

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

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Project Summary

This project researches and develops pedagogies for increasing access and inclusion in place-based teaching and learning. We employ a justice-oriented framework that includes attention to disability and neurodiversity, as well as marginalization on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, and other cultural and economic factors, such as career responsibilities. We apply these findings in a new course for Bachelor of Sustainability and Cultural Studies students. In addition to an experts' workshop, we have gathered diverse community members to pilot and discuss some of these methods. We will further disseminate findings in a peer-reviewed journal article.

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

The environmental humanities (EH) argue that environmental issues are inseparable from cultural contexts. EH frameworks explore how place is never neutral. It 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.

EH offers influential scholarship on themes like care, inclusion, and diversity in nonhuman environments, but 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.

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

How can access and inclusion deepen an understanding of place?

Considering access and inclusion in our pedagogies can radically shift how we understand “place-based teaching,” especially in environmentally-oriented courses.

Our literature review of place-based pedagogies in environmental humanities revealed examples such as winter skiing excursions, hiking on mountains, and boat trips down rivers. We asked: why do these assume that enhancing one's attention to ‘place’ requires a rarified understanding of it as remote, difficult, and likely exclusionary?

Our journal article (under preparation) argues for broadening our understanding of “place” beyond this “wild nature” stereotype. Campuses, bathrooms, city buses and even the digital place of ZOOM are all places worthy of our attention. To borrow a slogan from the environmental justice scholarship: these are also places where we live, work and play!

What We Did This Year:

- Held 2 Community Workshops at the FEELed Lab (Woodhaven EcoCulture Centre)
- Shared findings at a major international conference (4S) in Honolulu, HI
- Revised our course and presented it to the BSust Steering Committee, who decided it should be a required course for all BSUS students!
- Received course approval from the Senate Curriculum Committee
- Consolidated our findings for dissemination in an open-access peer-reviewed journal article



Community members gather for a workshop at the FEELed Lab (May 2023)

A few tips for including place, access and inclusion in your teaching:

- Consider access and inclusion in your planning
- Do your classroom activities proactively consider the needs and capabilities of *all* students?
- .. but also leave room to be responsive!
- Students sometimes have competing access needs. Notice who shows up, and invite students to co-design solutions with you.
- Land Acknowledgements + Positionality:
- Consider how a Land Acknowledgement can be an opportunity to invite all students to reflect on their different relations and responsibilities to this place.
- Remote Access:
- Just because students can't always attend in person doesn't mean they can't participate. Prepare alternative class plans for remote application in students' own kitchens, backyards or neighbourhoods.

What's Next?

Our project has now officially come to a close, but the results of it will continue to reverberate:

• Rolling out SUST 304 / CULT390

From September, SUST 304 will be a core course in the Bachelor of Sustainability program! BSUS students will be joined by Cultural Studies students taking it as an elective.

• Sharing Our Findings

We will report our findings in a journal article aimed at academics with an interest in place, gender, disability, and similar fields, to share lessons of how to integrate these principles in their classrooms.

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