

Co-Editor Statement: Why, When, and How to “Unsettle”

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“Settled” means a matter is finished, has reached a conclusion, and over time, perhaps is comfortable in its ways. “Unsettling” can be a matter of circumstance, such as the unexpected emergence of a new piece of paradigm-shifting information; or intentional, as in an organized effort to change established understandings, reopen a matter, or shift a political perspective or practice. Unsettling is a disruption from the norm, from the expected, and can be unforeseen or intentional or a combination of both. Such is the case with the disruption of the Environmental Movement and its foundational field of Environmental Studies.

Surging waves of immigration to the U.S., fueled in part by failures of American foreign policy, produced significant impacts on the demographics of the U.S. in the 1970’s and 80’s and were experienced as a paradigm-shifting development by many fields of study and civic engagement. During this period, my California-based colleagues in education and cultural work and I focused our efforts on assessing the impacts of these demographic shifts on Environmental Education and activism. We saw a need to shape and respond to the emerging view that people of color in the U.S. were not recognized for their indigenous environmentalism and advocacy, nor represented in the mainstream environmental movement and its corporate agenda. Further, Environmental Studies as a field was likewise disengaged from the racial, cultural, and

socioeconomic factors that intersected with the severe environmental conditions facing people of color and low income urban and rural communities.

In formulating a paradigm-transforming project, we looked outside the field of environmental learning to Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy. Both fields provided the research, pedagogical practices, ethical and ideological frameworks that could broaden and transform environmental learning. Such innovations would be helpful in engaging people of color in their own environmental learning and community-based environmental and political projects. Seeded with the conceptual insights, rich and practical research, and the social justice ethic of those fields, we focused on challenging and transforming Environmental Education and Environmental Studies. We named our project Multicultural Environmental Education, the keystone effort of our nonprofit organization, Three Circles Center—the name of which is derived from a recognition of the symbiotic interconnections of cultures, ecologies, and communities. We then formulated an initial set of guiding principles to support the development and practice of Multicultural Environmental Education and which embrace the vision of multicultural solidarity and environmental justice. The breadth of our continuing work spans teacher training, mentoring, community level organizing, research, policy development and advocacy.

While we focused at our inception on education and community development, Three Circles Center and our Multicultural Environmental Education project found a broader political context and a home in the newly emerged movement for Environmental Justice. The movement's multiple aims span issues of power, race, harmful environmental impacts, the demographics of the environmental movement, and a critique of the governmental environmental protection regime.

The meanings, consequences, contingencies, and disruptions of Multicultural Environmental Education and Environmental Justice continue to reverberate through

environmental learning and advocacy. There are many other disruptions—whether new possibilities or long-standing alternative projects and configurations—all on the margins, seeking a foothold or a broader platform from which to be heard and to disrupt exclusive and settled conversations and spaces in Environmental Studies.

This issue of Contingencies is a space to hear and consider the integrative, inclusive, subversive, and disruptive reformulations of projects outside the mainstream of settled Environmental Studies. It is our hope that the thinking here lifts up and inspires unsettling efforts everywhere in environmental spaces.

--Running-Grass

Running-Grass continues the work of Three Circles Center—now an LLC—in the intersectional spaces of environmental education, sustainability, climate advocacy, and environmental justice. (www.threecircles.org)