

Environmental Humanities Field Methods: Accessibility and Inclusion in Place-Based Pedagogies

Dr. Astrida Neimanis, Dr. Natalie Forssman, Daisy Pullman and Haida Gaede

Project Summary

In this project, we are researching and developing pedagogies for increasing access and inclusion in place-based teaching and learning. One main output will be a new course for Bachelor of Sustainability, Anthropology and Cultural Studies students. We are also developing open access materials and resources for use by diverse community partners, at the same time as we learn from their expertise and experience.

Background: Place is not “neutral”, and neither are field methods!

In the new field of environmental humanities (EH), environmental issues are inseparable from cultural contexts. EH frameworks explore how place is never neutral. Place is always shaped by and experienced via cultural, social, economic, historical and personal factors. Immersive field methodologies are one way to learn about the “thickness” of place.

Yet, while EH offers influential scholarship on themes like care, inclusion, and diversity in nonhuman environments, the field’s dominant pedagogies and practices replicate the exclusions of many settler academic learning environments, where a “standard” body (often white, male, neurotypical and without disabilities) is assumed as the participant norm. Particularly in relation to field methodologies, disability or cultural and structural access challenges are seldom addressed.

As a way of unsettling dominating settler epistemologies and methods in relation to place, this course will also help prepare students to engage syilx-led land-based learning in other contexts.



Learning about Place at Woodhaven EcoCulture Centre. Photo credit: Astrida Neimanis

Course modules are guided by verbs that orient us towards different ways of knowing place:



This project will develop field methods that integrate the knowledges and experiences of people with diverse abilities and backgrounds to deepen how we all come to know “place.”

Consultation with Pedagogy, Disability & Inclusion Experts

In March 2023 we organized two consultative workshops with experts in disability and inclusion, and invited them to a practice-run of one of our course activities. Key findings from these workshops included:

- Importance of student co-design
- Importance of engaging live perspectives on disability and disability studies, beyond just universal design or “one-size-fits-all” models; good pedagogy is responsive and flexible.
- Need to address how engagements with “the senses” have been shaped and limited by Western epistemologies
- Opportunity to address the learning environment alongside built and ‘natural’ environments, all with connected accessibility challenges
- Equity & access needs of instructors are part of the picture, too!

What is a “Sensory walk”?

A “sensory walk” is a way to learn about place by engaging our senses. These walks interrupt dominant colonial understandings of place as ahistoric or atemporal, and invite us to *know differently*. Instead of a dot on a map or name in an index, place becomes a relationship that we can pay attention to, and cultivate.

Our project is developing protocols for such “walks” to be offered to learners of all abilities and situations, as both a classroom and community-based activity. Thanks to clear guidance and many options, learners are led by their own capacities and comfort levels. At the same time, they can “unsettle” their understanding of place in a supported way.

What’s Next?

• Community Workshops

Spring 2023: We will organize workshops with diverse community partners to share our activities, and seek their feedback on how these learning materials might be adapted to support the goals of their work.

• Finalizing Course Design

Fall 2023: We will finalize our course design for Senate approval and complete development of our open-access community-facing materials.

• Sharing Our Findings and Prototypes

Winter 2023: Our team will share results from the project at an international conference and prepare scholarly communications in a number of formats.

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