

Title: The Ethical Aporia of Ecopedagogy: A Perspective from Epistemic Extractivism

Research Overview:

This presentation examines an ethical aporia in Ecopedagogy: incorporating indigenous knowledge to decenter Western epistemologies risks reenacting the very colonial logic it critiques. It argues that Ecopedagogy's self-critical reflexivity remains Socratic rather than relational in its humility, failing to genuinely engage with others as knowing subjects.

Purpose of Study:

As interest in climate change responses and sustainable development grows, indigenous knowledge and non-anthropocentric worldviews are attracting increasing international attention. Against this backdrop, ecopedagogy — which inherits and develops Freire's emancipatory pedagogy — has gained recognition as an environmental education framework that challenges the dominant "Development" paradigm. Its distinctive feature lies in the active incorporation of indigenous knowledge and non-anthropocentric worldviews toward the decentering of Western epistemologies. However, an ethical aporia underlies this project: the very act of drawing upon indigenous knowledge risks reenacting the colonial extraction of knowledge it seeks to critique. This presentation aims to examine this aporia from the perspective of epistemic extractivism. It should be noted from the outset that this critique itself is conducted from within the framework of Western academic language, and cannot escape that limitation.

Research Methods:

The primary theoretical frameworks are Grosfoguel (2019) and Alcoff (2022). The former, through the concept of cognitive/epistemic extractivism, reveals the structure by which indigenous knowledge and worldviews are "conveniently appropriated" in parallel with material extraction. The latter critically theorizes extractivist epistemologies as practices of "detaching knowledge from its origins and identifying its value in a universal and objective manner," and further develops the argument that competing conceptualizations of value are structurally dismissed as obstacles to extractivist projects. It should also be noted that the author, as a Japanese researcher, does not occupy a straightforwardly "external" position in relation to Western colonialism, but holds a positional relationship to issues concerning the Ainu and Okinawa as a person from mainland Japan (Yamato). While this presentation does not have the scope to fully develop this issue, the research is conducted with an awareness that the author is not exempt from the very critique of epistemic extractivism being advanced here.

Results and Discussion:

Ecopedagogy draws upon non-Western knowledge systems — such as Santos's (2018) epistemologies of the South and Ubuntu — in pursuit of decentering Northern epistemologies. However, this gives rise to a twofold problem. First, there is the question of whether Santos's own framework is itself constructed upon Northern epistemological foundations. Second, the act of drawing upon Southern epistemologies such as Ubuntu as "useful" resources for ecopedagogical purposes may itself reenact the logic of extractivist epistemologies as theorized by Alcoff — namely, the universal identification of value and its detachment from origins. Furthermore, as Alcoff argues, competing

conceptualizations of value are structurally dismissed as obstacles to extractivist projects. This mirrors the very structure of epistemological dominance that ecopedagogy seeks to critique.

Ecopedagogy does contain a degree of self-critical reflexivity in response to such concerns. Yet, with reference to Alcoff (2022), this reflexivity remains Socratic rather than relational in its humility — an awareness of the incompleteness of one's own knowledge, while taking for granted the legitimacy of "critical reading" as a method — failing to genuinely engage with others as knowing subjects. It is precisely this distinction between two modes of humility that enables a precise articulation of the limits of ecopedagogy's sincerity.

This presentation does not offer a resolution to this aporia. Nevertheless, in theoretical inquiry, the honest disclosure of irresolvability may itself constitute a scholarly contribution in the sense that it precisely delineates the contours of the problem.

Keywords: ecopedagogy, epistemic extractivism, neocolonialism, relational humility