

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: CRITICAL ECOLITERACY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY HUMANITIES
CURRICULUM TO CULTIVATE ENVIRONMENTAL
CONSCIOUSNESS

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I argue that contemporary struggles with sustainability must be addressed from the perspective of critical cultural analysis that identifies attitudes and behaviors as rooted in specific worldviews, narratives, metaphors, and belief systems, and that challenges and re-envisions these structures of thought in order to reformulate new alternative conceptual frameworks for positive interaction with the more-than-human world. I define this pursuit of critical cultural reflection and creative conceptual transformation as *critical ecoliteracy*, and I propose the incorporation of its goals and practices into educational curricula in secondary and post-secondary humanities classrooms. I outline a list of conceptual resources that I consider essential for engaging in critical ecoliteracy and for developing an approach to the world that values and considers the full, interconnected community of life in our global ecosystem. These skills and capacities include the practice of empathy; an understanding and appreciation of ecological and relational interdependence; ethical consciousness; an awareness of local and global socio-environmental systems and problems; critical awareness of the role that language and discourse play in shaping attitudes and behaviors; knowledge of the varying worldviews and belief systems of different cultures; a capacity for imagining creative alternative future paths; and a sense of agency to enact change. I encourage the development of critical ecoliteracy curriculum materials that cultivate this set of capacities. I next describe pedagogical strategies I recommend employing when applying critical

ecoliteracy materials in school settings, and I offer my own model critical ecoliteracy curriculum as an example of these goals and approaches. In order to assess the potential value of such a curriculum, I test my materials in classrooms by teaching them myself and by asking a volunteer teacher to use them. I then analyze student writing, survey results, and teacher feedback in order to gauge the effect of the curriculum materials on student thinking. Using qualitative content analysis, I explore the patterns of reactions presented by students in response to the materials, and I draw conclusions as to how effective the model curriculum may be at achieving the goals of critical ecoliteracy that I have outlined.