Community of Practice in Ecosystem Approaches to Health

CoPEH-Canada

Communauté de pratique sur les approches écosystémiques de la santé

Decolonization, Equity + Climate Transformation

Authors:

Mumbi N. Maina, PhD + Cody Thomas, MPH, BHSc

Reviewed by: We'es Tes, Sandra Martin

CONNECTS WITH:

Sex and gender – Narratives – Participation and research

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INTRODUCTION

The rising social inequities, ongoing colonization, and climate crisis demand a fundamental rethinking of our ways of knowing, being, and doing (Haraway, 2016; Escobar, 2018). This module provides an opportunity for learners to critically reflect on the root causes of interconnected social and ecological injustices and their impact on the health and well-being of both people and the planet. In a world increasingly polarized around fundamental issues such as the climate crisis (Klein, 2014), focusing on equity and decolonization is essential for uncovering the underlying paradigms that structure and organize our society (Smith, 2012). It is impossible to transform what we cannot see; thus, identifying the historical contexts that have brought us to this point is crucial for working toward climate transformation (Povinelli, 2016).

A central tenet of equity and decolonization is an understanding of power dynamics. Studies show that society establishes power hierarchies based on how different groups are positioned (Collins, 2000). This power imbalance affects the way groups relate to one another, resulting in benefits for those at the top and disadvantages for those at the bottom (Young, 2006; Nash, 2018). Power imbalances are evident in areas such as gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation, with those who identify as male, white, wealthy, able-bodied, and heterosexual often positioned at the top of the hierarchy (Crenshaw, 2019; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020).

In the context of climate transformation, it is vital to examine how these power dynamics manifest. Research indicates that those who have contributed least to the climate crisis, predominantly from the Global South, suffer the greatest impacts, while those in the Global North, who have contributed the most, possess more resources to mitigate these effects (Roberts & Parks, 2007; Bhattacharya, 2017). At the IPCC, conversations have aimed to develop a just and equitable approach to ensuring that nations most responsible for the climate crisis bear a greater responsibility for addressing its consequences (IPCC, 2021). In Canada, the impacts of the climate crisis are also disproportionately felt, with Indigenous, racialized, and low-income communities most affected (Ford et al., 2015; Berry et al., 2018). This differential impact must be central to climate action and transformation efforts (Agyeman et al., 2009).

Pursuing climate transformation requires an examination of one's positionality—understanding how our social identities shape our perspectives and actions (Haraway, 2016). As practitioners, we, the authors of this module, navigate multiple identities, including being Indigenous and Black individuals with experiences of both privilege and marginalization. We find ourselves in unique yet interconnected positions, coming from Indigenous communities on Turtle Island and as part of the African diaspora. Working on lands marked by settler colonialism, we are called to work in service of self-determination, acknowledge Indigenous Title and Rights, and build solidarity with Black communities on these lands (Simpson, 2014; Razack, 2015).

Our approach to developing and delivering this module embodies decolonial practices such as co-creation, relationality, reciprocity, and care (Mignolo, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Together with the project team, we held multiple sessions that allowed us to engage in meaningful conversations about the key ideas to include in this module. While this process took time—time not always available to all—it provided us with a valuable opportunity to curate a session that models how transformative work can unfold. The resulting 1.5-hour session was a dialogue between the two facilitators, incorporating learners' input as another opportunity to challenge traditional teacher-student power dynamics and co-create knowledge together. This model of decolonial practice is equity in action and serves as an invitation for learners to incorporate these principles into their ongoing work (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Purpose

The purpose of this module is to introduce learners to the concepts of decolonization and equity, to help them understand what these concepts look like in practice, and to invite them to imagine how these can help our society move towards climate transformation.

Objectives

- Understand the underlying structures and root causes of climate inequities/health disparities
- Examine the values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions that drive the climate crisis
- Understand alternative ways of knowing, doing, and being that enable a sustainable future
- Develop a critical reflection of the learnings and integration into daily practice going forward

Guiding Questions

1. What are the decisions, policies, and practices that got us to where we are today?
2. What needs to happen to move our society to a more just and sustainable future?

Working Terms

Decolonization, equity, climate crisis, transformation, systemic inequity, sustainable future, health disparities.

Directions

This module presents an opportunity for learners to critically reflect on the paradigms upon which our society is built and organized. Learners will unpack the power dynamics inherent at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systems levels, recognizing how these power dynamics interact to produce benefits for some and inequities for others. Learners' perspectives and living experiences are weaved into the session to decenter the instructor as the ultimate knowledge holder and encourage learners to be critically reflexive of their role in a decolonial future. As such, we encourage the instructor to invite learners to bring their experiences and knowledge in a process of co-creating their learning journey. The following principles will help set the table for the possible un/learning through this module:

Slowing down, critical reflection, collective care, openness, humility, and reciprocity.

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Introductions Through Sharing Positionality

Description

As part of setting the table for the discussion, we invite the instructor to welcome the learners into the space and introduce the course. Drawing from relational practice, the instructor will introduce themselves including their positionality and how they come into this work. This can include sharing their name, pronouns, ancestry, land acknowledgment, etc. This way of introduction begins to help the learners see an alternative way of being that invites our full selves, acknowledging the histories we carry with us as we move through society. The instructor can invite learners to use a similar model to introduce themselves in pairs. Learners are encouraged to bring in a photograph of a place where they relate to the land and/or a photo they can use as a talking point to situate themselves.

Aims/Goals

The aims of this activity include:

1. Honouring the land. Normalize the honouring of Indigenous lands and histories of place as a way of decolonizing ourselves.
2. Co-creating with us. Help to dismantle the power dynamics of teacher and student or instructor and participants.
3. Engaging students as active learners. Invite you to contribute and use not only what you've learned in the previous modules but also your lived experience.

Guiding Questions

- What is the significance of the place that you chose?
- What is your positionality - how do you come to these lands?

Directions

TOTAL TIME: 15 Minutes

OBJECTIVE:

This activity is intended to help ground and situate the learners for the work that is to be carried out during this course. It will facilitate a learning environment that is grounded in relational practice. It will also foster a sense of shared understanding and invite learners to bring their full selves into the discussion, laying the foundation for deeper engagement with the course themes.

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

STEP 1: Instructor Introduction and Grounding of the Space

- Begin by welcoming learners into the space and introducing the course.
- Share your own positionality, including aspects such as your name, pronouns, ancestry, and the lands that you come from or that hold meaning to you. If possible, share photos of the lands/places that hold meaning to you.
- Reflect on your journey into this work, emphasizing relational practice and the importance of bringing your full self to the space.
- Set the stage to include openness and mutual respect, inviting learners to engage in a similar reflective process and letting them know their insight will help with the co-learning.

STEP 2: Learner Introductions in Pairs

- Encourage learners to introduce themselves in pairs using the relational model that has been demonstrated.
- Provide guiding prompts such as sharing their name, pronouns, cultural background, and connection to the land or community.
- Invite learners to reflect on what histories and identities they carry into this space.

STEP 3: Photographic Connection Exercise *(The instructor will invite participants to bring the photo in advance to inform this step)*

- Ask learners to share a photograph that represents their connection to a place, land, or an object of significance.
- During their introductions, learners use this photo as a talking point to situate themselves in relation to the land and their personal experiences.
- Facilitate a group debrief afterward, allowing learners to share insights or reflections on the exercise and what it revealed about different ways of knowing and being.

Activity 2: Current State - The Reality of the Climate Crisis

Description

The climate crisis is not just an environmental issue; it is deeply intertwined with histories of colonization, racism, systemic inequities, and social injustice. The roots of the crisis lie in extractive and exploitative systems—colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization—that prioritize profit over people and the planet. These systems have disrupted Indigenous stewardship of the land, marginalized communities, and entrenched disparities in wealth, health, and climate resilience. This small group discussion invites participants to reflect on and examine the links between climate change, colonization, racism, and systemic inequities. Using their lived experience, education, and employment backgrounds, participants will be asked to discuss questions that will help draw out the climate crisis through their lens.

Aims/Goals

The aims of this activity include:

1. Learn about the background of the climate crisis.
2. Understand the intersection of the climate crisis, colonization, and inequity.
3. Identify the impacts of the climate crisis and intersecting issues on your community.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the climate crisis as understood by various communities?
2. Tying into activity one: what climate-related changes have you witnessed or experienced in the places that you chose?
3. What are the impacts of the climate crisis across the country and globally?

Directions

Instructor notes: Consider using materials from diverse sources, e.g. Indigenous, Black and racialized, and other equity-deserving groups, drawing from the reference list included in this document.

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

TOTAL TIME: 15 minutes

STEP 1: Introduction and Framing for the Discussion

- Begin by introducing the section and reiterate the topic and the key themes that the discussion will be focused around. Provide a brief overview of how the themes are interconnected and emphasize the importance of examining colonization and inequities as they relate to the climate crisis.
- Set the context for the discussion by sharing guiding questions.

STEP 2: Small Group Discussion

- Divide participants into small groups (4-5 people if possible) and encourage them to reflect on the guiding questions. Ask them to share personal insights, experiences, and ideas related to the topics.
- Reiterate that this exercise also helps with the co-learning that is occurring in this course.
- As the facilitator, move between groups to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute and guide the conversation as needed.

- Encourage the use of respectful listening, open dialogue, and sharing of diverse perspectives. Ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak and share.

STEP 3: Large Group Sharing and Reflection

- After 10-15 minutes of small group discussion, invite a member from each group to share some of their key insights with the class.
- Facilitate a group reflection on common themes, differences in perspectives, and new insights from the groups.
    - Encourage participants to think critically about how they can apply these insights in their personal or professional lives.
- Finish by highlighting key points that were not discussed regarding the background and interconnected nature of the climate crisis. Emphasize the significance of continued dialogue and learning to develop a critical understanding of the climate crisis.

Activity 3: How Did We Get Here? Examining the values, structures, and systems that got us here

Description

To understand how we have arrived at the intersection of colonization, inequity, and the climate crisis, it is essential to examine the values, beliefs, and assumptions that have shaped societal systems and behaviours. At the core of these systems are issues of power and privilege, where those in positions of power have historically exploited both people and resources, causing environmental destruction and social inequities. These power dynamics are deeply embedded in colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, shaping how lands and resources have been used and who benefits from their extraction. This section invites participants to critically examine the values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions that have shaped societal systems, focusing on how these dynamics have led to the climate crisis and social inequities, particularly through the lens of power, privilege, and historical structures.

Aims/Goals

The aims of this activity include:

1. Develop a critical analysis of the role of power and privilege.
2. Identify the values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions that shape our society.
3. Foster a shift in perspective toward decolonization and equity.

Guiding Questions

1. What beliefs about the environment, progress, and consumption have shaped how societies interact with the environment?
2. What assumptions about power, ownership, and entitlement have been normalized?
3. What values have driven the exploitation of land and people?
4. How do we reclaim the power to plan and act to address the existing climate crisis?

Directions

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

TOTAL TIME: 25 minutes

STEP 1: Share the Context and Frame the Discussion

- Start by introducing the key driving question: "What are the values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions that have shaped how we got here?" Explain the focus of the discussion - examining the cultural, historical, and systemic influences that have contributed to the climate crisis and social inequities.
- Take time to briefly explain how power and privilege, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy are deeply embedded in societal systems and have influenced the exploitation of people, land, and resources.

STEP 2: Small Group Discussion

- Break participants into small groups (4-5 if possible) and invite them to discuss the key themes, using the guiding questions as areas of focus.
- Remind participants to draw from personal reflections, historical knowledge, and examples shared in step 1 above.
- Reiterate that this exercise also helps with the co-learning that is occurring in this course.
- As the facilitator, move between groups to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute and guide the conversation as needed.

STEP 3: Large Group Sharing and Reflection

- Bring the participants back together and invite each group to share the key points from their discussion.
- As the small groups share, encourage the class to reflect on the common themes, differences in perspectives, and ideas presented.
- Conclude by summarizing the main takeaways and highlighting the importance of critical thinking and challenging the systems that contribute to both the climate crisis and social inequities.

Activity 4: Decolonial, Equity, and Climate Transformation in Action, Individual Reflections (Journaling Exercise)

Description

This activity is designed to showcase climate transformative practices in our contexts as well as an opportunity to gather individual reflection on how personal values, historical systems, power dynamics, and societal beliefs shape our understanding of the climate crisis. The goal is to explore how we can shift towards a more sustainable and equitable future. Participants will consider examples from local, national, and global contexts, and draw from content they learned from the course(s) and group discussions to help them connect the broader themes of decolonization, equity, and climate justice to their personal reflections and practice in their respective areas of influence.

Aims/Goals

The aims of this activity are to:

1. Practice self-reflection on personal values, beliefs, norms, and impact on the climate crisis.

2. Foster critical reflection of the mental shifts needed to transform our individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systems dynamics.
3. Identify possible collective action toward decolonization, equity, and climate transformation.

Guiding Questions

1. What are your personal values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions that inform your daily practices?
2. How can you become aware of these beliefs, norms, and assumptions, and what needs to shift to enable climate transformation?
3. What climate solutions are you aware of that can inform your practices toward a decolonial, equitable, and sustainable future?
4. What will you commit to doing at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systems level to contribute towards climate transformation?

Directions

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

TOTAL TIME: 20 minutes

STEP 1: Showcasing Promising Practices

- To show the possible solutions to the climate crisis, the instructor will share a few examples from local, national, and global contexts.
    - For example, see solutions from Canada, Africa and India.
- In a large group, invite the participants to share some practices that they are aware of as a way to spark hope that they have agency to contribute to a just future.
- E.g. draw on Indigenous practices of reclaiming fire and fire stewardship in British Columbia.
- Instructor can use the video of the hummingbird to show the power of action - doing all you can.

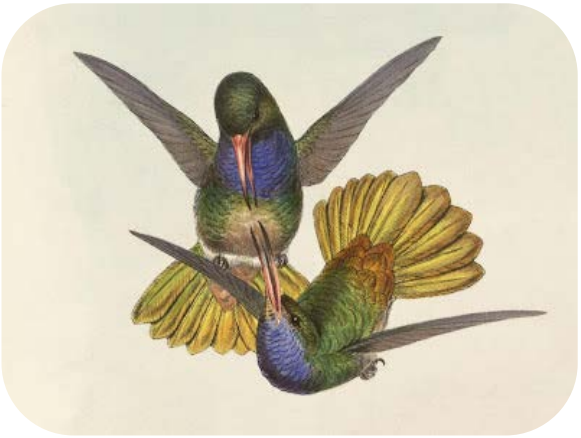

Image: *'A monograph of the Trochilidae'* by John Gould, published between 1861 and 1887. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. CC-BY-NC 4.0: **https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/**

STEP 2: Individual Reflection and Journaling

- Introduce the individual reflection exercise to the participants, inviting them to take time to reflect on their own being and how that informs their impact on the climate crisis.
    - Use questions #1,2 & 4 to guide the journaling activity
- Emphasize that this activity is an opportunity to slow down and look inward to understand how we each contribute towards our current state, and that each individual has the agency to make change.
- Note that while individual actions are important, they need to be tied to institutional and systems approaches to transformation.

STEP 3: Pair-share discussion

- Invite participants to get into pairs and share highlights from their journaling.
- Ask each participant to practice active listening, waiting until the other finishes to ask any clarifying questions.
- Switch the role after 2 minutes, practicing the step above.

STEP 4: Large group debrief and closing

- Participants will come together to share what it felt like to journal their reflections.
    - Encourage participants to incorporate this type of reflection in their daily practices, to make conscious thought processes and actions that are often unconscious.
- On a whiteboard, the facilitator will take note of the actions that participants shared, focusing on the institutional and systems-level actions.
- The facilitator can invite the participants to look at the list of actions identified and decide how they would like, individually or collectively, to follow up on these actions.
- To close, recap the session, and invite participants to share one intention for how they will move forward after this session.

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