

Education 268:
Educating for Ecological Literacy
Spring 2012

Jody Cohen
Course Meetings: TBD
Office: Bettws-y-Coed 303 (Bryn Mawr)
Meetings by appointment
Contact info: jccohen@brynmawr.edu

Course Overview:

An elective offered through the Education Program that counts towards the Bryn Mawr-Haverford minor in Educational Studies and the certification coursework and also is a part of the “Perspectives on Sustainability” 360 at Bryn Mawr, this course focuses on educational policies and practices for and about sustainability education. We consider policies and practices that can empower educators, students, and communities to become “ecologically literate” agents of change for a more sustainable and socially just world.

Education has the capacity to prepare students to perceive, think, and problem-solve in new and creative ways, to nurture thinkers/actors who can help our society meet change. But education as a system also reproduces the status quo, acting as a sorting mechanism that perpetuates socioeconomic class, for example. In this course we work with the dialectic of education as both a preserver of the status quo and a laboratory for new directions, taking up Baldwin’s challenge that true education would produce citizens that ‘no society wants’ because of their capacity to think for themselves. What can we learn about how to create educational institutions and modes of teaching and learning that maximize students’ and community members’ capacity to discover fresh ways of understanding and acting upon deep societal challenges such as how we manage our shared resources? What does it mean to develop “ecologically literate” students, educators, and communities, and how can we participate in that endeavor?

The course will address key issues in ecological change, focusing on the question of what it means to develop “sustainability-literate” educators and students as part of the development of “Deweyan ideas about the fundamental social purposes of schooling, attends to the tensions created by the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social equity systems” (Nolet). What kinds of policies and practices might enable and empower those who are concerned with schools to engage deeply with and have real impact on complex social issues such as developing and practicing sustainable ways of living? How can education operate beyond schools, so that communities engage local knowledge to promote ecologically savvy ways of learning and living?

In this course we begin with several frameworks to investigate human beings’ relationship with our environment on the one hand and how change happens on the other. For example, resilience thinking offers a model of evolution in both the natural and the

human-made world that helps us analyze possibilities for intervention; the field of ecolinguistics gives us tools to address the relationship of language to issues of ecology and to cultural shifts in how we perceive and what we do. We then ask what education has to do with change: More specifically, what does sustainability education look like in different contexts and communities? What can we learn about effective practices at different levels and for people of different ages, what are the crucial issues and challenges to this kind of education, and how might we participate in this work?

The approach we take here is premised on the assumption that we all bring to the classroom our prior knowledge, diverse life experiences, and experiences as learners and teachers. The goal of this seminar is to create a space in which, through discussions, reading, writing, and activities, we are able to develop our awareness of the challenges and possibilities of using education to impact issues of sustainability; furthermore, we will work closely with the other 360 courses to develop our imaginations and sense of efficacy in relation to these issues as global citizens, educators, and learners.

All students will complete a field experience that meets the interrelated purposes of deepening our understandings of educating for ecological literacy and addressing the expressed needs of an education-related and/or a community-based organization. The Praxis component enables us to gain real life experiences with education in a range of contexts that will deepen our understanding of issues and ways to address them. We will learn both from our own field experiences and from sharing this dimension of the course with other members of the class. Since we will also use our resources to address expressed needs of people in the field, your work at your field placements will also allow you to contribute to teaching and learning in a real setting in which your efforts matter.

We are fortunate to be working with the **Bryn Mawr Praxis Office**:
Kelly Sheard, Praxis Field Placement Coordinator, ksheard@brynmawr.edu

This course is limited to 15 students. Priority goes to students in the other 360 courses and to those who are completing the teacher certification program or the minor in educational studies.

Learning Outcomes:

This course seeks to develop participants' knowledge, skills, and awareness of the following areas:

- recent history and ongoing changes and issues in relation to issues of education in relation to the environment and sustainability
- theoretical foundations for education that promotes ecological literacy, including relationship of language to theory and practice;
- approaches to developing curriculum and pedagogy geared toward developing ecological literacy among educators and students in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational settings;
- approaches to developing community-based sustainability education.

Course Policies

- This course will involve students as critical readers and writers of texts, active participants in class discussions, and participants in other education-related settings. Your presence and active engagement are essential. If the need arises for you to miss a class, be late or leave early, please call or email me ahead of time if possible. Missing more than three classes may lower your grade; excellent attendance and participation will enhance your grade.
- If there is a reason why you cannot complete a paper by the due date, speak to me about an extension BEFORE the date that the paper is due. Please limit your use of this option to one paper.
- Course papers may be revised and re-submitted for a new grade based on the revision. Please consult with me on the revision process. Revisions are due the last day of classes.
- In all written assignments, please take care to edit and proofread your work so that needless errors do not distract readers from the strength of your thinking.

Students who think they may need accommodations in this course because of the impact of a disability are encouraged to meet with me privately early in the semester. Students who attend Bryn Mawr should also contact Stephanie Bell, Coordinator of Access Services, at 610-526-7351 in Canwyll House, as soon as possible, to verify eligibility for reasonable accommodations. Haverford Students should contact Rick Webb, Coordinator, Office of Disabilities Services, at rwebb@haverford.edu or 610-896-1290.

Assigned Texts (available in the Bryn Mawr Bookstore and on reserve at Canaday)
Reynolds, Brondizio, and Robinson, eds. Teaching Environmental Literacy Across Campus and Across the Curriculum

Stone, et. al, eds. Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World

Other readings are available on the Moodle site for this course.

Assignments

IMPORTANT NOTES:

***We will discuss all assignments more specifically in class.**

***ALL course writings referring to your field placements must use pseudonyms.**

Field Placement

Each student in this class will be assigned (with your input and with consideration for your schedule) to a field placement site that includes work with issues of ecology and sustainability. The Praxis coordinator for the course will negotiate access to the site for you, plan transportation, and help you to navigate issues that arise. I am also available to help you think through ways to learn from and work within this educational context. You will work with your field site consistently throughout the semester, in some cases going to the site and in others working with your team or individually on site-related projects.

Draw on your experiences in your placement to contribute to class discussion each week and to explore the connections between the theory we discuss and what is happening in actual classrooms. You should incorporate direct quotations, vignettes, and references to your experiences into as many forums as possible (short papers, class discussions, etc.). Please note that all course writings referring to your field placement **must use pseudonyms**.

1. Field-based writings

(a) **Field log/memos:** Keeping a regular field journal will help you keep track of issues, events, and questions to pursue in course papers and the portfolio. You should observe the neighborhood, the school/community building and area, the culture of the place, the curriculum and pedagogy in use if relevant, and any other details you can access.

Each entry should be about a page long and should demonstrate thoughtful engagement with what you are learning in your field project. You will post these on your **FIELD TEAM BLOG on our Moodle site every Wed. by 8 pm**; this will help you to keep communicating and moving forward as a group and will also keep me in the loop.

Your weekly posts might include (but are not limited to) these guidelines:

- (1) Describe what you're seeing and hearing as fully as possible. Be aware of interactions and the explicit agenda of the site (e.g. in a classroom, what the class is doing and learning). As you spend more time at the site, you'll probably become increasingly aware of implicit and perhaps also competing agendas; keep track of these as well.
- (2) If you're involved in field-related research, what are you learning, how does this inform your work, and what are your ongoing questions?
- (3) Using your evolving notions of education for sustainability as a lens: What can you learn about this from what's going on at your site? What are your ongoing hypotheses and questions?

You will use your logs as a resource for two **field-based memos**:

(b) **Entry field memo:** Briefly describe your field placement, using online resources as well as your early visits. Be sure to address the role of sustainability education in your setting. (2 pages)

(b) **Mid-course field memo:** Tell a story from the site that has some bearing on educating for ecological literacy. Where and how do you see actual and/or potential learning going on? Also describe any areas where teaching and/or learning, developing teaching/learning materials, etc. seem particularly challenging. (2 - 3 pp.)

2. Reading responses posted to our CLASS BLOG on Moodle (a paragraph or two due Sun. @ 5 except when a field memo is due, as specified below):

This is an informal space for us to address issues and questions of concern raised by one or more of our readings and/or discussions due the previous week and/or the

next class day. Your own and others' posts will provide a source for our ongoing work together, including your papers for the course.

3. Analysis of a key challenge in changing education for a sustainable world

Using your reading memos and group discussions as a base, select a key challenge regarding the role of education in relation to issues of ecological literacy and a sustainable world. Clearly articulate the focal challenge and analyze its significance in terms of the frameworks we've looked at for understanding and impacting change; note ways that educators, scientists, and/or social scientists have framed or addressed the challenge, and consider your own questions and ideas for how best to take this challenge forward. (5 pp.)

4. Proposal for a sustainability education project in school/college/community:

Select an institution/community you'd like to have an impact on with regard to educating for ecological literacy, and consider what kind of project would accomplish your intended ends. Write a proposal for an action. This could be a proposal for a college course or program; a curriculum unit for an elementary school classroom, a plan for working with a community... In your proposal, name your target community, describe your proposed intervention, and set out your rationale (drawing on shared readings and any additional research) for these choices; include an annotated list of resources and/or materials needed, if relevant. (5 pp.)

5. Final project with other 360 classes (to be adjusted as the courses and Praxis projects proceed)

Use your fieldwork as a resource for extending and deepening your understanding of education for sustainability/ecological literacy. Describe and analyze your experiences and the data you've gathered over the course of the semester at your field site to elucidate approaches to working with these issues as evident in this setting. What do you see as crucial challenges and how have the key players, e.g. educators, site managers, students, community members at the site met these challenges? How does your deepened understanding of practice at the field site illuminate, and perhaps bolster an argument for revising current theoretical perspectives on policy and/or practice? Use the literature as appropriate for this field-based investigation.

Your final products might look like the following:

- (a) your field team completes your work with the site and represents this in some way to our class and the larger community. Formats could include written documents, visual representations, use of relevant technology (e.g. voicethread, Prezi), oral presentation, etc.
- (b) your field team submits documentation of your work in the form of a descriptive essay (see description above, approx. 6-8 pp.)
- (c) individuals submit auxiliary reflections on your participation in the field project, including bringing the lenses of interdisciplinary thinking and learning to your work (approx. 5 pp.)

Course design (with focal topics, questions, and readings):

I. Weeks 1 - 5: Frameworks for understanding the challenges and considering how change happens

What are sustainability, sustainable development, resilience thinking, ecology literacy, sustainability education...?

What is education? What's the relationship between education and change? specifically in relation to the environment/ecology/sustainability?

Week 1

Wed., Jan. 18: Orienting to the 360

Fri., Jan. 20: Field trip to Harriton House

Reading due:

Dewey, *Experience and Education*, "Criteria of Experience," pp. 23-46
googlebooks

Week 2: Purposes of education

Sun., Jan. 22 by 5pm: Post #1 to course blog (How do Dewey's and/or Orr's descriptions of the purposes of education resonate or not with your own experiences of education?)

Mon., Jan. 23

Reading due:

Dewey, chap. XI, in *Philosophy of Education*
Orr, excerpts from *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, "Ecological Literacy," "What is Education For?"

Wed., Jan. 25

Reading due:

Nolet, "Preparing Sustainability-Literate Teachers"
Nelson, "Effective Education for Environmental Literacy," in *Teaching Environmental Literacy Across Campus and Across the Curriculum*

Fri., Jan. 27: Morning field trip to Haverford Reserve

Reading due:

Week 3: Educating for change

Sun., Jan. 22 by 5pm: Post #2 to course blog (Select a line from Freire that puzzles/intrigues you and respond, raise questions, etc.)

Mon., Jan. 30

Reading due:

Freire, chap. 2, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Sarkissian, "Education," in *Kitchen Table Sustainability*

Wed., Feb. 1

Reading due:

Reynolds, "A Model..." and "Overview" and Applegate, "Environmental Justice and a Sense of Place" in *Teaching Environmental Literacy* (pp. 3-25)

Fri., Feb. 3

Reading due:

Lanza, Part IV of *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*

Week 4: Frameworks for understanding change

Sun., Feb. 5 by 5 pm: Post #3 to field team blog: Entry field memo (see assignments above)

Mon., Feb. 6:

Cities

Wed., Feb. 8: Karen Stevenson: Social network analysis

Reading due:

Fri., Feb. 10

Reading due:

Holling and Meffe, "Command and Control and the Pathology of Natural Resource Management" (Moodle)

Walker and Salt, *Resilience Thinking*, chapters 1 & 2 (Moodle)

Fazey, "Resilience and Higher Order Thinking"

Week 5: Frameworks for understanding change

Sun., Feb. 12 by 5 pm: Post #4 to course blog (responses to Fri. and/or Mon. readings)

Mon., Feb. 13

Reading due:

Schultz, *Ecolinguistics Reader*, "Language and the Natural Environment"

Chawla, "Linguistic and Philosophical Roots of our Environmental Crisis," in *Ecolinguistics Reader*

Wed., Feb. 15

Reading due:

Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities"

Fri., Feb. 17

II. Weeks 6 – 12: Educating for sustainability/ecological literacy: What does/could this look like in practice? Focus on issues of curriculum and pedagogy; putting theory into practice.

Sun., Feb. 19 by 5 pm: Post #5 to course blog (responses to Fri. and/or Mon. readings)

Week 6: Ecological literacy in colleges/universities

Mon., Feb. 20

Reading due:

Kiefer and Kemple, “Stories from our Common Roots,” in *Ecological Education in Action* (Moodle)

Wed., Feb. 22

Reading due:

Brabson, Glaser, Sideris, Pezzulo, chaps. 2,4, 7, 8 in *Teaching Environmental Literacy*

Fri., Feb. 24: Leith Sharp: How do you go about making an institution sustainable?

Writing due: Analysis of a key challenge (see assignments above; email to jccohen@bmc by 6 pm)

Week 7

Mon., 2/27, Wed. 2/29, Fri. 3/2: Korinna Thielen: Project-based analysis of BMC campus

Writing due: Fri., March 2 by 5 pm: Post #6 to field team blog: Mid-course field memo (see assignments above)

SPRING BREAK: March 5-9

Week 8: Educating learners and teachers in and beyond schools

Mon., March 12

Reading due:

Armstrong, Capra, Berry, Callenbach, Part 1 of *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*, pp. 11-44

Adams, “Art and Design Education and the Built Environment” in *Art, Community and Environment: Educational Perspectives*

Wed., March 14

Reading due:

Armstrong, Orr (“Place and Pedagogy”), Hass, Michael, Part II of *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*

Fri., March 16

Reading due:

Ecological Literacy

Week 9: Changing policies and practices in schools and communities

Sun., March 18 by 5 pm: Post #7 to course blog (responses to last week’s and/or Mon. readings)

Mon., March 19

Reading due:

Smith, Casella, Stone, Ruef, Parts III/IV of *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*

Wed., March 21: Anne Burrill talk: EU Environmental Policy

Reading due:

Fri., March 23

Reading due:

Stone, Briggs, Evans, Part IV of *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*

Week 10: Changing policies and practices in schools and communities

Sun., March 25 by 5 pm: Post #8 to course blog (responses to Fri. and/or Mon. readings)

Mon., March 26

Reading due:

Sideris, Pezzulo, Capshew, chaps. 7, 8, 10 in *Teaching Environmental Literacy*

Wed., March 28

Reading due:

Teaching Environmental Literacy

Fri., March 30

Reading due:

Schonemann et. al, Meretsky, chaps. 11, 14, in *Teaching Environmental Literacy*

Week 11

Mon., April 2

Reading due:

Larson, Gross, Schlegel et. al, chaps, 15, 16, 17 in Teaching Environmental Literacy

Wed., April 4

Reading due:

Fri., April 6

Writing due: **Proposal for a sustainability education project in school/college/community (see assignments above)**

Week 12: Communities, sustainability, and economics: Two cases

Mon., April 9

Reading due:

Kamel, "Ecological Education in the Living Environment," in Ecological Education in Everyday Life

Wed., April 11

Reading due:

Wingerter, "General Motors Role in Education for Sustainability," in Education for a Sustainable Future

Fri., April 13

Reading due:

IV. Project presentations across 360

Week 13

Mon., April 16

Reading due:

Tough, New Yorker

Wed., April 18

Reading due: TBA

Fri., April 21

Reading due: TBA

Week 14

Mon., April 24

Wed., April 26

Fri., April 28