

Climate Justice Education: Weaving Together Our Stories of Nature and Place

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On May 24th the 8th PIMA webinar on Climate Justice Education (CJE) took place, exploring the role of Adult Education in promoting Climate Justice. There were 64 registrants with about 35 attending. As with some previous PIMA webinars, the zoom host was CASAE, the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education. Thanks to Tim Howard the CASAE secretariat for creating a registration and zoom link and assisting with technologies. These webinars are also cohosted with several other adult education networks including Adult Learning Australia (ALA), Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research on Education of Adults (SCUTREA), and MOJA, the Adult Education Africa Network.

Shauna Butterwick, Darlene Clover and Joy Polanco O'Neil organized and hosted this event. We were assisted by Gabriella Maestrini, a PhD candidate at UBC. We continued exploring CJE, and specifically focused on the power of creative expression and other artforms which have been and can be used to create spaces of imagination, hope, and even healing. There is much value and power in creative expression as an approach to CJE. For this seminar we wanted to give participants a taste of a story telling process. It is one of the most powerful forms of communication which can change hearts and minds and speak truth to power. We all have stories (little and big and in between); we live with and in them. We need *both* stories and statistics on climate crisis in order to occupy the space and work between despair and hope.

After some introductory remarks on creative expression and story-telling, the process of *métissage* or weaving stories together was described. *Métissage* comes from the Latin word *mixtus*, meaning mixed. It originally referred to a process of bringing and weaving two different kinds of cloth or fabric together, cloth which did not 'normally' go together such as silk and burlap. This process celebrates the claiming and reclaiming of mixed identities as well as multiple, and sometimes contradictory, ways of knowing, being, thinking and doing. This weaving process can provide opportunities for participants to tell their own story (individuality) and then weave it through other's stories (a collective tapestry). It is important that the individual story telling and collective weaving is performed and shared aloud. *Métissage* challenges the idea that narratives (and lives) are linear, straightforward and uninterrupted by others. It also challenges the idea that our stories are lessened by contact with 'the other', instead it illustrates how we are enriched by encounters with and weavings of diversity. For this to work, the *métissage* process involves participants all responding to a common theme or 'prompt'; this creates a container for holding the stories together.

For the May 24th webinar, the shared theme was exploring together across different locations, time zones, and experiences, the relationship between climate justice and adult learning. After Darlene outlined the background and process of métissage, Shauna and Joy shared their example in response to the prompt: our relationship to land and nature.

Heat Dome Blues (Shauna)



Early July 2021, cycling home, I have to stop. Feeling the heat. I drink all my water, 3 bottles. I need more, sit in the shade, nauseous, unwell. At home, my pulse is pounding. I'm hot, dry, sick. I can't quench my thirst. Hours pass. S l o w l y I recover.

Mid August, 2021, at the seashore. Another record breaking heat wave. Amongst the rocks and logs, a delicate pale green sea urchin shell catches my eye. I pick it up, gently add it to my collection. I see more urchin shells, floating, along with starfish, all dead. It's low tide. I crunch over exposed mussel beds, they too have been cooked. My stomach turns with the smell; my heart breaks. I find some shade. For days, the heat continues. People are trapped in apartments, some die. Sea life trapped in their homes; they all die.

It's not in the future, it's now. It's my fault, our fault. What to do. I write a poem, share my despair. Look for hope. I hear a report about a coral reef, not bleached, thriving, somehow adapting.

Crematorium Snow Globe (Joy)



My phone text read, "A fire...get prepared to evacuate!" We were relocating to the West Coast of the US. We'd just moved all of our belongings into storage. The fire roared up the valley. Our storage unit seemed next and all I could think about was my "stuff".

The Air Quality Index was toxic, well over 500. The smell of smoke seeped through every nook and cranny of our hotel doors and windows. Using packing tape, I taped us in. Birds singing outside one day ago, now vanished. There were no people. All around was barren and bleak, with only a few feet of visibility. Repurposing our N-95 masks, we investigated our storage unit, driving past miles of charred Earth. Our storage unit was blackened but intact.

When we opened the door, a thick layer of ash floated all around us. My husband cupped the tiny particles, saying “Do you see? We are in a crematorium snow globe!” Our stuff no longer mattered. What mattered was the falling flakes of life and death, every speck of ash - someone’s home, a tree, an animal.

Life is what matters. We cannot run nor hide. Wherever we go, we will live/breathe climate change. Let us be part of the healing process – climate justice.

Shauna and Joy’s ‘Thematic’ Weaving:



Relational Suffering

Record-breaking temperatures. Fires and destruction on both land and sea.

I’m hot, dry, sick. I can’t quench my thirst.

All of our belongings layered in ash.

Do you see what is falling? We are in a crematorium snow globe!

I smell and see the urchin shells floating, now starfish - all dead.

Evacuate or leave? Stay put or run. Human and non-human creatures trapped in their homes.

We’re all in this together, but not in the same boat. We are all fire, water, smoke, rain.

Despair and hope.

Wherever we go, we will live and breathe climate change.

We must react by being a part of the healing process – climate justice...thriving,
somehow adapting.

I'll go with hope.

Here I am. Here we are.

Group Process:



Break out rooms were created for six small groups of 3 to 5 people. Groups were given 30 minutes to work together. After some introductions, group members moved to individually write, for about 10 minutes, a brief story (a few short paragraphs). Groups were assigned to respond to one of these two prompts: a) my story of place and b) working with hope and despair. After this individual free writing, participants then reconnected and read aloud their own stories to their other group members. Given the limited time and some technical challenges, not all groups were able to weave these individual stories into a collective story through métissage.

In the final plenary, groups reported on the process and their stories. It became clear that the métissage process was powerful with much potential and that more time is needed, a day-long workshop perhaps, for the weaving together of individual stories. Some common themes included how diverse our stories are and the importance of them being told and how we must not wait for an external saviour (e.g. government or pointing of fingers). Rather our collective starting point is the self and nature.

Final thoughts were shared concluding our time together. One participant asked if there were connections to PIMA and other Adult Learning organizations and indeed there are (visit us at: www.pimanetwork.com.) Darlene offered some final reminders on how to deploy the use of métissage by recommending that not too much time should be required for the writing process, do not overthink it, and take one line from each story and weave, weave, weave. Joy's final thoughts were a reminder that no matter where we are in the world, it is important to be able to voice how/what we are feeling. It broadens our view of self and enlarges our empathetic feeling. This voice allows us to bring what is happening in the world to a level of hope and peace. Shauna concludes us with heartfelt gratitude for this time together and shared with us a bouquet of flowers.

The Power of Métissage:



Métissage is a powerful educational approach that can be used in many different contexts. It is a useful introductory activity bringing a group together and it can provide a way to conclude a class or workshop. In teaching, métissage is a creative way to present inter-woven texts. As an arts-based research method, it is an approach to gathering data and can be a powerful form of writing up data, for example interviews can be woven together as a collective story. Métissage is an arts-based process that can deepen our ways of seeing and healing complex, shifting, and overlapping elements of experience, of power, discrimination, joy, exclusion, sexism, racism, hope, and any other number of things. This seminar provided just a taste of this form of creative expression. It is an important component of climate justice education (CJE).

References:

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