Identity and Place-Based Education

Place and Identity: Place and identity must be central to education as they are inseparable from the landscape and the learner/educator. This integration of place and identity can cultivate willingness to learn and may better address the complex and interdisciplinary issues that we face today.

What does this new geoscience curriculum look like?

Unit 1: Introduction to the ‘-oams’: A Crash Course on Settler Colonialism, Capitalism, Imperialism, and Extractivism

- Settler colonialism and colonial violence
- The role of capital in colonial projects
- Violence used to enforce the hierarchies of capital
- Historical context of the role of geoscience in extraction

Unit 2: Land, Place, People, and Science: Geoscience ties to land and Indigenous Resistance

- Land as a point of conflict between the dispossessioned and capital
- Extraction as a weapon of imperial and settler-colonial projects
- Shared class struggle among the peripheral sacrifice zones
- Conflict between those who rely on extractive revenues and the exploitation by outside powers

Unit 4: Painted Landscapes: Environmental Humanities and EJ in the SW

- Stories and people are part of the land, and the land is part of the people
- What role does environmental humanities play within the age of the Anthropocene?

“Where is this place (the Yuapi)? power as a culture circle: with this shared consciousness of being part of a living community that continues on and on, beyond the death of long or even many, that continues on the riverbanks of the Santa Cruz and the mountains have been left behind.”

Diaz (2020)

Future Directions and Applications

This framework has been applied, in part, to an undergraduate field geology course taught by Dr. Karl Karslon in EPS (EPS 310). Since the course solely meets in the field weekly for five hours, it serves as an opportunity to not only teach in the field, but also address place and the human fabric of the landscape. Weekly readings are assigned to relate place, identity, history and extractive/explorative systems of power that intimately interplay with the geologic landscape. The students’ final project takes the form a storied account of the geologic history of the state, with the final chapter relating their own sense of place within the landscape to the ethnographic readings and content added to the course.

Despite the cornucopia of examples of injustice, dispossession, genocide, and violence exemplified through imperial extractive projects, students should not find themselves discouraged; rather, they should be inspired to be makers of change within or outside their respective geoscience fields to remedy these injustices and ensure that the future of geoscience not only resembles the communities it serves, but also embraces everyone on their place in the landscape.

Techniques

Karl Karslon and Laurë Clesser teach structure and methodology to YUM students through a place-based approach on the Bright Angel Trail in the Grand Canyon (June 2021).