



May 2021

Pedagogies of Resistance

Contribution to GTI Forum [The Pedagogy of Transition](#)

Johnny Lupinacci

The more that educators engage pedagogies which encourage the recognition of and resistance to all forms of domination, the more potential there is for educational experiences to foster spaces where teachers and students learn together to recognize the harmful assumptions and actions that undergird social and ecological injustice. While on one hand we admire, value, and are firm supporters of a shared commitment to respond to the undeniable atrocities that we—as humans—enact on one another, these atrocities are inextricably connected to the cruelties we perpetuate against non-human animals and the environment. None of these atrocities occur in isolation; they are all interconnected. To confront human supremacy together with other forms of supremacy in education, educators must work as committed allies to those suffering while challenging and confronting the systemic roots of oppression on our respective fronts.

Responding to the enclosures of schooling by connecting the systemic roots of anthropocentrism to racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and so on requires attention to the difficult necessity for cultural change. If we do not rethink the cultural framework rooted deeply in our language by which dominant meanings are socially constructed, then we are destined to re-create and perpetuate many of the problematic relationships that we as radical educators often set out to change. We must listen to and learn from social movements and activist leaders like those of the Black Lives Matter movement, The Women’s Revolution in Rojava, or the Water Protectors on occupied Native territories together with taking some actual steps in our studies and enactments of pedagogies in our classrooms toward cultural change.

Although I recognize the importance of localized responses and understandings, below are some preliminary suggestions for how teachers, and teacher educators, might begin to utilize an ecocritical framework in their lives and in their classrooms.

- **Engage in teaching and learning that explores diverse projects to rethink the dominant assumptions influencing how we, as humans, construct meaning and thus how we learn to relate to each other and the more-than-human world.** Further, make the commitment to critically and ethically examine how, as teachers, we individually and collectively understand educating, organizing, and taking action toward supporting healthy communities that include all beings and the intrinsic value of recognizing, respecting, and representing the right of all beings to belong to and live peacefully within an ecological system. For example, critically engage in questioning how we language our world. *What does it mean to refer to trees or natural gas and oil reserves as “natural resources”? What language further perpetuates social inequalities and undermines human rights in our communities?* Furthermore, as future teachers, think about how we might frame lessons that include essential ecocritical questions. *What does it mean to be human beings in our diverse communities of life? Who/what benefits, and who/what suffers? How are learning relationships in our classrooms influenced by value-hierarchized dualisms and cultural assumptions about students’ abilities? What does it mean to teach toward the abolition of superior/inferior (either/or) thinking and decision-making and in support of anti-racist and feminist teaching as part of any Great Transition?*
- **Engage in critical and ethical examinations of community.** As notions of community are all too often defined in terms of white supremacy, patriarchy, and human-centered exclusion, it is important to work to reconsider community in terms of who and what is included in our definitions of this construct and how those definitions contribute to either supporting or undermining the right of all beings to coexist in peace. *Who and what might we be ignoring when we think about who is considered in decisions in our neighborhood community? What animals and plants live and make homes in our community, and how are we interrelated to them? What are we doing to practice care and reciprocity with our diverse human and more-than-human neighbors?* Teachers can work with students to imagine how

decisions might be made that consider more broadly how important it is to center diverse voices, ideas, abilities, and experiences given a historical dominance of White male voices. Consider engaging students in learning to listen and be responsive to diverse language systems like breathing, smell, diverse sounds, gestures, and weather, climate, water, soils, birds, insects, fungi, forests, and other mammals and animals. Specifically, work to identify—or seek out—a more-than-human teacher (something/one you learn from and intentionally engage in a learning relationship). At first, this is just about making a commitment to learning from this different kind of teacher–student relationship in a way that interrupts habits and assumptions of anthropocentrism and human-supremacy. Then, journal over the course of the semester and share your experiences with how you learned from, and learned to listen to, your ecological surroundings. Commit to learning about the ways in which oppressed communities have suffered and survived the extreme violence of white-male heteronormativity and to not reproducing or existing in complicity with these atrocities.

- **Engage in examining community in terms of inclusion and the diverse ways in which our living relationships can be recognized, respected, and represented through teaching and learning among all members.** Specifically, engage in recognizing the role activist networks play in alleviating and eliminating unjust suffering in our communities. Build networks of solidarity with these organizations. How can single-issue social justice groups make alliances with other social and/or environmental justice groups? For example, in my community, I would ask what commonalities and bridges might there be between Planned Parenthood, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Sierra Club? *How could teachers connect with and start conversations between organizations, our classrooms, and communities?* This starts with learning about who is already attempting these conversations and how to support their attempts. Additionally, think about shifting classroom communities in order to encourage collaboration rather than competition and focus lessons on fostering and developing skills of community collaboration rooted in mutual aid and interdependence. School and community gardens can be a site of such teaching and learning. *How might we learn to teach from the Black Lives Matter at Schools resources? Or, what might it be like to teach or be a student in Rojava?*

- **Engage in supporting the diverse approaches to taking up resistance and healing from Western industrial culture and, in solidarity, show respect for epistemologies that differ from the current dominant discourses of Western industrial culture.**

Support the ways in which diverse forms of resistance work to challenge value-hierarchized dualisms that perpetuate value-hierarchized thinking. For example, explore the ways in which local groups in your community are fighting against past and present acts of colonization, both in the US and internationally. Imagine how educators might teach lessons that challenge and question progress rooted consumerism and global market ideology. For example, have students explore barter and trade in efforts to make explicit that economic systems do not require capitalism to exist. Have students identify non-monetized activities that exist in the community. Additionally, have students explore the gendered dimensions of non-monetized caring work and how that work upholds and strengthens communities.

Above all, and in addition to the attempts to disrupt institutionalized Western industrial culture that is perpetuated through and within educational spaces, we can also commit to the daily effort of cultivating critical and caring friendships with other humans and non-human animals, engaging with adversaries, and sharing stories of hope and resilience while critiquing local and international relations of domination and hierarchies. In such volatile, authoritarian times, it is important that critical educators challenge dominant perceptions of what currently constitutes schooling, education, and knowledge to collectively imagine with open hearts and minds what is possible.

About the Author



Johnny Lupinacci is an Associate Professor of Cultural Studies and Social Thought in Education at Washington State University. His research focuses on reimagining education through addressing the deeply rooted cultural assumptions influencing K-12 schools and higher education. He is co-author of *EcoJustice Education*, co-host of the radio show *Bust-ED Pencils*, and sits on the editorial boards of *Educational Studies*, *Critical Education*, and *Journal for Critical Media Literacy*. He holds a PhD in Educational Studies from Eastern Michigan University.

About the Publication

Published by the [Great Transition Initiative](#).

Under our Creative Commons BY-NC-ND copyright, you may freely republish our content, without alteration, for non-commercial purposes as long as you include an explicit attribution to the Great Transition Initiative and a link to the GTI homepage.



Cite as Johnny Lupinacci, "Pedagogies of Resistance," contribution to GTI Forum "The Pedagogy of Transition," *Great Transition Initiative* (May 2021), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/pedagogy-transition-lupinacci>.

About the Great Transition Initiative

The [Great Transition Initiative](#) is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being.

As an initiative for collectively understanding and shaping the global future, GTI welcomes diverse ideas. Thus, the opinions expressed in our publications do not necessarily reflect the views of GTI or the Tellus Institute.