Where Does the Ribbon Want to Take Us? Rethinking the Role of Materials in Sustainability Education

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As of January 1, 2018, China will no longer import much of the plastic and paper that we have been shipping there for decades. This means that much of the world’s recycling could become garbage. What are the implications of the end of the ‘golden age’ of recycling for sustainability education?

Contemporary approaches to sustainability education regard humans as the primary protagonists, solely responsible for destroying the planet and in turn for saving it. This anthropocentric paradigm unintentionally perpetuates the toxic cycle of extraction, production, consumption, and waste (or reuse/recycle) that caused environmental degradation.

What might be possible for sustainability education if we were to de-center the human and reconceptualize materials as agential and ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennet, 2010) rather than passive objects in a journey for sustainability? This shift could offer a pedagogy of hope and relational practices in an ecologically challenged world.

This presentation draws upon data collected through the Inventing ReMida Portland project (IRPP), a creative reuse facility located within Helen Gordon Child Development Center at Portland State University. A doctoral student from IRPP shares a narrative about a project that unsettled her thinking in regard to creative reuse with young children. The project, entitled ”Where does the ribbon want to take us?” challenged the educator’s approach of thinking about the materials, and through observation of children, opens up possibilities for thinking with the materials. The data from the project generates a discussion among IRPP coordinators about the role of materiality in their sustainability project and in the future of sustainability education.

References:


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