

Ecology/ Eco-criticism in English Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, a paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centered to learners-centered approach like Autonomous Learning and Culturally Responsive Teaching approach is necessary in pedagogical practices like ecology and eco-criticism in fostering the students' critical faculty to understand the ecology and its relation with the human world, and raise eco-consciousness among them for a more sustainable world. In search of an effective eco-pedagogy, this research suggests the teachers to borrow the insights, ideas, strategies like field-work, eco-centric project etc. from other disciplines as Environmental Science, Climatology, Social Work, Geography and use examples from the learners' everyday life and cultural background so that while teaching the literary texts like *Silent Spring* (1962) in the classroom, the students will be able to connect them with their own environment, culture, and realize the danger of humans' maltreatment upon the earth which will help them to be responsible citizens. Through the sensible use of advanced technologies as internet, tape-recorder, Artificial Intelligence or virtual reality, screening different short animated films like *Tomorrow* (2019) in the classroom, the teacher can also address the threat of climate change and global warming upon the eco-system to enhance the environmental awareness, justice and eco-literary scholarship.

Pedagogy, according to Oxford Dictionary, is the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept. It includes the approaches, strategies, and techniques teachers use to help learners learn as well as the theory behind how learning happens in the classroom setting. Pedagogy, in the context of ecology and eco-criticism, suggests an ecological approach to teaching and learning that aims to develop ecological and critical awareness among students, and work towards a more sustainable world. In the introduction of *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, Greg Garrard states that eco-criticism has always been preoccupied with pedagogy. 'The point of ecocritical pedagogy is to make its existing environmentality explicit and, above all, sustainable (Garrard, 9).' This eco-centric pedagogy's main focus is to create thoughtful citizens through participatory or dialectic learning especially in the classroom in which the students really get involved in issues related, for example, to nature, the local community, climate change, global warming and the consequences and possibilities of globalization. The participating students become engaged in analyzing various cultural constructions of nature, animals and other non-human characters, as well as various human and post-human conflicts and other fields of eco-critical interest. Furthermore, the students are required to use their own creativity and develop a variety of products. For example, in their writing, they address the issues of climate change, global warming, and the problems of cosmopolitanism in varied ways using different rhetorical and stylistic repertoires which ultimately develop their language skills as well as critical thinking. In the addition, for creating an environment of great effectiveness, other learners-centered approach like Autonomous learning, Culturally Responsive approach, Collaborative, Integrative, Interdisciplinary, placed-based approach, eco-project-based learning, outdoor exploration etc. can be used especially, while teaching eco- literary texts like *Silent Spring*(1962)by Rachel Carson, *Fire on the Mountain*(1999) by Anita Desai etc. in the eco-classroom. To address the man-made hazard of climate change and global warming upon the whole eco-system to enhance students' environmental awareness and sustainable behaviors (Frank and Ricci), this research suggests that

the sensible use of advanced technologies of the modern world such as internet, tape-recorder, multimedia, Artificial Intelligence or virtual reality, screening different short animated films like *Tomorrow*(2019), *Migrants*(2012) etc. in the classroom, can play a pivotal role for establishing effective Eco-pedagogy in educational settings. In “Teaching Green Cultural Studies and New Media”, Anthony Lioi discusses the role of new media such as graphic novels with regard to their mass cultural appeal and eco-critical effectiveness.

In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Glotfelty states that Eco-criticism, also known as Green Studies, is an attempt by scholars to delve into texts - literary and cultural-through an “earth centred approach” (Glotfelty, XVIII). It refers to the studying and exploring of texts from an ecologically and environmentally conscious perspective. It believes that human culture is tied with the physical world, of which it affects each other. Howarth claims, “although we cast nature and culture as opposites, in fact they constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream” (69). The ecocritics believe that the problems in nature are largely byproducts of man-made culture. Usually, human approaches natural world from intrinsic and instrumentalist perspectives. According to Nayar, western thought has often taken an instrumentalist view of nature – nature is there to serve human needs (246) especially in the 17th century. However, after the eighteenth century, there emerged many voices like Arne Nesse, a Norwegian philosopher, who developed the notion of “Deep Ecology” emphasizes the basic interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features, and presents a symbiotic and holistic world-view rather than an anthropocentric one. With the progress of modern science, technology and economy, humans, for their obsession with material development and enrichment and for satisfying their unlimited desires, ravage nature treating it as a “mechanical” rather than a “natural” system. Relevantly, in *Silent Spring* (1962), which is thought to have begun the literary eco-critical movement, Carson emphasizes the ‘harmony’ of humanity and nature that ‘once’ existed in America and how the excessive use of modern pesticides, particularly DDT, deteriorates the existing harmony, evidenced in the collapse of the populations of bird, in the death of river, and so on. Carson says:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings... On the mornings that had once throbbled with the drawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh (Carson, 1-2).

Actually, this unchecked use of pesticides destroys not just the particular pests, but the whole ecosystem. Even, Bangladeshi short animated cli-fi film, *Tomorrow*, is a cultural product whereas climate change and environmental crisis are consequences of anthropocentric cultural practices (Akhter, 14).

To introduce the concept of eco-criticism or ecology and develop students’ sustainable environmental awareness towards man-made eco-crisis in the classroom in an effective way, ‘Interdisciplinary’ or insights, ideas, strategies like field-work, eco-research project based learning etc. from other disciplines like Environmental Science, Climatology, Social Work, Geography, Cultural Studies etc. can be more useful than the traditional teacher-centered imperialistic model where only the teachers speak and deliver their lectures and the students as passive receivers only hear and gain only theoretical knowledge without any kind of practical knowledge and therefore, can’t connect to their everyday life and consequently are lagging behind in their practical life. Garrard states, ‘ecocriticism should be demandingly interdisciplinary’ (5). Primarily, ecocritical literary studies interacts with ‘the most hotly contested of modern sciences: climatology’ (7). Further, in “Reading and Writing Climate Change”, Gabriel and Garrard states, “seeing climate change as a pedagogical *opportunity* provides ecocriticism with much more generous remit than providing PR for the IPCC” (120). In “A Fable for Tomorrow” of *Silent Spring*, Carson visualizes a future where widespread pesticide use has silenced wildlife and created a world of ecological devastation, foreshadowing the potential consequences of unchecked pesticide use. Even, in Uddin’s *Tomorrow*, the devastating effect of climate change due to global warming upon the ecosystem especially southern part of Bangladesh is portrayed through one of the visions of the little boy named Ratul. Giving such apocalyptic vision or message through such texts or films to provide

a kind of realistic view in purpose of raising eco-awareness by making them realize the danger of climate change and global warming caused by human's anthropocentric thinking, can be very effective in postmodern classroom.

In the context of teaching the short animated cli-fi film *Tomorrow*, 'placed-based' approach of eco-critical pedagogies is more applicable because in the twenty-first century, the world is plagued with climate change and eco-disasters, and countries like Bangladesh, especially its southern seaside regions because of their unique delta pattern and close proximity to the sea, will face the first brunt of ecological crisis. This approach analyzes how environmental issues and injustices affect specific places (Cox's Bazar in *Tomorrow*), communities, and how these issues are reflected in literary and other cultural texts. Actually, it foregrounds not only the literary text's geographical place of origin but also the student's: The 'place' of place-based learning is, then, becoming increasingly complex, including both the sensuous immediacy of phenomenological approaches and the proliferating loci of electronic mediation.

Further, to provide a complete view of the instinct communion among human, ecology and culture and the consequences of human's indifferent actions, teachers can utilize 'Culturally Responsive' pedagogy in the classroom. According to Ladson-Billings, Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in all aspects of learning. It is meant to promote engagement, enrichment, and achievement of all students by embracing a wealth of diversity, identifying and nurturing students' cultural strengths, and validating students' lived experiences and their place in the world, thinks Villegas & Lucas. In fact, learning occurs when students connect subject matter to their own life. Students can compare Carson's "A fable for Tomorrow", "And No Birds Sing", "Rivers of Death", with their own experiences of environmental change, resilience, or injustice.

Additionally, only classroom lectures can't give them a proper understanding of the ecology and the destructive effect of human's maltreatment that they will get from real life experience. While teaching texts like *Silent Spring*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *The Merman's Prayer* where human's selfish actions like unchecked use of pesticides (including DDT), Pasteur Institute, waste around the tourist's spot and sea-beach side of Cox's Bazar are contaminating the whole environment through water pollution, air pollution etc., teachers can assign some field-works, eco-research projects on local environmental issues and sustainable practices, allowing students to explore real-world problems. For example, a research project of making a documentary in collaboration on the effect of climate change (that is present in *Tomorrow* and *Migrants*) is given for which students have to go through the direct contact with local people of that particular area which will help them to develop their communication competence, language skills, technological efficiency, critical thinking, competence of teamwork, management skills, and the experience they gather to complete the task will help them in their practical life in future. In this case, students will be introduced to a new approach, Autonomous learning approach.

Further, incorporating ecology or green studies into English pedagogy, Lynne Bruckner also suggests several ways of integrating eco-critical approaches as holding classes outside, asking students to keep 'eco journals', and using contemporary ecological issues. She says that an eco-critical pedagogy for early modern scholars requires a purposeful, sometimes uncomfortable, departure (or at least partial departure) from the now hegemonic methodologies of new historicism and cultural materialism. To connect with our environmental contexts, Kerridge also recommends developing 'a classroom vocabulary' for this.

For raising environmental sustainability in educational settings, Cassel's "Walking in the Weathered World" proposes to "help students understand that many of the problems they face are not just personal or local; instead, that they are part of larger problem of the consumer culture in which they live" (27). This form of critique is anything but new, yet Cassel adds an eco-critical twist by suggesting the practice of walking as a means of pedagogy. Students are asked to take walks, but not in order to establish a contemplative love for nature, but rather in order to make them actually see their neighbourhoods and environments. This, she hopes, will help making students "aware of their behaviour and its impact on others" (34). In this case, *Tomorrow's* visionary impact

of climate change and global warming due to ‘fossil fuels’ on polar-bears and humans’ health makes Ratul along with students realize the importance of protecting environment as well as Bangladesh and combined effort of everyone to save the Earth and for that the continuation of resistance against pollution is essential. So, Michela Cortese highly recommends fictional films for making the audience feel emotionally involved with the climate change issues and thus creating eco-literary and bringing in significant behavioural changes among people.

In eco-pedagogy classroom, Cassel also recommends the use of new technologies, specifically blogs and wikis to foster collaboration among the students and potentially, community involvement because, as Tim Lindgren explains, ‘[t]he environmental crisis is not just a scientific issue that involves providing more evidence of global warming, species extinctions or pollution. Rather, it is an issue of cultural ideologies that shape the decisions people make’ (Mathieu et al., 115). So, as Malcolm McCullough argues, ‘[h]umanity naturally adapts to being in the world by using technology’. Thus, the sustainability of our species depends on the appropriateness of our adaptation (McCullough, 211). These arguments lead us to McDonough and Brungart in their provocative work, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, and the claim that “the solution is not to withdraw from technology but to engage with it more fully, redesigning everything we can with greater ecological intelligence” (123).

To sum up, Eco-pedagogy as an extension of critical pedagogy, seeks to empower individuals as responsible citizens of the Earth (Kahn, 2010) and advocates for the well-being of all living beings. It examines the intricate relationship between living beings and non-living matters and how they influence each other in the ecosystem. In fact, under the shadow of student-centered eco-pedagogy classroom, instructors try to give an apocalyptic vision to raise eco-consciousness and sustainability among mankind about eco-disasters so that they can avoid those attitudes and actions which are harmful to ecosystem. Otherwise, the world will encounter a severe consequence, if such careless, utilitarian and anthropocentric attitudes of humans towards non-human beings continue that is found in the narratives of *Silent Spring* as well as cli-fi movie, *Tomorrow*. Moreover, eco-critical pedagogy aims not only to invoke environmental awareness and impact, but also to make deep shifts in our educational models for which Garrard directly ties environmental change to educational change.

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