Silence a matter
of public concern

Reconsidering Critical Environmental and Sustainability Education

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Silence in action

Fostering silence in a society full of noise

- Flanders: a diffuse, dispersed city
    - densely populated
    - Little open spaces
    - Little distinction between urban and rural spaces
    - No more silent spaces
    - Diverse pressures on the environment
- Waerbeke: turn 'silence' into a matter of public concern
    - As a socio-cultural movement
    - Defining zones of silence
    - Networking & lobbying
    - Sensitizing actions: conferences, publications, awareness raising

A matter of public concern

- Silence as a soft value: therapeutic effects

- Silence as a commercial value: privatization effects

- In defense of the 'commons': *'goods and practices that we inherit from nature and civil society, which we are duty-bound to pass along, undiminished to future generations' (Bollier)*

- Examples: water, air, nature, culture, literacy, democracy, etc..

- Not just resources, but the result of a community that engages in social practices to manage a resource for the benefit of all

- Commons: *a resource + a community + a set of social protocols*

Environmental and Sustainability Education Between instrumental and critical approaches

- The paradox of environmenal education: urgent measures are needed, yet in democratic education slow, transactional and non-instrumental processes are needed (Wals)

- Complexity: there's not one single truth with regard to environmental issues and their solutions

- Consensus oriented practices: reducing complexity

- Need for 'working with dilemmas, dissensus and deliberative communication

- Recognize the the multiplicity of competing notions (Lassoe)

Critical Pedagogy – A Source of Inspiration

- Freire: conscientisation in opposition to banking education

- Connection with social movements and activist practices

- Deconstruct economic and political structures that create degradation (Clover)

- Empowerment orientation

- Risk of disempowerment: individualizing the risks, blaming the victim

- Some criticisms: post-structuralist critiques of 'humanist' and 'enlightenment' discourses; stultification tendencies

Rancière's concept of 'equality of intelligence'

- Educational, political and art practices often depart from the assumption of 'inequality of intelligence'
- This often results into stultification of the subjects who are considered to be ignorant
- Every human being has the capacity to learn in his/her own way: '*The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its own mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of things and signs surrounding it'*.
- An emancipatory relationship in Rancière's view departs from the assumption of '*equality of intelligence'*
- It is is a '*will to will relationship'* rather than a relationship where the subject learns to think and act like the educator.

Critical thinking and the condition of plurality

- For Hannah Arendt human action is characterized by plurality

- *If to act means to take initiative, to introduce the unexpected into the world, it also means that it is not something that can be done in isolation from others'.*

- The notion of plurality points to the necessity of the presence of others for one's own identity development, for processes of emancipation and critical thinking.

- Empowerment is never a solitary activity: power resides not in the individual capacity of the individual agent, but in the potential capacity of plural agents to deliberate and act together.

Creating Spaces of Transition

- Back to Waerbeke: the initiators bring people together in diverse spaces where they make evident and surpising connections between arts, meditation, politics, environmental action, public health, experiences of trauma and care, etc..

- In doing so, they create spaces of transition where people can move away from fixed securities and explore 'new beginnings' (Arendt)

- Moments of interruption: *'Transitional space opens up the space and time between an experience and our habitual response to it. It introduces a stutter, a hesitation'* (Ellsworth)

- It are democratic experiments where private troubles are transformed into matters of public concern (Bauman & Wright Mills)

In conclusion

The role of research and of education with regard to environmental issues is:

> '*One that allows you to become less sure, to realize that things aren't quite as certain as you thought (..). Familiar objects, often unseen because they're so familiar, become more interesting and become something else if you change the context in which they're presented. It's in that state of uncertainty that your mind is the most active. That's the space of change and anything can happen in that space. And if we can get people untethered, even briefly, then things change slightly, individually and perhaps collectively down the road*' (Matthew Coolidge, American Centre for Land Use Interpretation).