

Thesis abstract

Localising the Global Eco-Schools™ Program in South Africa: a postcolonial analysis

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Environmental educators are exhorted to ‘Think Global and Act Local’. This popular refrain encourages environmental educators to consider the interface between the universal and the particular. It also highlights the ways global environmental education programs such as the Foundation for Environmental Education’s (FEE) Green Flag Eco-Schools Program can shape the pedagogy and practice of environmental educators in localized settings around the world. Originally a Danish initiative designed for a European context, the Eco-School Program is now the most widely adopted environmental education program in the world, deployed in over 64 countries. As such it has the capacity to significantly influence environmental education pedagogy and practice internationally, yet little is known about its effect.

My research explores the influence of Eco-Schools on the ways that teachers from non-Western contexts understand themselves and their work. Specifically, I am interested in understanding the extent to which Eco-Schools, as exemplars of a global environmental education program, impose particular discourses, visions or imaginaries of what it means to be an environmental educator on teachers in Southern contexts. Through a case study of the implementation of FEE Eco-Schools in South Africa, I explore the

ways in which the program shapes what counts as environmental education knowledge, what pedagogies are deemed appropriate, and what kinds of student actions are encouraged.

The key research questions I address are:

1. How are Eco-Schools teachers imagined through global and local discourses?
2. How has the South African host organisation (WESSA) interpreted Eco-Schools discourses; and what are the mechanisms through which they subject Eco-Schools teachers to these discourses?
3. How do South African Eco-Schools teachers subject themselves to, and resist, such discourses?

A postcolonial lens is employed to illuminate the everyday effects of power on teachers’ perceptions of themselves and their work. Postcolonial concepts offer an innovative way of investigating teacher identity and self-perceptions of capacity and agency in environmental education because they emphasise the powerful colonising effects of discourse as well as the possibility of agency through discursive disruption. My research provides a telling case study of Eco-School teachers in South Africa and how they are both subject to and subject themselves to different teacher identities made available through Eco-Schooling discourses. Through the methodology of postcolonial discourse

analysis, I draw upon a range of global Eco-Schooling policies and curriculum resources as well as interviews with South African Eco-School coordinators and teachers to explore how Eco-Schooling identities are negotiated across global and local discursive fields in South Africa. My research shows how Eco-School teachers are both taking up and resisting dominant discourses available in

these global and local arenas, creating new hybrid identities that offer spaces for teacher agency.

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