies, alternate cosmologies, and ways of being. And finally, teaching *for* the world means working with a radical love for all earthlings currently alive, and those to come in a time we will not see. In this sense, the book reflects the spirit of a kind of Arendtian love for the world (1968) - where ecopedagogy prompts people to be responsible for and accountable to all of the 'other others', both human and non-human, where teachers are more than technicians, families far from consumers, and students never a deficit.

Nurturing a philosophy such as this, in a historical moment such as ours, at times bears large similarity to making flowers grow out of cement and iron. As market fundamentalism, neoliberal politics and transnational capital sweep the globe it is no wonder that the language of business is threatening to hijack the entire discourse of education. A central task ahead then is the retrieval and renewal of the language that we use to talk about schools, society and the inextricable relationship between, in order that there can be true hope in the realization of a socially-just and ecologically-sound planetary community.

Staying true to the dialectical theory that drives this text, Kahn's words often simultaneously provoke profound hope and sadness, inspiration and despair. The fight ahead which constitutes the motivation behind the ecopedagogy movement is no doubt a formidable one. And during moments of reading the book paralyzing feelings of 'I am only one person; I have only one classroom – *what can I do?*' at times take over. Kahn encourages people to claim a space, to stand up and be counted. He reminds us that: "now is not the time for tears ... we as educators must do all in our power to confront the powerful forces that appear ever increasingly to associate the drive for economic and political profit-taking with the all-out exploitation and annihilation of life on earth. We must not be silenced by the intensity of the threat. Rather, we must teach as if our lives depend on it, because in a very real way, they do." (p. 148)

And so, with this realization in mind, Kahn's words beckon us to revisit the question: *why is it that we educate?* If we are up to the task and agree that the constant renewal and improvement of democracy is the promise we make to generations to come – then education needs to be recognized as a pivotal means through which this promise can be fulfilled. As educators working in the tradition of critical pedagogy, Kahn pushes our understanding of the call for democracy even further, reminding us that any education not predicated upon the health of our planet or the dignity and integrity inherent in the full range of our myriad ecological relationships with the world is at best sadly deficient, and at worst, definitively self-destructive. In the event that the ecopedagogy movement, as described by Kahn, takes hold in schools and spreads through communities (and it will only do so if movements unite across theoretical divides, political bounds, national borders, and identity categories) there may still be a world possible where

democracy is not thought of as synonymous with capitalism, where freedom is not equated with free markets, and “progress” never comes at the expense of nature.

For the students of critical pedagogy who arrive at this book through a deliberate effort to seek out a new source of inspiration and enlightenment, or those who stumble across it serendipitously, Kahn’s offering is a unifying force, a call for collective action that is desperately needed. This is a book which stands on the shoulders of the achievements of critical, feminist and postcolonial scholars who have been advocates for championing personal struggles as political issues and academic research that deliberately trespasses the imposition of suffocating disciplinary bounds and the sterile requirements of scientific study. In this sense, Kahn embodies Edward Said’s conception of a “true intellectual” (1994) who bravely embraces the “fingerprint” inevitably emblazoned on the construction of any text and the spirit of resistance which is the necessary accompaniment to revolutionary pedagogy. Put simply, this is academic scholarship at its finest – theoretically sophisticated, yet activist-oriented; appealing to reason and emotion, while leaving the reader critically enlightened about the world-as-is and ready to work for a world-to-be.

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