

Mattering

I am not empty
a place abandoned
and subject to squatters' rights

my flesh is solid, solid
resisting crowds and all
that would move through me

my skin is browned and sloughed
in the furnace of the sun
but never melted or consumed

my bones, erect, deliberate
support this fortress frame
their marrow, substantial as bread

my vapours are an atmosphere
not to be staked and claimed as galaxy
by any but what my breath invites

the impenetrable depth of my waters
will capsize all who voyage recklessly
across the surface of my insides

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ecological communities,

edge effect: "the line that connects the
pointsof accumulated or abrupt change...
is a stress line or ecotone" (Clements 1907: 297)

introduction

Ask most children about their favourite subject in school, and they invariably reply "recess". One doesn't have to think too long about elementary school days to remember the agony of watching the clock tick towards that magical time when the bell rings and a collective sense of relief rises from students and teachers alike. Recess is naturally any child's favourite subject. It is the only time of the day when children can run around, stretch their legs, talk to friends and play. Recess represents a fleeting freedom that ends each time the bell rings and summons everyone back into the classroom.

The division between recess and the rest of the school day is profound, marked by bells, whistles, on-duty teachers and rigidly defined play spaces. Although there are many physical and psychological benefits of recess for both teachers and pupils, the boundaries between recess and the school day reflect a wider and more problematic division. Education at all levels has failed to bridge the gap between the world of the human and the world of the non-human. In so doing, it has failed to educate our young people about the "real" world, that is to say, the natural world. As a result, students graduate ill-equipped to face the challenges of the current global ecological crisis.

In this paper, I will outline some of the hidden and not-so-hidden divisions that exist between the school community and the ecological community. The notion of a division between communities will be used as a metaphor for describing the current state of education about the environment. In ecological jargon, the term for this division is "edge effect," which describes the dynamic boundary between two distinctly different ecological zones (or biological communities), such as a forest and an open field. In the natural world, the boundary is not a definitive line, but a zone of transition, where the characteristics of both communities meet in a climate of interspecies tension and competition. This ecological phenomenon is a useful metaphor for the tension that exists at the boundaries of the school classroom and the ecological community.

According to the generally accepted scientific definition, an ecological community comprises a group of organisms of different species types along with the abiotic elements of soil, air and water which surround them. These "community members" interact with each other within a prescribed physical space, for example a field or a forest. Similarly, students and teachers interact with each other within the physical space of the classroom as one level of a human community. Although it is problematic to oversimplify the definition of community (human or ecological), it is not my intent within this paper to discuss the implications of the androcentric values implied within the broadly accepted scientific definition. Rather, I wish to use the metaphor of tension between communities to explore where some of the conflict between the human and non-human worlds has occurred. More importantly, if we consider human beings as *part of* the wider, global ecological community, why then are we incapable of actively participating within this community for its greater good? One reason for this lack of participation may be due to the divisive way in which education, particularly education about the environment, has been implemented in the Western world.