School geography as radical global citizenship education

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This chapter introduces Laclau and Mouffe's theory of radical democracy and related ideas about discourse. It adopts Riedy's analysis of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses of sustainability and follows him in suggesting that discourse coalitions are necessary to defeat neoliberal hegemony. Agreements across counter-hegemonic discourses suggest the need for radical global citizenship education that accommodates agonistic pedagogy allowing students and teachers to articulate sustainability within and across discourses. The Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective suggests how such education can address post-developmentalism with pedagogy designed to enable students to know, be, relate and desire differently and so realise sustainability.

Keywords discourse, citizenship, radical democracy, agonism, pedagogy

The school, the geography curriculum and the geography classroom are part of a discursive landscape that includes narratives and stories concerning sustainability. 'Discourses are invisible webs of meaning that permeate media and culture, underpin economic institutions, organisations and technological systems, and shape our individual sense of identity and our relationships' (Riedy, 2020:100), They help us make sense of reality; offer a shared language and a basis for mutual understanding and practice; can impose limits on imagination; and can promote interests, goals and values that enlarge or diminish equity, democracy and sustainability.

Articulation of sustainability within and across discourses is key to active and critical citizenship since it can support individual and collective agency and allow citizens to evaluate strategies for social change. This chapter argues that it should be part of school geography that seeks to educate for sustainability and radical global citizenship. and that Laclau and Mouffe's approach to radical democracy has prompted appropriate theory and pedagogy.

Discourse analysis, the populist left and radical democracy

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) are post-structuralist and post-Marxist political theorists (Nascimento, 2022). Rejecting Marx's economic determinism, they suggest that social change results from diverse social actors uniting around a discourse that challenges power, inequality, and oppression. Mouffe (2018) sees such a populist left as a response to neoliberalism, growing authoritarianism, linked environmental, economic, and social crises, and the rise of the populist right. She insists that the liberal democratic state is not inevitably a servant of capital and that it can be radicalised to better realise the core democratic principles of popular control and political equality.

Key concepts in discourse analysis

As post-structuralists, Laclau and Mouffe recognise that our identities within an increasingly complex and fluid capitalist (late modern) society are not fixed. The meaning of any **identity** (woman, black Asian and minority ethnic, worker, colonised, etc) is fluid and negotiated in relation to other identities and changing discourses. This is explained by intersectionality theory and requires political work to be about forging connections (**chains of equivalence**) between identities and such discourses as those surrounding sustainability and radical democracy.

If people with different identities are to unite around a radicalised democracy and establish sustainable societies, they will need to challenge the **hegemony** (leadership or dominance) of the current power elite (the ruling class). It uses politics, the media, consumerism, and schooling to support its own ('common sense') versions of democracy and sustainability and is currently engaged in 'culture wars' that attack the ideas of the populist left and seek to limit the discussion of sustainability in schools (DfE, 2021). The complexity of social relations and identities requires an alternative hegemony to be built by **discourse coalitions** through the process of **articulation.** Different radical individuals, movements and parties must persuade others who do not already agree with them to do so and link their demands. In this process sustainability acts as a **floating signifier** (Brown, 2015), an ambiguous concept without fixed meaning that takes on meaning as articulation proceeds and different identities, interests and constituencies find common cause and formulate an alternative 'good sense'. As regimes of truth, sustainability discourses act with regimes of rule and regimes of accumulation to shape the politics of sustainability (Scoones, 2016).

Laclau and Mouffe claim that liberal and deliberative forms of democracy are too ready to build consensus and so suppress differing opinions, identities, and worldviews. **Radical democracy** is not only accepting of difference, dissent, and antagonisms but dependent upon them to reveal oppressive power relations and social alternatives. The Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainability (FDSD, 2022) and the principles of Radical Ecological Democracy (2022), reveal the links between radical democracy and sustainability.

Conflict, convictions, passions, and emotions (what Mouffe terms **affects**) are central to radical democracy, pluralist politics and the process of articulation. While we/they antagonisms are part of the human condition that will never disappear, they can be handled in ways that turn **antagonism** into **agonism**. 'The aim of democratic politics is to construct the 'them' in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed but as an 'adversary', that is somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe, 2000:15). While antagonism undermines trust in politics, agonism increases it by recognising the potentially positive aspects of certain but not all forms of political conflict.

The COVID crisis, the 'cost of living' crisis linked to the war in Ukraine, and the climate emergency have prompted a strong desire for security and protection that requires a left populist strategy or green democratic revolution (Mouffe, 2022). This would protect society and its ecological foundations in a way that empowers citizens and prevents them retreating into a defensive nationalism or a passive acceptance of technological solutions. By uniting political and ecological affects it would create a powerful anti-hegemonic discourse coalition or **left bloc** (Schneider, 2022) that demands security and protection along with social justice, radical democracy, and sustainability.

Discourses of sustainability

Riedy (2020) considers neoliberalism to be the dominant or hegemonic discourse of sustainability and reveals a spectrum of reformist and transformative discourses based on analysis of ninety scholarly articles published between 2017 and 2019 with titles that 'focus on transformations of environmental discourse' (Riedy, 2020:101).

His analysis uses the concepts of discourse, discourse coalitions, narrative, story, and meme These concepts are nested within one another with memes referring to the language and ideas that form the building blocks for the others. Memes are core elements of culture and replicate and spread when people use them to think, communicate, learn, and teach.

Neoliberal hegemony

Neoliberal capitalist discourse has dominated world affairs for the past forty years. It puts economic growth, capital accumulation, free markets and small government before environmental and social welfare and is the prime cause of current environmental, economic, and social crises. Its story and memes occupy the first two columns of Table One.

Neoliberalism's story	Memes in neoliberalism's story	Memes in the reformist sustainability story
'Disorder afflicts the land! Caused by the powerful and nefarious forces of the overmighty state, whose collectivist tendencies crush freedom and individualism and opportunity. But the hero of the story, the entrepreneur, will fight those powerful forces, roll back the state, and through creating wealth and opportunity, restore harmony to the land' Monbiot (2019)	Capitalism, economic growth, gross domestic product, individualism, freedom, opportunity, entrepreneurship, competition, small government, privatisation, deregulation, globalization, financialisation, digitisation, free trade, austerity, separation, duality	Sustainable development, ecological modernisation, green growth, green consumerism, social justice, human wellbeing, ecological integrity

Table one **The story and memes of neoliberalism together with the memes of the reformist sustainability story (Based on Riedy, 2020)**

Neoliberal capitalism invests in initiatives to address sustainability to the extent that they improve profitability and international competitiveness, do not involve regulation that threatens profits, do not burden the state with excessive expenditure, and sustain consumerism and competitive individualism. Adelman (2017) provides insights into neoliberal sustainability while Mulvihill and Bruzzone (2018) explore how sustainability discourse has eclipsed environmental discourse, and Mensah (2019) examines the meaning and history of sustainable development.

The reformist story of sustainability (Table One, column three) is socially democratic in that it suggests that capitalism can be managed to deliver the goals of social justice, human wellbeing, and ecological integrity. An influential text is the UN's statement of sustainable development goals which continues to suggest that such goals are compatible with capitalism and economic growth. The 'greening of capitalism' shapes policy making, political institutions and such educational initiatives as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (Huckle & Wals, 2015) but is not yet hegemonic. Radical geographers are among those who debate whether capitalism's growth imperative is compatible with sustainability, see for example Vetlesen (2016).

Counter hegemonic or transformative discourses

Transformative or counter- hegemonic discourses of sustainability are diverse having their origins in radical political economy, green political thought. new economics, global ethics, futures thinking, alternative worldviews, and postcolonial/decolonial theory (see for example Dobson, 2007, Dryzek, 2022, Pepper, 1996). Riedy looks for common ground and conflicts across these believing, like Mouffe, that discourse coalitions are needed to defeat neoliberal discourse and that conflicts within and across discourses offer productive sites for agonistic dialogue.

Table two summarises Riedy's analysis of counter-hegemonic discourses that tell a transformative story of sustainability. Their areas of agreement are in column one, the contributory memes in column two, and areas of disagreement in column three.

Column one suggests that school geography should develop a holistic and systems orientated view of the world, rejecting such dualisms of modern thought as nature / society, and human geography / physical geography. It should nurture such ethical values as those outlined in the Earth Charter (ECI, 2022) and explore how these are fostered by forms of global and sustainability citizenship and radical democracy that extend citizens' responsibilities to others distant in time and space, and other species (Dobson 2011, Huckle 2016) and allow popular control of economy, politics, and culture at all scales from the local to the global (Harvey, 2010). Additionally, it should explore alternative and sustainable forms of political economy by examining the ideas and strategies of global networks of transformative social movements (Progressive International, 2022). In short,

Areas of agreement in the transformative story of sustainability	Contributory memes	Areas of disagreement
Ontological commitment to a world made up of complex nested systems and networks.	Complex nested systems, connected networks, holism, social-ecological systems, emergence, circular economy, limits, collapse, systems evolution/adaptation, global connections, peer-to-peer exchange	The universalising ontology of the global North. The need to consider decolonial theory and Southern, indigenous, and post-developmental ontologies.
A normative relationship with nature that is at least sustainable, probably regenerative, and potentially ecocentric / planetcentric.	Sustainability, ecological integrity, carrying capacity, limits, living with less, circular flows, balance. Regenerative/restorative economy, abundance, planet centred, nonduality, people are nature, values all life, balance and harmony, evolutionary potential	The extent to which the human relationship with nature needs rehabilitation for a transformed future. The extent to which we need to adopt ecocentric values.
Recognition of our cooperative, interbeing and entanglement with each other.	Cooperation, lives entangled and dependent on others, interbeing, collaborate, co-create, share, soft skills, relational goods, respect, care, global commons, diverse cultural life.	The best way to deliver human wellbeing. Degrowth or abundance.
Goals of human dignity and wellbeing, social and economic justice, and plurality	Human dignity, prosperity and wellbeing, human rights, quality of life, social and economic justice, fairness, equality, redistribution, plurality, intercultural dialogue, agonism.	Whether sufficiency or abundance are appropriate economic goals
Agreement that participatory governance, a new economic system, prioritization of different human values and participatory knowledge practices are enablers of transformation.	Participatory governance, free and equal democratic participation, participatory and dialogic processes, mobilize from the grassroots, a new economic system, reduce physical inputs and outputs, reduction in material consumption, collaborative, commons	Whether transformation is possible within a capitalist framework or requires a post-capitalist economy. Orderly, deliberative change vs non-violent revolutionary resistance. Who should lead: government, business or civil society. Localisation vs global governance vs glocalisation

Table two **Areas of agreement and disagreement between counter-hegemonic discourses of sustainability (Based on Riedy, 2020)**

column one calls for a critical school geography (Huckle, 2020) that draws on critical social theory (Fuchs, 2017), critical environmental politics (Death, 2014) and the environmental humanities (Heisse et al, 2017) to question neoliberal hegemony and offers students hope in a troubled world.
Reformulated as education for sustainability, global citizenship and radical democracy, a critical school geography that fosters debate across and within neoliberal, reformist, and transformative discourses of sustainability, becomes a vehicle for radical global citizenship education (RGCE) and agonistic pedagogy.

Radical global citizenship education and agonistic pedagogy

Drawing on Laclau and Mouffes' ideas, Ruttenburg (2009) suggests that RGCE should educate the emotions (Mouffe's affects) by developing understanding of the difference between moral and political disputes and how power constitutes global society. It should also develop political literacy (the ability to 'read the social order in terms of political disputes over liberty, equality and the hegemonic relations that should shape them', Ruttenberg (2009:3)). As they study, articulate and debate sustainability discourse, students should understand the difference between private and collective emotions; the ways in which emotions are collaboratively constructed in movements and parties; and how they are associated with views of desirable social and environmental relations and hegemonic orders. RGCE should explore how movements and parties have developed solidarity across space, time and species; why it is justifiable to feel anger on behalf of those (including other species) who suffer injustice; and how proposals to reform global governance would give global citizens greater voice (One World Trust, 2022).

To distinguish between moral and political anger students need to understand power and the role of political economy and international relations in constituting fluid identities and an unsustainable/sustainable social order. Moral anger leads to acts of kindness such as charitable giving while political anger leads to attempts to establish a more democratic, just, and sustainable society. RGCE should frame debate not in terms of competition between moral enemies (with different interpretations of right and wrong) but as confrontation in the public sphere where political adversaries, with different views on a desirable global society, engage in agonistic debate (see the curriculum units in Huckle, 2020).

Snir (2017) examines what is involved in developing students' ability to articulate their political differences, identities and demands. He suggests that agonistic

pedagogy has three elements (Table three) that take place simultaneously rather than sequentially. It reflects the work of counter hegemonic agents outside the classroom in that it is about building chains of equivalence (what we have in common) and discourse coalitions; growing to understand one another; broadening and deepening one's identity; and arriving at a 'conflictual consensus' that accepts 'that there will always be disagreement about how to interpret and attain sustainable development' (Hånkansson et al, 2019:25)

	Radical democratic or agonistic pedagogy
Perform	Students perform their discursive identities: how they see themselves as environmental and global citizens and how their relations with the rest of nature and others at a distance in time and space give meaning to their lives. They reveal and debate valuable truths about themselves including their preferred futures.
Connect	Students connect with discourses of sustainability, recognise antagonism between them, and engage in agonistic debate that may change the way they understand and experience the world.
Transform	Students' identities change as they engage in agonistic debate. They connect issues and positions and become part of a hegemonic front seeking a radical global democracy and sustainability.

Table three Radical democratic pedagogy and sustainability, based on Snir (2017)

Snir draws on Gramsci to see the teacher as a transformative intellectual. S/he is engaged personally in the process of articulation along with students while making available relevant discourses and memes and so developing political literacy. S/he directs rather than provides articulation, not imposing political ideas but allowing these to arise in discussion, offering 'a compass and roadmap but not assuming the role of navigator' (Snir, 2017:11).

Sant et al (2018) sum up agonistic pedagogy as eliciting worldviews; enabling conflict; and resisting consensus; and have applied it to interactive workshops. Underhill argues that RGCE and radical social movements should inform each other about the use of such pedagogy and 'how it enables ideas of the self and

‘the other’ to be imagined, reimagined, learned and unlearned’ (Underhill, 2019:214). Clearly it provides new insights into critical pedagogy that geography teachers can add to those already provided by eco-pedagogy and the critical pedagogy of place (see Huckle, 2020 chapters five, six and eight).

Global Citizenship Education Otherwise

Turning to the first area of disagreement between counter-hegemonic discourses of sustainability (Table 2, column three), it is relevant to consider the contribution of post-developmental theory and initiatives to RGCE. *Pluriverse, a Post-Development Dictionary* (Kothari et al, 2019) provides an overview of over one hundred post-developmental/decolonial initiatives and associated discourses that challenge modern development. Some are reformist (for example sustainable development, ecological modernisation, the circular economy, and transhumanism) while others are transformative (for example agroecology, alternative currencies, eco-socialism, and the transition movement). The transformative initiatives take sustainability discourse beyond the epistemological and ontological hegemonies of mainstream thought by recognising the structures and processes shaping surface events and experiences and rejecting modern dualisms that separate society and nature. They also recognise modern citizens’ metaphysical entrapment and advocate other modes of existence based on different cosmologies.

The Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (GTDFC) offers a study guide to global citizenship education ‘otherwise’ that provides a series of cartographies or maps to help teachers and students explore modernity and post-developmentalism (Andreotti et al, 2019. Amsler, 2019). Cartography 3 (Figure one) suggests that to address the first area of disagreement in Table 2, column three, school geography should explore societies and environments within the soft, radical, and beyond-reform spaces. This will enable teachers and students to question the epistemological and ontological hegemony of mainstream school geography and offer examples of indigenous and alternative societies living with a holistic worldview that accommodates the sacrality of nature (Armstrong, 2022) in religious or secular ways.

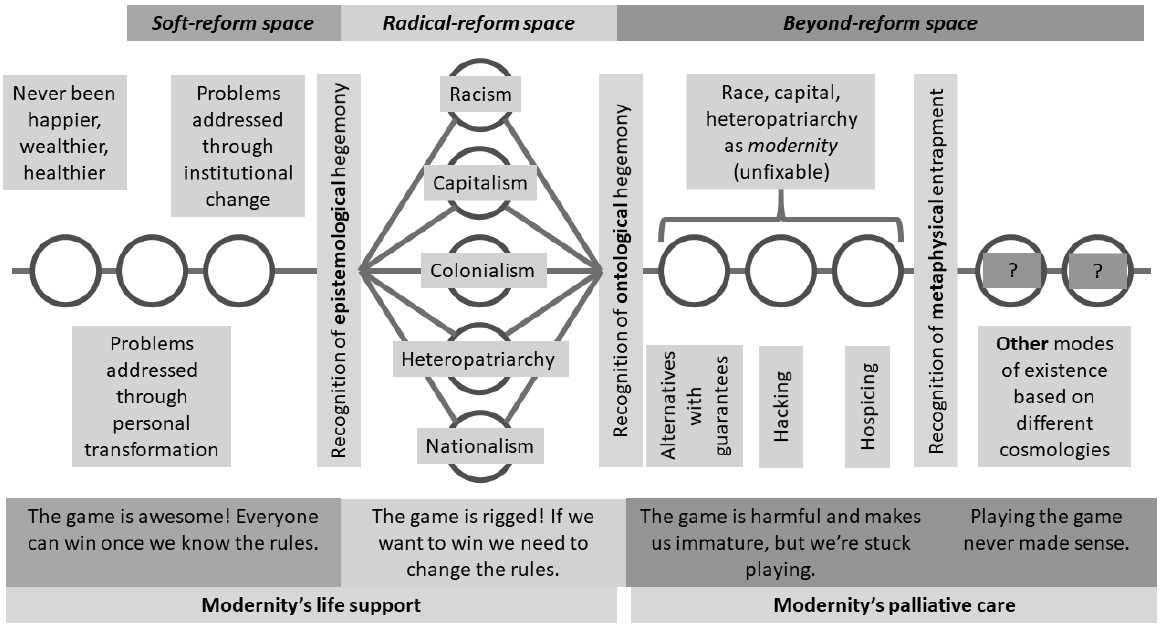

Figure four Cartography 3, Different approaches to reform with regard to modernity / coloniality (Stein et al, 2020:51)

The GTDFC offers pedagogy to enable students to address three modern denials (of systemic and violent complicity in harm elsewhere; of planetary limits; and of entrapment in a cosmology of duality) and help them to know, be, relate and desire differently. Its exercises and cartographies enable them to recover lost capacities, such as the ability to experience 'oneness' with the rest of human and non-human nature; to hospice commitments to an unsustainable modernity; and to recognise the value of alternative cosmologies. As part of RGCE they can strengthen critical school geography's approach to sustainability discourse at a time when growing crises in regimes of rule and accumulation create new audiences for counter-hegemonic discourse.

Further reading

Read the author's ebook *Critical School Geography: Education for Global Citizenship* (Huckle, 2020) paying particular attention to chapters five, six and nine. Figure 6.5 on page 258 outlines reformist and transformative discourses of sustainability (the greening of capitalism and socialism). Consider how these should be introduced to students through agonistic pedagogy and how this might also incorporate one or more of the transformative initiatives (discourses) featured in Kothari et al (2019) or on the Progressive International's website.

Smith (2021) considers the legislative and constitutional reforms that liberal democracies should make to safeguard the future. He also recommends an Office for Future Generations and deliberative mini-publics (citizens' assemblies, citizen's juries, consensus conferences, young people's parliaments and city councils, etc). Read Smith alongside Sant and Davies (2017) and Hayward (2012). Research the opportunities for engaging your students in such deliberative mini-publics and consider whether they encourage agonistic debate.

Read Blűhdorn (2020) and Blűhdorn and Deflorian (2021). They suggest that liberal democracies are now modernising themselves in ways that render them post-democratic and post-ecological. Citizens, private corporations, and the state accept a new social contract that amounts to 'sustaining the unsustainable.' This preserves neoliberal hegemony and involves a values and culture shift whereby citizens become more accepting of lifestyles previously seen as corrupting, hedonistic, unprincipled, and unsustainable, and more resistant to counter-hegemonic discourses. The authors associate this shift with the concept of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). To what extent do your students' identities, beliefs and behaviours reflect this shift? Do the cartographies and exercises in Andreotti et al, (2019) offer ways of revealing and countering it?

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