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Editorial Overview: Ecomedia Literacy Special Issue

Antonio Lopez, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy
Jeff Share, University of California, Los Angeles, U.S.
Theresa Redmond, Appalachian State University U.S.;
Clare Hintz, Journal of Sustainability Education, U.S.

Antonio Lopez, *Ph.D. is a leading international expert of media education. With a research focus on bridging sustainability with media literacy, he is an experienced curriculum designer, educator, trainer, theorist, researcher and public speaker. As an author and blogger he has written numerous academic articles, essays and three books: Mediacology: A Multicultural Approach to Media Literacy in the 21st Century, The Media Ecosystem: What Ecology Can Teach Us About Responsible Media Practice, and Greening Media Education: Bridging Media Literacy with Green Cultural Citizenship. He is currently Chair and Associate Professor of Communications and Media Studies at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. Visit his website at: https://antonio-lopez.com/*

Jeff Share *is a Faculty Advisor in the Teacher Education Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). His research and practice focus on preparing educators to teach critical media literacy in K-12 education, for the goals of social and environmental justice. An updated second edition of his book, Media Literacy is Elementary: Teaching Youth to Critically Read and Create Media, was published in 2015. Two years later Routledge published the book he co-wrote with Richard Beach and Allen Webb titled, Teaching Climate Change to Adolescents: Reading, Writing, and Making a Difference. Collaborating with Douglas Kellner in 2019, they published, The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education.*

Theresa Redmond *is an Associate Professor at Appalachian State University where she teaches in Media Studies and Teacher Education. She studies how media and communication technologies impact literacy, fluency, learning, community,and expression. Currently, Theresa is exploring measures to evaluate media literacy, ecomedia literacy, and nonlinear pedagogies for media literacy education.*

Clare Hintz *is the editor in chief of the Journal of Sustainability Education. Clare has a Ph.D. in Sustainability Education with a focus on Regenerative Agriculture. She has been teaching sustainable agriculture and permaculture since 1998, and has additionally developed curricula for the University of Wisconsin, River Falls, University of Minnesota, Duluth, Northland College, and Prescott College. She is a permaculture consultant in the Midwest, U.S. Her research focuses on arts-informed inquiry, regenerative agriculture, place, and ecofeminism. You can see more of her work at www.elsewherefarm.com.*

Forward from JSE Editor-in-Chief, Clare Hintz: The Journal of Sustainability Education marks its tenth anniversary year with an issue on Water Literacy (published in March) and this issue, Ecomedia Literacy. From a dream of several Ph.D. students at Prescott College (U.S.), we have come a long way to an internationally known, peer-reviewed journal, publishing two to three issues per year. As the main editor, and the second in the Journal's life, I have been privileged to explore special topics for nearly two-thirds of the journal's history. In this contemporary moment, I have been struck by the insights endemic to the topic of Ecomedia Literacy. This issue began as a reaction to the growing global attacks on journalism, the disinformation campaigns around climate chaos, and active fear and spite against science and learning in the United States. As we have worked across time zones and quarantines to bring you this issue, I have come to understand how essential it is that we think critically about what stories we are telling ourselves in our multitudes of communities. There is no other way to create a resilient future. Further, this issue has taught me that the way that we tell those stories shapes our current reality and our future just as surely.

I am, when not editing, a full time organic farmer. This experience always provides a test to the ideas and writings that come across my desk. Are the ideas I read worth bringing forward against a background of a direct lesson from nature: be diverse to survive? Does the thinking shared with me ring as truly as the drive to build healthy soils that will hold carbon, clean water, and nurture food and medicine? Is the logic of authors' arguments as elegant as the language of the bees?

In the U.S., there is no safety net to farming. Nature's intact systems are all I have. As a farmer I am keenly aware of the decoupling of relationships in the ecosystem of which I am a part: birds migrating out of season, pollinators awake before plants are flowering, unseasonable fall rains drowning harvests, winters disturbed and unable to reset crucial balances of insects and trees. I am shaken to my core. But my Anishenabe neighbors have taught me the power of persistence, despite the odds. So has this pandemic. While human lives are upended across the world, not much has changed on my farm. The spring still demands long days of work. The pastures still feed the pigs. There are chicks. I am more carefully arranging my crops so that I can better save the open-pollinated seeds I have been planting for years. My Community Supported Agriculture group is strong, and I am growing more to feed additional families as industrial supply chains continue to collapse. My farm and this issue, Ecomedia Literacy, remind me that more than ever, we need new stories, artfully told, from the ground up. Resilient futures, sometimes ancient ones, already exist all over the world. We need to find them and share them. We are especially pleased to be partnering with the Journal of Media Literacy on this issue. In this tenth anniversary year of the Journal of Sustainability Education, I am honored to bring you some seeds.

The 50th anniversary of the founding of Earth Day is marked by a global pandemic, causing the world to pause and take stock of our planetary predicament. This culminated a period of ecological shocks across the globe: devastating fires in Australia, Amazon, Siberia, and California; accelerating ice melt; devastating hurricanes and flooding; and ongoing mass extinction. At the time of this writing, members of our editorial team located around the world are under quarantine to slow the spread of Covid-19. The collective, global response and actions being taken to limit the spread of the virus are in the same spirit and at a similar level of action that the climate emergency demands. Yet, even as we grapple with the immediate consequences of the virus, it's important to acknowledge that it is a symptom of our centuries of disregard for our planetary health. Consumerism and greed, combined with the lightning speed of transnational capitalism, are at the core of the global economy that is destroying our very systems of survival.

Not coincidentally, the spread of the virus is deeply connected to our environmental challenges. Under the guise of "development" and "progress," so-called modernization projects promote industrial agriculture and extractivism. New roads and settlements burrow deeper into isolated territories, leading to deforestation and to the loss of animal habitats. With the reduction of biodiversity, previously unknown diseases are pushed into human populations as viruses seek new hosts. This coincides with the traffic in wild animals, which also spreads novel contagions. Meanwhile, the globalized economy makes us more urbanized and interdependent, with frequent air travel enabling diseases to spread faster. The past 40 years of neoliberal economic policies have eviscerated healthcare systems and the social safety net of most countries, compounding efforts to treat and respond to the health crisis effectively. Finally, a major study links 80% of Covid-19 deaths to heavily polluted regions, demonstrating how pollution damages our health (Carrington, 2020). As systems dynamics teach us, a system remains invisible until a crisis exposes its structure and weaknesses.

To indigenous people throughout the world, the relationship between a global pandemic and current economic systems is more obvious. As occupants of land comprising 80% of the world's biodiversity, indigenous communities are disproportionately impacted by the current system and know that it is not environmentally or morally sustainable. They implicitly understand that our current political and economic crisis is founded on the legacy of colonialism, extractivism, and slavery. For centuries they have warned those in the richer regions of the world that our economic system, currently manifested as neoliberal globalization, decimates a sense of care and collective responsibility that should be at the core of our systems of survival. And beyond frontline indigenous communities, environmental impacts on the poor and people of color throughout the world (rural and urban) include land grabbing, clear-cutting forests, radiation exposure, toxic waste dumping, loss of water rights and water toxicity, hazardous work, underemployment, substandard housing, toxic schools, lack of transportation infrastructure, economic disinvestment, deteriorating infrastructure, and biomedical experimentation.

Naomi Klein (2020) suggests that Covid-19 could serve as an unveiling for the general public of "the pre-existing crises," such as economic inequality and global heating that have only

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worsened the effects of the pandemic and will still be with us after the virus has gone. From her research on disaster capitalism, Klein insists that crises create openings for radical possibilities. In a similar vein, Arundhati Roy (2020) asserts that this pandemic "offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves" and see this moment as "a portal, a gateway between one world and the next." This is our chance to create a new path toward a more equitable, sustainable, and socially and environmentally just future. This portal is an opportunity for educators and students to collaboratively imagine and create a better path forward. Indeed, global quarantines are showing us what life is like when we slow down. Specifically, consumption declines, air pollution decreases as car and air travel are lessened, and we become aware of what is most important: life. (Ironically, the reduction of toxins in the atmosphere that result from global quarantines may save more lives than measures to protect us from the virus.)

The virus teaches us that the climate emergency is really a conceptual emergency. What can we do as media educators to use this opportunity as our portal to the future we've been hoping for? To face the climate emergency, we need a massive shift from destructive practices of unfettered capitalism to new policies of economic equity and sustainability, and from conventional media education that eschews environmental concerns to adapting ecomedia literacy that centers ecological perspectives.

Just as education mobilized to respond to the quarantine by moving coursework to online platforms, prioritizing the environmental crisis can promote education focused on media literacy and ecology. Many of the same climate science deniers have spread misinformation about the coronavirus across social media and even in mainstream news reports (Kelly, 2020). The so-called "stimulus" packages from Washington are more evidence that we can find the money for any crisis when there is the political will. The path to recovery should address not just the coronavirus, but also the bigger climate crisis that is linked to the causes and effects of the pandemic. In April, 17 European environment and climate ministers signed an open letter asserting that the "European Green Deal must be central to a resilient recovery after Covid-19" (17 European climate and environment ministers, 2020).

This rapid mobilization models the same urgency that media education can make to address the planetary ecological emergency. This is not to argue that going online is the solution, but simply to assert that through collective will we can respond to and make adjustments to how we work when faced with an immediate crisis. The problem up to this point has been our inability to contain the scale and timeline of the climate crisis as a predicament within our everyday perception.

Critical media literacy educators are well versed in the problems associated with stereotyping, propaganda, consumerism, and culture industries, which is a critique at the core of many of our foundational theories and approaches. While some critical media educators extend the analysis of our techno-scientific-capitalist society to environmental concerns, these are rare occurrences. Instrumentalist media educators even less so. Meanwhile, the climate crisis is moving faster than our ability to build awareness or take collective action. The emerging planetary ecological

emergency is now a foundational, intersectional crisis that challenges all media teachers to expand how media are conceived. This requires acting from a normative framework that our ecological challenges pose an existential threat to our students and need to be addressed system-wide. As other disciplines are doing, it's time for media teachers to expand methodology and curriculum design to incorporate practical methods and solutions for integrating ecological awareness into praxis. In short, the professional practices of media educators are badly in need of an ecological intervention.

Increasingly more organizations are now declaring climate emergencies, including educational institutions. Usually it means a commitment to going carbon neutral and supporting the Paris climate agreement's meager CO2 reduction goals. But what does a media education climate emergency look like? What does a carbon neutral pedagogy entail? What would media education be like if its core ethic was the Lakota principle of mni wičoni ("water is life")? Should we follow Extinction Rebellion's dictum to tell the truth about climate science and the impending impacts if we don't change? Can media organizations and education be environmentally sustainable? There is a tendency to self-censor for fear of being disciplined by academia or other practitioners. This is not the place to do either. We have to be bold. This becomes important if we consider our chances for mitigating the climate crisis. As philosopher and Extinction Rebellion activist Rupert Read argues, the scientific evidence indicates that, "This industrial-growthist civilization will not achieve the Paris Climate accord goals; and that means we will most likely see 3-4 degrees of global rover-heat at a minimum, and that is not compatible with civilization" (Read & Alexander, 2019, p. 4).

While system redesign may be beyond the humble work of individual teachers, we could start by collectively examining all the different ways education impacts/is impacted by the environment, from K-12 schools to universities. Changes that can be made include:

- Support increased budgets for neighborhood schools to reduce travel, but also retrofit old buildings for clean energy and efficiency; and when new schools are built, make them as environmentally friendly as possible.
- Redesign our transportation infrastructure to reduce the amount of driving it takes to bring people to school, by supporting public transportation, using electric school buses, providing free bikes, creating more bike paths, and "walking schools buses" (kids walk in supervised groups to their neighborhood schools).
- Fix existing environmental challenges, like toxic water in our pipes and schools (and don't just give kids bottled water, which creates other environmental problems). After all, what good is media education if our students are getting poisoned and their cognitive abilities are damaged by toxins?
- Provide clean-energy to schools.
- Establish farm-to-school food programs with sufficient funding and staffing to support regional and community farmers to bring healthy and organic food to students (reducing carbon inputs into soil, farming, and transportation).

- Create school gardens and eliminate soft drinks and junk food from vending machines; teach farming and soil conservation.
- Expand outdoor education and physical activity and advocate for more green spaces.
- Support mindfulness and other mind-body activities (such as yoga).
- Change school hours and annual calendar to better sync people's natural rhythms and seasons.
- Offer more social services, such as providing laundromats, food banks, mental health support, anti-violence and domestic abuse programs, and healthcare facilities.
- Create space and support for elderly and differently abled members of the community.
- Don't succumb to the technological sublime in which gadgets are presented as the answer to education challenges. Rather than more iPads, how about musical instruments, hemp paper, pencils, colored pens, paints, scissors, and glue?
- Pay educators and staff a decent living wage.
- Holistically evaluate how what we teach reinforces the same thinking that created the environmental crisis. How might we teach science, history, language arts, and other disciplines from the perspective of climate crisis?
- Challenge industry-produced curricula and Big Carbon's push to promote climate denial in classrooms.
- Advocate for a host of education reforms that include supporting media education and climate science; reaffirm and reinvest in liberal arts, fine arts, music, and humanities; and reevaluate the purpose of education so that it is not just about skilling and drilling.
- Decentralize education standards by revising or eliminating the role of federal guidelines and common core standards and rethink the use of testing.
- Promote trades, crafts, and making as an essential component of the curriculum; partner with Green New Deal initiatives for job training, mentoring, and apprenticeship (including working with local unions).
- Reduce international travel for education conferences by finding ways to connect that don't entail long-haul flights.
- Demilitarize national budgets and invest in public education.
- Eliminate student loans and make education free.

To borrow from the language of markets, the bottom line is that when it comes to teaching media, business as usual is no longer tenable.

The Covid-19 pause necessitates that we consider the pandemic from one other perspective. It's fair to say that not only has it exposed the ecological peril we face as a global community, it also causes us to reflect on the idea of mental models as a kind of contagion. Various traditions from throughout time have recognized that dangerous thought patterns are also contagious. The mechanistic mindset of neoliberal globalization is promoted under the guise of modernity and technological "progress" that enables extractive industries (mining, fossil fuels), biomass conflicts (deforestation, monoculture agriculture), and mega-projects (dams). Vandana Shiva (1993) refers to this as a "monoculture of the mind." Its early incarnation in the form of colonialism was deemed an "invader dreaming" by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of what is currently Australia. The Algonquin people in North America referred to it as

wetiko, a term for a kind of mind virus and cannibal spirit driven by greed. Buddhists use the term "hungry ghosts" (preta in sanskrit) to describe a kind spirit that has a small throat and bulging stomach to represent the idea of insatiable hunger. Western popular media manifests it in the form of vampires and zombies. In media criticism, it takes the form of advertising, which has been called the dream life of corporations (Jhally, 2002).

Regardless of what name we give it, these are stories we live by (to borrow from ecolinquist Arron Stibbe) that shape how we interact with and create the world. As Beach, Share, and Webb (2017) assert, "In every discourse whether that be of science, the mass media, or literary, or cultural artifacts, climate change is a story, and the plot, the characters, and how that story has different variations (Gaard, 2014). The way a story is told makes a difference in how we understand it and respond to it" (p. 10). In our view, media education needs a new story, one that enables us to connect our information and communication technology with their environmental impacts. It should allow us to explore how the interconnected realms of our global system materializes through ICT, and also how they spread belief systems and thought patterns.

Our co-published issue of *Journal of Sustainability Education* and *Journal of Media Literacy* is dedicated to ecomedia literacy, which is a reframing of not only media literacy education, but also education generally so as to comprise a central focus on ecological concerns and ethics. By incorporating ecomedia literacy (see the accompanying article by Antonio Lopez), we broaden our conception of literacy beyond the traditional view to incorporate different types of mediated experiences that teach us about the world and planet. Throughout this issue, the collected authors explore various facets of communication, including the complex intersections of food, art, language, youth media, solar punk, embodied knowing, media as material objects, remote sensing, and the human response to the climate crisis. Something media educators understand implicitly is that education is not confined to the classroom—media act as a kind of "public pedagogy" that teaches people how the world works through different sensory experiences (audio, film, TV, print, social media, etc.). Highlights of these different approaches in our special issue of ecomedia literacy include:

- Exploring dominant paradigms that govern how we frame contemporary issues, Four Arrows (aka Don Trent Jacobs) critiques language use from an indigenous perspective, while Tema Milstein reframes the role of scholarship and teaching through regenerative pedagogy. Tim Wise offers a provocative assessment of STEM in his proposal for developing MESH: Media Literacy, Ethics, Sociology, and History. Carolyn Fortuna breaks down the "Not in my back yard," or NIMBY phenomena, and why coal is on its way out. Rethinking science is explored in a thoughtful review of Naomi Orekes' latest book, "Why Trust Science?"
- Interdisciplinarity is a strong theme. Andy Opel explores strategies for educators from different fields to work together on a media project that documents environmental problems in a local river ecosystem. Bill Pettit and Candice Smith Corby show how art and food culture were combined in their summer program in Italy.
- Expanding the concept of ecomedia, Benjamin Thevenin explores the material reality of media; Carl Bybee and Shelby Stanovsek assert the importance of embodied knowledge in

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ecomedia education; and Antonio Lopez interviews Kenji Williams about the Bella Gaia project, which combines the use of remote sensing and art to put people's senses in touch with climate science.

- For an exploration of community-based media programs, we have Jason Corwin's discussion of a youth media program, "Green Guerillas," that served rural communities of color; Steve Goodman's experience of teaching for environmental justice at the Educational Video Center; Brett Cohen and Leonie Joubert's account of training community-based journalists in South Africa to engage in effective, local climate change reporting; and Derek Douglas presents an overview of youth, ecomedia, and resilience in Appalachia.
- Classroom strategies are offered from Denis Doyon, who explores a pedagogy for green web design, and Chelsea Attwell, a Director with The Association for Media Literacy and teacher, who shares a case study of primary learners using design thinking and media literacy to create more sustainable snack food packaging in their school community. Sox Sperry from Project Look Sharp explores how to apply constructivist deconstruction techniques for media and the environment. Jeff Share and Antonio Lopez examine how media literacy techniques can be used to analyze fake climate news and disinformation. Digging deeper into climate denialism, Rachell Marshall applies a critical analysis to right-wing propaganda that was sent to over 300,000 teachers. Exploring the importance of teaching biophilia (the love of nature) a new teacher, a principal, and a teacher educator share experiences and ideas in the essay by Mendoza, Rumble, and Share. Envisioning positive futures in ecomedia, Isaijah Johnson's overview of Solar Punk literature demonstrates how a new genre of science fiction can be used for English Language Arts instruction.

We hope you will use these articles in your teaching and your civic engagement. We have much work to do.

Special Issue Co-Editors, (left to right) Jeff Share, Antonio Lopez, and Theresa Redmond at the National Association for Media Literacy Education biennial conference in Washington D.C. June 2019

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