

March 2024

## Nurturing a global ecojustice consciousness among preservice teachers through critical place-based learning

Greer C. Burroughs

*The College of New Jersey*, burrougg@tcnj.edu

Marissa E. Bellino

*The College of New Jersey*, bellinom@tcnj.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jger>



Part of the [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

This Refereed Article is brought to you for free and open access by the M3 Center at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Global Education and Research by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Burroughs, G. C., & Bellino, M. E. (2024). Nurturing a global ecojustice consciousness among preservice teachers through critical place-based learning. *Journal of Global Education and Research*, 8(1), 34-48. <https://www.doi.org/10.5038/2577-509X.8.1.1163>

---

# Nurturing a global ecojustice consciousness among preservice teachers through critical place-based learning

## Authors

### Corresponding Author

Marissa E. Bellino, The College of New Jersey, 2000 Pennington Rd, Ewing Township, NJ 08618

## Abstract

Global environmental challenges brought on by over-consumption, limited resources, and climate change will task teacher education programs to prepare teacher candidates with new paradigms in problem-solving, collaboration, and innovation. Skills such as collaborating across cultures and borders, thinking critically and creatively, reflecting on deeply embedded assumptions, and negotiating uncertainty will all be needed to surmount these challenges. EcoJustice education addresses these needs. When combined with critical place-based pedagogies, skills, and attitudes associated with global citizenship may also develop. Four preservice teachers participated in a research trip to Lesvos, Greece, to learn about and aid in the refugee crisis there. Participants documented their experiences via critical reflections and dialogues and analyzed these data. Findings suggest that through engagement in a critical place-based learning experience, preservice teachers challenged conceptions of their role as Americans and shifted towards a more global, EcoJustice consciousness.

## Keywords

ecojustice, global citizenship education, critical place-based learning, preservice teacher preparation

## Revisions

Submission date: Apr. 2, 2020; 1st Revision: Oct. 8, 2020; 2nd Revision: Oct. 28, 2021; 3rd Revision: Sep. 18, 2022; 4th Revision: Apr. 23, 2023; Acceptance: Apr. 26, 2023

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

# Nurturing a Global EcoJustice Consciousness Among Preservice Teachers Through Critical Place-Based Learning

Greer Burroughs<sup>1</sup> and Marissa E. Bellino<sup>2</sup>

Elementary and Early Childhood Education  
The College of New Jersey  
<sup>1</sup>burrougg@tcnj.edu

Educational Administration and Secondary Education  
The College of New Jersey  
<sup>2</sup>bellinom@tcnj.edu

## Abstract

Global environmental challenges brought on by over-consumption, limited resources, and climate change will task teacher education programs to prepare teacher candidates with new paradigms in problem-solving, collaboration, and innovation. Skills such as collaborating across cultures and borders, thinking critically and creatively, reflecting on deeply embedded assumptions, and negotiating uncertainty will all be needed to surmount these challenges. EcoJustice education addresses these needs. When combined with critical place-based pedagogies, skills, and attitudes associated with global citizenship may also develop. Four preservice teachers participated in a research trip to Lesbos, Greece, to learn about and aid in the refugee crisis there. Participants documented their experiences via critical reflections and dialogues and analyzed these data. Findings suggest that through engagement in a critical place-based learning experience, preservice teachers challenged conceptions of their role as Americans and shifted towards a more global, EcoJustice consciousness.

**Keywords:** ecojustice, global citizenship education, critical place-based learning, preservice teacher preparation

## Introduction

The environment is facing unprecedented natural and manufactured ecological and humanitarian disasters. Severe weather patterns and climate change shifts often come with large-scale social and environmental costs. Confronting the challenges of over-consumption, limited resources, climate change, and all attendant consequences will require new paradigms in problem-solving, collaboration, and innovation. These socio-environmental challenges have both global and local impacts and as such, K-12 public schools need to prepare students to understand the complexity of these issues and ready them to respond in ways that lead to fair, equitable, and sustainable solutions. Additionally, teachers need to be equipped to address student audiences who may come from backgrounds different from their own. Skills such as collaborating across cultures and borders, thinking critically and creatively, reflecting on deeply embedded assumptions, negotiating uncertainty, and problem-solving will all be needed to surmount the challenges and capitalize on

the opportunities ahead.

Today, schools of education must prepare preservice teachers with extended learning to include the study of complex social and environmental problems, the development of skills and orientations to become agents of change, and the ability to critique current paradigms of power, privilege, and marginalization, both locally and globally. Andrews and Aydin (2020) concluded in their review of teacher education programs that there are limited opportunities for students to develop these skills and perspectives. Addressing these challenges can provide novel learning spaces that reimagine how educators are prepared and what they will bring to their future classrooms.

While conventional teacher education often addresses issues of social inequality through foundation courses and seeks to instill a social justice ethic in future teachers, few programs explicitly incorporate an EcoJustice lens (Lowenstein et al., 2010). To address this omission, this paper reports on the transformational experiences of four preservice teacher candidates as they engaged in a critical, place-based learning experience designed to develop knowledge, skills, and orientations associated with an EcoJustice Education worldview. No single definition of EcoJustice Education exists; rather the emerging field is organized around principles and practices. Scholarly literature and extensive work in this area identified six principles that guide understanding of the concept and the structuring of learning experiences for students, analysis of the data, and evaluation of program success.

These principles are:

- (a) An acceptance and valuing of the interdependency of all systems. Individuals are prompted to understand themselves as part of a larger system (Henderson, 2015).
- (b) A recognition of the hierarchical systems that position humans over nature, and some humans as supreme over others (Martusewicz, 2018).
- (c) An analysis of cultural, political, and economic forces that are responsible for and help maintain unjust practices and beliefs (Turner & Donnelly, 2013).
- (d) A recognition that individuals participate in systems of domination and must uncover the forces that have unknowingly shaped deficit views and participation in damaging practices toward people and the environment (Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2016).
- (e) An approach to learning that is contextualized and real-world and engages students in researching problems in communities and seeking solutions, while also deconstructing the cultural roots of the problems (Lowenstein et al., 2010; Lupinacci & Happel, 2016).
- (f) An emphasis on working within local systems, forming partnerships, and valuing the knowledge and traditions held by locals is vital in the problem-solving process (Bowers & Martusewicz, 2009).

These principles served to define how to apply the concept of an EcoJustice consciousness throughout this paper. The consciousness sought to engender among preservice candidates reflects these principles and is evident in the findings. Another finding that emerged was that participation in a critical, place-based, learning experience fostered principles of global citizenship education (GCE), viewed as a complimentary educational focus. This study was guided by the following research questions: (1) In what ways does a critical, place-based learning experience impact preservice teacher meaning-making of an international human and environmental crisis? and (2) How do conceptions of self, citizenship, and responsibility shift because of participation?

## Literature Review

Several bodies of literature are relevant to this study. A primary premise of this work is that an EcoJustice stance among educators is integral to addressing the global challenges of the 21st century. Intersecting and aligning with an EcoJustice orientation are pedagogical approaches embedded in GCE and critical pedagogies of place. Therefore, each of these areas is discussed below.

### *Education for EcoJustice*

At the very core of EcoJustice is the recognition and value of the interdependency of all systems. Individuals are prompted to understand themselves as part of a larger system and to develop a consciousness of connection upon which to act (Henderson, 2015; Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2015). This system's perspective highlights the ways that EcoJustice work is conceptualizing *environment* and *environmental education* beyond the natural world to include the social and material (i.e., built) environments as well. By calling on individuals to recognize their participation in these various systems of domination, they uncover forces that have led to limited and demeaning understandings of *others*. An EcoJustice Education must help students develop, “the skills and habits to critique the cultural norms, structures, and forces at work in a society that operate to constitute and reproduce unjust and unsustainable attitudes about other people, other living beings, and the land” (Turner & Donnelly, 2013, p. 388). These include recognizing the hierarchical systems that position humans over nature, and some humans as supreme over others, and how schools and culture perpetuate these belief systems. When it is understood that “modernist cultures. . .are organized by patterns of belief and behavior that naturalize hierarchized relationships” (Lowenstein et al., 2010, p. 101), individuals can move past ingrained patterns of thought and behavior and become actors in bringing about change. Education from this position calls for analysis of cultural, political, and economic forces that have led to the United States -centric and anthropocentric worldviews that “reproduce unjust and unsustainable attitudes about other people, other living beings, and the land” (Turner & Donnelly, 2013, p. 388,).

Education for EcoJustice also moves beyond traditional classroom-based learning and extends into community-based learning. Learning is contextualized and students are called on to learn alongside members and experts in the local community. Emphasis is placed on working within the local systems, forming partnerships, and valuing the knowledge and traditions held by locals as vital in the problem-solving process. Cultural knowledge and practices at the local level (the *commons*) are understood as sources of community empowerment and self-sufficiency (Bowers & Martusewicz, 2009). From this vantage, students investigate real-world issues, while analyzing the cultural and structural roots of the problems (Lowenstein et al., 2010; Lupinacci & Happel, 2016). This is a departure from approaches that are limited by textbook topics and classroom boundaries.

### *Global Citizenship Education*

Many educators are concerned with the need to prepare young people to operate within a global environment and thus call for GCE. As there is no clear consensus on what the attributes of a *global citizen* are, neither is there a clear vision for what GCE should encompass. Nonetheless, a review of the literature highlighted commonalities and differences in the growing field of GCE.

Gaudelli (2009) identified five heuristics of GCE: (1) *Neoliberal*, which focuses on preparedness for the global marketplace, (2) *National*, which stresses national civic identity over conceptions of global citizenship, (3) a *Marxist* approach that seeks equity through the redistribution of power and wealth, (4) *World Justice and Governance* that advocates for global justice through the recognition of codified human rights, international law, and civic activity; and (5) *Cosmopolitan*, where a sense of global citizenship, with emphasis on the development of global democratic norms and practices, is the goal. Gaudelli's (2009) heuristics can be used to identify and analyze differing goals and pedagogical practices of GCE.

Many approaches that fall under the GCE umbrella share qualities with an EcoJustice orientation. Learning experiences that go beyond the traditional physical and curriculum boundaries in education, where learners have opportunities to engage with real-world issues, critique existing norms and power structures, engage in problem-solving, and reflect on their learning are shared attributes identified by many scholars in the field of GCE (Brown, 2018; Cantón & Garcia, 2018; Santulli, 2018). Additionally, some models of GCE call for transformative learning experiences to impact individual attitudes and behaviors (Brown, 2018) causing individuals to confront and challenge the assumptions of *others* (Mezirow, 2000). Many scholars envision GCE that equips learners to be agents of change in their communities and globally. Asgharzadeh and Nazim (2018) explained this requires education.

Moves toward engaging with this knowledge in a manner that enables the learner to see the world in a profoundly different way—one that moves them toward social action with the aim of improving the living conditions for the diverse inhabitants of the planet (p. 168).

Others criticize the emphasis on action for leading to what Andreotti (2010) called *soft* engagement, promoting superficial experiences without focusing learners to critically assess issues. Piccin and Finardi (2019) suggested that global or international education programs can serve to reinforce a colonial ideology as locals are often positioned as the *other* in need of saving by Westerners. Despite differences in how to implement GCE, the reality of an ever-increasing interconnected and globalized world calls for attention to how to educate students in the United States.

### ***Critical Place-Based Education***

EcoJustice and GCE both warrant pedagogical approaches linked to place-based education and critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is focused on empowering learners to critique and question structures in society that grant power to some while oppressing others and to equip learners with the skills to be agents of change (Freire, 2018; Giroux, 2010). Place-based learning emphasizes inquiry into local issues at the source (e.g., the community under investigation) while also learning from local experts. Taken together, critical pedagogies of place (Bellino & Adams, 2017; Gruenewald, 2003) challenge dominant educational ideology and provide alternatives where learning about local communities occurs with a focus on critical questioning and engaging in critical discussions. Critical, place-based learning connects people with places outside their familiar classroom space, affords opportunities to investigate and understand local socio-environmental issues more deeply, and recognizes that people hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences. A critical pedagogy of place raises questions about why certain conditions exist and challenges the unequal power dynamics that perpetuate dominant conditions that exploit people, communities, and resources. Making visible the systems that embed local issues within global economic, political, and cultural structures raises critical questions about local environments including who wins, who loses,

who benefits, who suffers (and in what ways), who has access to resources, who does not, who will control resources (and other components of the environment), and who will not. Critical dialogues framed around these questions illuminate how places are products of decisions that are social, political, and economic in nature and can therefore be contested and debated.

## **Methods**

### ***Sample Population and Research Site***

The site of Lesbos, Greece, was selected for the critical, place-based learning experience due to the central role of the island in the ongoing mass migration crisis of people from Syria and North Africa since 2012 and the ensuing environmental crisis. Due to environmental and economic hardships, human rights violations, and war, millions of people fled their homes to seek access to Europe by entering through the island of Lesbos, situated off the coast of Turkey. The situation caused both a human and environmental crisis. As people sought refuge on the island via the sea, debris littered the waters and beaches of Lesbos in the form of rubber dinghies, wrecked boats, personal items, plastic bottles, and an estimated 600,000 life jackets (Tonge, 2017). Many of the refugees were able to move on to mainland Greece or Europe, however, Lesbos had become home to many other refugees, some of whom the participants met. The refugees represented people who were regularly degraded by the political rhetoric around immigration and national security in the United States. The trip occurred in the months following former President Trump's Executive Order 13769, which banned foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the United States and suspended indefinitely entry into the country of all Syrian refugees (Exec. Order No. 13,769, 2017). This action drew widespread attention domestically and internationally and was highlighted regularly in the news. All participants were exposed to this rhetoric, and it was possible that it may have contributed to overt or hidden perceptions of refugees. For these reasons, the site offered an opportunity to explore a socio-environmental crisis that was layered with politics and beliefs about nationality and hierarchies among humans, and between humans and the natural world.

The critical, place-based service experience was developed to nurture student environmental and global consciousness, an important precursor to developing an EcoJustice orientation. The participants traveled to Lesbos, Greece, in June 2017 where they worked with multiple local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (primarily with Lighthouse Relief) to learn more about the refugee crisis that was impacting diverse groups of people and the local marine environments. The formal and informal interactions with organizations and individuals were essential components in the meaning-making of the participants (e.g., beach cleanup, packing and sorting backpacks, interviewing local organizers, and visiting refugee camps). These encounters were integral to challenging the assumptions held by the participants and in their development of a more critical lens toward the crisis.

### ***Data Collection & Analysis***

A phenomenological research approach guided the construction of the research project and the collection and analysis of data. A defining feature of the phenomenological approach is to explore the lived experiences of the participants about a particular phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon was their place-based learning amidst the refugee and environmental crisis on the island of Lesbos. The phenomenological approach "attempts to explore personal experience and is

concerned with an individual's perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith, 2015, p. 25). To better understand how a critical, place-based learning experience might transform student understanding, exploring their experiences was essential. Building on Bresler's (1995) position that "understanding cannot be pursued in the absence of context and interpretive framework" (p. 11), creating spaces for the participants to reflect on and share their experiences was a central feature of the research design.

Four preservice teachers and two education faculty members participated as co-researchers in this global experience. As the program was not affiliated with any course, all four students applied and were accepted to participate in the trip and associated research. At the time, all four students were elementary education majors, one enrolled in a 5-year urban education master's program at the college, and one enrolled in a 5-year special education master's program at the college. Each student participant had a second major. Three of the four were Integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math majors and one was a history major. All identified as white females and had limited exposure to traveling abroad beyond tourist experiences. Three were from the same state as the college, and one was from a neighboring state in the same geographic region. All grew up in suburban contexts, were high-achieving students at the college, and were involved in various service projects on campus. The two education faculty members are both committed to EcoJustice education in their teaching and have diverse experiences working in international contexts. One faculty member teaches a science methods course for elementary preservice teachers and the other teaches a social studies methods course for elementary preservice teachers.

Data collection involved documenting the preservice teachers' experiences and related thinking before, during, and after the trip (see Appendix 1). This was integral to capturing the events that led to shifts in understandings and perceptions. This data was captured through structured written reflections and research discussions. Before the trip, prompts focused on perceptions of the crisis at the site: what was known about the causes and current state of the socio-environmental situation and who was responsible. Beyond this first discussion, there were no formal educational experiences to build prior knowledge about the refugee situation in Lesbos. Prompts during the trip centered on the participants' observations, challenges, and beneficial experiences, and how the experiences impacted their thinking about global citizenship and responsibility for socio-environmental crises (see Appendix 2). Upon returning, the participants were asked to reflect on shifts in their knowledge and perceptions of the crisis, the response and decision-making at all levels, and how they might act on the experience as educators and citizens.

Data analysis began with deductive coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) looking for evidence of the following codes in the data: (a) evidence of developing a consciousness of global citizenship and the associated responsibilities of being a teacher for global citizenship and (b) evidence of challenging preconceived notions of people and the world in relation to nationality and citizenship. These codes were supported by the literature on EcoJustice and GCE, as well as critical place-based education. These principal themes guided the entirety of the study, including the data analysis. New codes also emerged from the data, and inductive coding strategies were utilized as well (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). One new code relevant to GCE was added related to the way participants were voicing their own experiences and the ways each thought about, understood, and saw the world. This code is particularly significant as it speaks to the initial identities the participants brought with them into the experience, and how these ideas of self were challenged and evolved.



Additionally, participatory analysis (Cahill, 2009) involved a smaller subset of the larger research collective. Two preservice teachers who attended the trip and the two teacher education faculty members collaborated in the participatory analysis process. The process involved all members reading the writings of the two preservice teachers and listening to recordings from the pre-, during, and post-trip discussions. Each participant generated initial themes and then shared themes with all co-researchers. The two preservice teachers each wrote a narrative reflection integrating the themes that had emerged in an attempt to make sense of their shifts in thinking. The findings are based on an analysis of all data sources: journals, discussions, and participant narratives.

## **Findings**

Findings suggest that participating in a critical, place-based learning experience allowed for significant transformations to develop among preservice teachers. More specifically, the first finding indicated that participants developed new conceptions of their role in problem-solving both local and global issues that challenged their identities as citizens of the United States and American exceptionalism. The second finding showed that participants developed a global consciousness that expanded conceptions of who holds knowledge while challenging hegemonic discourses prevalent in the United States. Together, both findings helped to nurture and support orientations reflecting the goals of EcoJustice and GCE among the participants. Although the sample size is small, this work highlights the potential that critical, place-based learning can offer preservice teachers who are similarly situated to these student demographics.

### ***Challenging Ethnocentric Way of Thinking and Doing***

The purpose of the critical, place-based learning experience was to challenge preservice teachers to expand their understandings of socio-environmental issues and reflect upon their existing assumptions of self and others to develop a more EcoJustice stance as an educator. The preservice teachers entered the experience with assumptions about problem-solving approaches and their ability to be change-makers. They were active in service at home and had experienced great levels of satisfaction from this work; thus, the group was confident that they would be able to make an impact while volunteering in Greece. Throughout the research meetings, much of their understanding came from their positions as white, middle-class, college students in the United States. As soon as they arrived in Lesvos, these assumptions were challenged.

*I want to lead* I wrote in my response journal that evening. But at the time, I did not mean lead. I meant fix. I admit that typically when others are in a vulnerable place, I surrender to my savior complex. I drew on my own experiences as a leader in my school community and compartmentalized the issues. By the time I went to bed, I had more answers than questions. (Cassie, Narrative Reflection, November 2017)

Cassie was a rising senior during the ecoservice trip to Lesvos and early childhood and Integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math major with an environmental sustainability education minor. She was an active participant in many clubs and organizations in the School of Education, a strong advocate for the environmental sustainability education minor, and planned to teach in a high-needs school after she graduated. Cassie is also the daughter of a European immigrant father who carries strong love for an idealized and equitable United States, raising her to believe in the idea of the American dream. On the first day, Cassie's understanding of her position in the world as a citizen of the United States was called into question when European volunteers poked fun at her for not being able to drive a stick shift. In her journal that night, she wrote, "Stereotypical American-

doesn't know how to drive stick-shift, lazy. Felt some resistance to volunteering, could have been because of disorganization within the organization itself.” (Research Journal, June 2017). At this stage of the trip, she made sense of the attitude she encountered by deciding the organization must be at fault and disorganized.

This theme appears multiple times for the preservice teachers. Mel, an Integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, and urban education major, was enrolled in a five-year master's program at the college. Mel was at the end of her third year of the program when she participated in the learning experience on Lesbos. Like Cassie, Mel was very involved at the college. She took on multiple leadership roles in her sorority, volunteered on many campus service projects, and hoped to teach upper elementary students in an urban district after graduation in 2019. Mel was upset that upon arrival for the first day of beach clean-up, no one from Lighthouse Relief was ready to meet them and start the day. She wrote,

With the crisis being so large you think that NGOs would be desperate for help, but our arrival got lost in translation. It makes me wonder if they have larger issues to worry about and that is why they were not prepared, or they do not care, or it is nothing personal, just a foreign difference. (Research Journal, June 2017)

Mel also tries to make sense of the lack of greeting by concluding there must be bigger issues, or the organization simply doesn't care. Mel's feelings indicate a sense of entitlement that calls for recognition and appreciation on our arrival.

In early research discussions and journaling, the participants highlighted the inefficiencies they observed at Lighthouse Relief and their belief that they held answers for how to address the crisis more efficiently. Cassie questioned, “Poor organization and leadership with Lighthouse Relief. Does this reflect the process in which the refugees are processed?” (Research Meeting 1, June 2017). Just a few days later, she stated, “I want to restructure the way Lighthouse utilizes their volunteers” (Research Meeting 2, June 2017). During a research discussion meeting, the participants agreed that their example of efficiency when sorting and organizing clothing donations might lead others to do it the same way. At this stage, a general sentiment expressed among the participants was pride that “Americans know how to get things done” (Research meeting 2, June 2017).

Initial assumptions were challenged and reformed as the participants worked side-by-side with Lighthouse Relief staff and other volunteers. During a research discussion, the participants marveled that one of the 19-year-old volunteers from Italy spoke four languages and possessed an independence that, although they were a few years older, the participants had not yet obtained. The information that the Italian woman had not spoken to her parents in weeks, whereas the participants were in constant contact with their parents, led Mel to assert, “We need to stop babying everybody!”

A powerful experience occurred when the participants were invited to sit in on a weekly meeting of the long-term volunteers and staff at Lighthouse Relief. All participants expressed surprise at the open nature of the meeting where everyone who wanted was afforded an opportunity to speak. As Mel described, “There is no real leader. There is a lot of equal power” (Research Meeting 3, June 2017). Much of the sureness held by the participants only days earlier began to slip away and was replaced with comments reflecting a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of leadership and service. Faith was a senior during the trip experience. She was in the 5-year special education master's program, working toward an environmental sustainability education minor, and was a

service scholar on campus. Faith reflected “I’m used to being the person to come up with the solution. I don’t feel like I have solutions, I have more questions after the past few days.” Also, “I don’t know what it’s like to organize a landing or to communicate with so many different NGOs. I learned so much from each person we talked to” (Faith, Research Meeting 2, June 2017).

Previously held views from the participants about valuable answers and ethnocentric notions of efficiency were being replaced with new concepts and respect for alternative ways of being. Faith summed this up by stating,

I’m questioning how you know what to do [in crisis situations]. Maybe their sense of flexibility - I don’t feel like this is something we have in the US. In my experience everything is very rigid, but I don’t know how you can stay rigid when you have such a fluctuating problem! (Research Meeting 2, June 2017)

Cassie questioned, “How can I bring the dynamic of the Lighthouse meeting to my classroom? How do I create that environment in my community?” (Research Meeting 3, June 2017). For Lily, a senior iSTEM major during the trip, the transformation came with a level of discomfort expressed in her journal entry,

This trip is really helping me roll with the punches a bit, you just have to go with the flow and go where you are needed—I struggle with this because I need to plan and prepare and think or I get too anxious so it has been really hard for me to go along and change plans at the drop of a hat—This is a lot of out of my comfort zone—things, all the new people, all the moving around, no consistency. (Research Journal, June 2017)

Lily continued to grapple with this self-discovery and shared in a post-trip research meeting (July 2017) that “being diligent about being outside my comfort zone” was an intention she now had for herself. Mel also reframed her understanding of the role she could play. “Even if I can’t fix the whole problem, if I help just a little bit, even in a small way, I have helped guide towards the solution.” (Post-trip Research Meeting, November 2017). After a pause, Mel exclaimed, “Who did I think I was?” which signaled a huge shift in her assumption of her role as an American. The participants came to see they had held oversimplified views based on standards of United States efficiency and beliefs that they knew how best to solve problems.

Similarly, toward the end of the trip, Cassie expressed a more complex understanding of how to approach the problem,

Communication is huge in addressing solutions to the environment. There are many factors and many people involved in the consequences of the decisions that affect the environment. There must be communication between other NGOs and the government about what is next. There is no quick fix, single solution. (Research Meeting 3, June 2017)

### ***Developing a Global Consciousness***

Many aspects of GCE and an EcoJustice stance call on individuals to be not just knowledgeable about global issues, but also to care about others across borders and perceived boundaries and to work for changes rooted in social justice. The question remains how individuals can be moved to a place where they care about others who are often at a distance, socially or geographically. Noddings (2005) stated, “Caring about requires us to work towards the establishment of conditions under which caring for can flourish” (p. 7). The critical, place-based learning experience was instrumental in helping the participants develop this orientation. The participants experienced transformations in

how they viewed and connected to *others* and deepened their empathy as well as their sense of responsibility in addressing global issues, both professionally and personally.

What makes a refugee? These people are educated, they were just born in the wrong place... difficult because you put value on lives based on their political, religious, social beliefs and level of education—I am redefining human rights. (Cassie, Research Journal, June 2017)

In pre-trip writings and discussions, the participants described the situation from a detached perspective: “These journeys are dangerous for the refugees. They could be killed on land, or drown in the water,” and “Refugees come over in rafts/boats that may get abandoned”. One of the comments, “Any form of heavy migration to a developed country is harmful to the environment, the country was not prepared to deal with this,” did not even recognize the people who were behind the “heavy migration”. While the participants were all caring young women, they could not yet connect to the human tragedy of the situation, even though they had certain facts about the crisis. At this stage, the participants demonstrated a superficial concern, but not the level of “caring about” needed for a commitment to action.

In the first few days of the trip, the participants spent hours cleaning beaches and combing through brush and sand to uncover and remove plastic bottles, foam packing material, and other remnants of human activity. During these initial days, the connections to human experience began to form. In journal reflections, participants noted, “Finding lipstick, eyeliner and shoes, they’re humans. . . although there is a crisis, they are still human beings who want basic things” (Mel, Research Journal, June 2017). Lily wrote, “Finding a shoe, I thought, this was on another person and now it’s here—where is that other person. What’s the story behind these things that are so personal?” (Lily, Research Journal, June 2017). Similarly, in a research discussion meeting, Faith shared,

Standing on the beach and you could see the other side [Turkey], I could imagine taking that risk to get to freedom. I could picture myself doing it, instead of it just being something other people on the other side of the world did. (June 2017)

In the days that followed, the group sorted children’s clothes and packed backpacks for new arrivals. They also heard personal stories of rescue and tragedy. Each contact they had helped them to connect with the people experiencing the crisis. After visiting a refugee camp and speaking with Omar, a volunteer who identified as Muslim, Cassie wrote,

I listened to a leader in the camp speak about the children that pass through Greece and reside at the camp. He compared children to gold and spoke passionately about their innocence and lost potential. I thought about what those children could be and do if only they were given the opportunity. This was my transformative moment. I was overcome with a sense of empathy. This was something I never could have imagined or understood had I not been on this trip. (Research Journal, June 2017)

These experiences also led the participants to challenge the discourses about refugees and their ways of conceptualizing the crisis. During a research discussion meeting, Faith noted, “The way we talk about this issue, *the refugee crisis*, we don’t talk about people, *the refugees are crossing*, not like they are a person” (Research Meeting 2, June 2017). The other participants joined in with observations of how the media framed the situation. “The media doesn’t want us to connect directly to the people, so instead they make them *refugees*. Our news does a really good job of distancing us from the people” (Cassie, Research Meeting 2, June 2017). The participants shared their conceptions of who a *refugee* was before the trip: people who were extremely poor, fragile, oblivious, and

uneducated. Reflecting on how their understanding had changed, the participants agreed that it was essential to teach the skills of critical media literacy and that they wanted to become better informed themselves.

These new understandings appeared in how the participants thought about their future roles as teachers. They discussed the need to structure time to build on current events in meaningful ways and the participants agreed that exposing children early to global issues was important. Faith summed this up, “We need to break barriers, we can be talking about the refugee crisis in an appropriate way so they can feel like they are global citizens” (Research Meeting 2, June 2017), and Lily wrote, “I want to draw stronger connections to real-world issues in my classroom. . .so they have an understanding of what is happening in the world” (Research Journal, June 2017). In a post-trip research discussion, Cassie shared,

Before the trip I recognized that global citizenship education and Educating for Sustainability meant more than an after-school Gardening Club, I could not define how. I later recognized that this meant teaching children to envision a better world for all people and share in the responsibility of the consequences brought about by failed attempts. I realized that to be a global citizen, I needed to share my experience in a way that would bring knowledge to others. (Research Meeting, November 2017)

Participants transformed deeply held assumptions about who possesses the knowledge and who (people and nations) are best positioned to solve crises. They came to value the local knowledge, as well as the necessity for many entities and approaches to addressing the needs of the crisis on Lesbos, rather than viewing their way as best. Developing long-term, environmentally sustainable solutions requires this flexibility in thinking and an openness to collaborate and learn from others, particularly from those close to the situation.

## **Conclusion**

The learning experience presented here is one example of how Critical Place-based Learning can foster an EcoJustice consciousness. We sought to develop this critical perspective among the participants through engagement in the critical place-based trip, daily research journaling, and supported dialogues. Through these reflective experiences, participants were able to identify their own biases and they came to value other ways of being, knowing, and problem-solving.

## ***Theoretical Implications***

An EcoJustice stance calls for dismantling existing hierarchies that prioritize some people over others, and people over the earth. Critical pedagogies of place can help students challenge existing assumptions, develop new conceptions of themselves as global actors, and engender a sense of responsibility that reflects an EcoJustice stance (McInerney et al., 2011). Additionally, many models of GCE call for individuals to value and respect the human rights of all beings, regardless of national citizenship status, and to have empathy for others. The participants were able to develop aspects of an EcoJustice orientation and values associated with GCE, as they were challenged in how they viewed themselves and how they viewed *others*. They came to understand that passive acceptance of rhetoric that labels and dehumanizes people like *refugees* was no longer acceptable for them and new visions of human rights for all emerged. They also identified exact moments where interactions with the *other* led to personal transformations. Cassie wrote about one such experience when she talked with Omar at the refugee camp. “This was my transformative moment. I was overcome with

a sense of empathy. This was something I never could have imagined or understood had I not been on this trip” (Narrative Reflection, October 2017).

### ***Practical Implications***

This research addresses criticisms of GCE and builds on existing models. The *soft* interactions that Andreotti (2010) warned about were avoided through meaningful exchanges where the participants worked alongside and learned from locals. Stein described frequently used practices associated with GCE where students may.

Understand themselves as benevolent actors granting knowledge, humanity, resources, or rights to those they perceive to lack them. . .they simultaneously affirm the supremacy of their knowledge and values and absolve themselves of any complicity in harm. (Stein, as cited in Piccin & Finardi, 2019, p. 77)

Our model went beyond international travel or acts of service by creating intentional opportunities to dialogue with and learn from locals. Combining these experiences with critical reflections and journaling, the students challenged hegemonic worldviews and some of their deeply held assumptions. Shifting towards an EcoJustice and global citizenship worldview could not have happened if they were not learning in the places and from the people most impacted by the refugee crisis. As a result, this research also builds on conventional conceptions of place-based education (Smith, 2002; Sobel, 2004). This study demonstrated that adding the *critical* component allowed participants to see often invisible relationships between environmental, political, economic, and social systems. This awareness of the interconnections of these systems supported the development of an EcoJustice consciousness.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

The nature of place-based learning can present challenges. Due to the cost of international travel, the fact that the program was elective and took place outside of the semester calendar and that a portion of the student travel was grant-funded, only four students participated in this experience. This small sample size may raise questions about the generalizability of the findings. However, the small sample is viewed as a strength of the work as it is rooted in qualitative research methods that draw on critical pedagogies calling for deep inquiry and intimacy with participants. There are also limitations regarding replication. The refugee crisis represented a moment in time and place which will never occur in the same way again. This is the reality of critical placed-based learning where the goal is to investigate a place and phenomenon. However, the *process* can be replicated, and the model of focused dialogues applied with students before, during, and after the trip will enrich future practices of place-based education and global experiences with students.

The work presented here lends itself naturally to Massaro’s (2022) recommendation that more empirical research be conducted in K-12 settings to learn about how global citizenship is taught and enacted. The next steps for the researchers include the implementation of K-12 lessons that participants created in collaboration with in-service teachers (Burroughs et al., 2019). Reflecting with teachers about their experience of enacting lessons will create spaces for dialogue that can lead to a better understanding of how global citizenship topics can integrate school subjects and lead to EcoJustice consciousness-raising in elementary and secondary classrooms.

## References

- Andreotti, V. (2010). Postcolonial and post-critical 'global citizenship education. In O. C. Elliot, C. Fourali, & S. Issler (Eds.), *Education and social change: Connecting local and global perspectives* (pp. 238-250). Continuum International.
- Andrews, K., & Aydin, H. (2020). Pre-service teachers' perceptions of global citizenship education in the social studies curriculum. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 11(4), 84-113.
- Asgharzadeh, A., & Nazim, Z. (2018). The enlightenment conceptions of pedagogy and global citizenship education: A Canadian case study. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 13(2), 163-176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197917731276>
- Bellino, M. E., & Adams, J. D. (2017). A critical urban environmental pedagogy: Relevant urban environmental education for and by youth. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 48(4), 270-284.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research and design for education: An introduction to theories and research*. Pearson Education.
- Bowers, C., & Martusewicz, R. (2009). Ecojustice and social justice. In E. Provenzo, & A. Provenzo (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of the social and cultural foundations of education* (pp. 272-279). Sage.
- Bresler, L. (1995). Ethnography, phenomenology and action research in music education. *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, 6, 4-17.
- Brown, E. J. (2018). Practitioner perspectives on learning for social change through non-formal global citizenship education. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 13(1), 81-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/174619791772362>
- Burroughs, G., Bellino, M. E., Johnston, M., Ribeira, C., Chanin, M., Cash, B., & Cahill, E. (2019). Pushing the boundaries of elementary social studies education: Teaching young children about borders and freedom. *Teaching Social Studies* 19(1), 19-24.
- Cahill, C. (2009). Participatory data analysis. In S. Kindon, R. Pain, & M. Kesby (Eds.), *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place* (pp. 181-187). Routledge.
- Cantón, A., & Garcia, B. I. (2018). Global citizenship education: New directions for student leadership, 2018, 21-30. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20307>
- Exec. Order No. 13769, 82 C.F.R. 8977 (2017). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2017-02-01/pdf/2017-02281.pdf>
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury.
- Gaudelli, W. (2009). Heuristics of global citizenship discourses towards curriculum enhancement. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 25(1), 68-85.
- Giroux, H. A. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6), 715-721. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.6.715>
- Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032004003>
- Henderson, J. A. (2015). Out of sight, out of mind: Global connection, environmental discourse and the emerging field of sustainability education. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 10(3), 593-601. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-014-9614-z>
- Lowenstein, E., Martusewicz, R., & Voelker, L. (2010). Developing teachers' capacity for ecojustice education and community-based learning. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(4), 99-118.
- Lupinacci, J., & Happel-Parkins, A. (2016). Ecocritical foundations: Toward social justice and sustainability. In J. D. Diem (Ed.), *The social and cultural foundations of education: A reader* (pp. 34-56). Cognella.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage.
- Martusewicz, R. A. (2018). EcoJustice for teacher education policy and practice: The awy of love. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 27(2), 17-35.
- Massaro, V. R. (2022). Global citizenship development in higher education institutions: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Global Education and Research*, 6(1), 98-114. <https://doi.org/10.5038/2577-509X.6.1.1124>
- McInerney, P., Smyth, J., & Down, B. (2011). 'Coming to a place near you?' The politics and possibilities of a critical pedagogy of place-based education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 3-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2010.540894>
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow, & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-33). Jossey-Bass.

Noddings, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Educating citizens for global awareness*. Teachers College.

Piccin, G. F. O., & Finardi, K. R. (2019). Questioning global citizenship education in the internationalization agenda. *SFU Educational Review*, 12(3), 73-89. <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v12i3.1015>

Santulli, D. P. (2018). The role of international service-learning in cultivating global citizenship and leadership: The role of international service-learning. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 2018(160), 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yl.20314>

Smith, G. A. (2002). Place-based education: Learning to be where we are. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(8), 584–594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217020830080>

Smith, J. A. (Ed.). (2015). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods (3rd ed.)*. Sage.

Sobel, D. (2004). *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms & communities*. Orion Society.

Tonge, D. (2017, September 6). *Lesvos in 2017: From 600,000 abandoned life jackets to an uneasy quiet*. Prospect. <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/44926/lesvos-in-2017-from-600000-abandoned-life-jackets-to-an-uneasy-quiet>

Turner, R., & Donnelly, R. (2013). Case studies in critical ecoliteracy: A curriculum for analyzing the social foundations of environmental problems. *Educational Studies*, 49(5), 387–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2013.825262>

## Appendix 1. Research Timeline and Prompts

	DATE	WRITING PROMPTS/TASKS	DATA COLLECTED
PRE-TRIP MEETING	May 2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you know about the refugee crisis?</li> <li>2. What do you know about the environmental impact that the refugee crisis has had on Greece?</li> <li>3. What do you want to know?</li> <li>4. Who do you think is most responsible to respond to the social and environmental impacts of the refugee crisis?</li> <li>5. What are your expectations about the trip?</li> <li>6. How do you think this experience relates to your future teaching?</li> <li>7. Why did you decide to participate in this trip?</li> <li>8. Do you have any concerns about going on this trip?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Journal responses</li> <li>• Recorded conversation of discussion based on writing prompts</li> </ul>
DURING TRIP MEETINGS	June 2017	(See Appendix 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Journal responses</li> <li>• Recorded conversation of discussion based on writing prompts</li> </ul>
POST-TRIP MEETING 1	August 2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you noticed any changes in yourself (in the way you think about things or actual behaviors)?</li> <li>2. What do you think were the most meaningful aspects of the trip for you?</li> <li>3. How were assumptions/understandings that you had prior to the trip affirmed? How were these affirmed?</li> <li>4. How were assumptions/understandings that you had prior to the trip challenged and/or altered? How were these challenged or altered?</li> <li>5. What questions do you still have?</li> <li>6. What information about the events in Greece do you think are important for people to know?</li> <li>7. What information, topics or themes would you like to teach children about?</li> <li>8. What resources do we have that we can use to share with others?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Journal responses</li> <li>• Recorded conversation of discussion based on writing prompts</li> </ul>
POST TRIP MEETING 2	September - November 2017	Participatory Data Analysis: Participants (Author 1, Author 2, Mel, Cassie) read through all writing reflections from pre, during and post trip and reflected on Mel and Cassie's journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recorded conversation.</li> <li>• Preservice teacher produced narrative</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2. During Trip Research Themes and Prompts

### Observations

- What events and/or images thus far have stood out for you?
- What impression did the event or image make on you?



- Why do you think you reacted in this way? Does your reaction affirm or challenge a belief or understanding you previously had?

### **Understandings**

- What have you learned about the environmental crisis in Lesvos?
- How did you obtain this information?
- In what ways do you think your understandings are shaped by how you obtained the information?
- What more would you like to know?

### **Challenges**

- What aspects of the experience have been challenging for you?
- Why do you think this has been challenging for you?
- What challenges have you identified for the people you have encountered?
- What have you learned from observing these challenges?
- Do you have any thoughts on how the challenges the people are dealing with can be remedied?

### **Benefits**

- In what ways do you think you are benefiting from this experience?
- How is the experience helping to facilitate the benefits you identified?
- What aspects of the experience do you think you will carry forward into your professional life?
- What aspects of the experience do you think you will carry forward into your personal life?

### **Sustainability**

- Has your understanding of environmental sustainability been altered? If yes, what do you attribute these changes to? If not, what do you attribute this to?
- What solutions to address the environmental crisis have you learned about?
- Provide a brief analysis of the practices you have observed or learned about. What do you think is working, why/why not? What else do you think needs to occur? Who else do you think needs to be involved?
- What solutions to address the refugee crisis have you learned about? Provide a brief analysis of the practices you have observed or learned about.
- What do you think is working, why/why not? What else do you think needs to occur? Who else do you think needs to be involved?
- How have your understanding of the connections between the environmental and the refugee crisis been changed by this experience?
- What do you attribute these changes to?