

PLACING “PHILOSOPHY IN THE PARKS”: A NEIGHBORHOOD PRAXIS TOWARDS A “GLOCAL” ORIENTATION¹

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ABSTRACT: This paper provides a feminist pragmatist rationale for a course called “Philosophy in the Parks.” As a course that supports the development of a “glocal” orientation, it offers a practical and effective option to prepare students to be engaged citizens on a local and global level. The first section of this essay introduces the concept of a “glocal” orientation and why it is needed. The following section outlines the commitments of a feminist pragmatist orientation and argues that because they support the objectives of preparing students to be global citizens, they should also be the commitments embraced by a “glocal” orientation. In other words, a “glocal” orientation is a feminist pragmatist orientation. Finally, the third section of the paper describes the course – “Philosophy in the Parks” – and demonstrates how the tools and assignments of this course inform and reinforce a feminist pragmatist “glocal” orientation, underlining the practicality and effectiveness of this approach.

Keywords: “glocal” orientation, feminist pragmatist orientation, nature-based education, place-based education, global citizenship, recognitional justice, “communitiveness”

Why a “Glocal” Orientation?

A “glocal” orientation in education is deeply rooted in local contexts and engagements, fostering the skills and attitudes necessary for global citizenship.² When rooted in a local context but with intentional connections to global issues, this orientation can enhance and inform citizenship broadly conceived, habituating this broader way of seeing and engaging with the world. A “glocal” education interweaves “the global with the local to design,

plan, and deliver higher education programs based on the principles: Think globally, act locally; and think locally, act globally” (Francois 2015, 87). This orientation underscores the significance of proximity and embeddedness in fostering effective and ameliorative engagement. Achieving a “glocal” orientation goes beyond the mere inclusion and recognition of diverse individuals, cultures, and perspectives. It necessitates a nuanced quality of being and a responsive engagement with others. Amrita Banerjee refers to this as “poise.” As Banerjee highlights, “poise involves developing ethical ways of responding to difference, which must entail a dynamic interaction between distinct worlds, allowing each person’s worldview to evolve in unique ways” (2018, 254). With “poise,” individuals possess the “ability/capacity to convert ‘visible’ differences into ‘presence’” (Banerjee, 244), engaging in an iterative, back-and-forth process that is co-constructive and mutually relational. Such a framework enriches individual perspectives and fosters an environment conducive to collective growth and understanding.

While experiences beyond one’s community are uniquely and undeniably perspective-expanding for those fortunate enough to receive them, experiences within one’s local community may also be, if structured effectively, perspective-expanding and may be both practically and pragmatically preferable in some situations. This is especially the case as an initial step toward cultivating an expanded and more culturally inclusive conception of the world.

For many students, the idea of a global education that includes traveling to other countries may be economically and culturally inaccessible. Additionally, it may be more practical to cultivate a broader worldview, along with the associated confidence, through gradual steps—starting locally and gradually extending beyond the local community over time. Judy Whipps advocates this balance in her essay, “Local Community: Place-based Pragmatist and Feminist Education.” While she did not use the term “glocal,” Whipps too argues for a balance between

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² The term “glocal” is borrowed from Emmanuel Jean Francois and his book *Building Global Education with a Local Perspective* (2015).

“the global and the local, and between the abstract and the practical” (2014, 33). An education that achieves this balance deeply engages students and promotes learning that necessitates “being attentive and reflective to both the creative growth of the individual, and the growth and maintenance of the social and political state” (34).

Preparing our students to engage with a “glocal” orientation is essential in our world today for at least four reasons: First, our interconnected and interdependent world requires that individuals see themselves as both local and global citizens. Second, the “poise” required by this orientation—characterized by a receptive presence and awareness³—is essential for gaining a deeper understanding. It allows for sustained growth and improvement by collaborating with others, rather than acting for them or over them, often from a position of paternalism and or unequal power. Third, the polarization of our local and national communities threatens the ability of our communities and nations to function and thrive. A “glocal” education can help to address this polarization. Finally, a “glocal” orientation informed by feminist pragmatist commitments has the added benefit of helping address what the World Health Organization (WHO) describes as a widespread problem of isolation and loneliness⁴ and what the U.S. Surgeon General similarly calls a contemporary “epidemic of loneliness and isolation.”

Addressing the opportunity and challenge of globalization, most would agree that – regardless of the kilometers, miles, or oceans between nations and due to global climate change and technological advancements

in communication and transportation – the fate of all nations is inextricably linked.⁵ We must equip students with the skills and dispositions necessary to be citizens of their local communities and the world. It is vital that our students “recognize themselves [as beings] of the world” and also responsible “for the world” (Bennett et al. 2012, 37). Other theorists agree, supporting the efficacy of local, place-based work for cultivating the qualities needed for global citizenship.

For example, the geologist and professor D.J. Marshall argues that a “locally oriented” approach helps students cultivate a “sense of place” and “serves as a means of relating the self to the surrounding social and environmental world” (214). This further results in a “sense of self” that is “deeply intertwin[ed] with a sense of place” (214) and, with this, an enhanced appreciation of coming to understand “place” in relation to other people and problems, regardless of who or where they are located.

Similarly, in his essay, “Re-Thinking Global Citizenship in Higher Education,” Viv Caruana argues that institutions should re-conceptualize global citizenship to embrace diversity, belonging, community and solidarity and support the development of pedagogies whose key components are place-based and community-engaged. Caruana argues that though it is the case that global citizenship “requires the ability to work, play, and live somewhere other than [one’s] land of birth,” learning and embodying the skills that this requires is “not simply a matter of accumulating multiple addresses through international outward mobility” (2014, 90). Students need a “readiness to cope with encounters with cultural diversity,” and this derives from “the skills of listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting on experiences” (90). Cultivating this is advanced by pointedly local work, or “rooted” work, where the individual develops a “sense of being at home in more than one place, which stems from a process of putting

³ Banerjee (2018) develops her idea of “poise” in her article “‘Diversity’ as ‘Poise’: Toward a Renewed ‘Ethics of Diversity.’” I develop a similar concept in “Receptive Perception, Particularized Justice, and Moral Agency” (2007) and in “Beyond Recognition: A Feminist-Pragmatist Account of Esthetic Moral Agency” (2005), arguing in both that to be an effective moral agent, one must employ affective attunement and receptive perception.

⁴ The World Health Organization (WHO) describes isolation and loneliness as a widespread and increasingly world problem. WHO notes that feeling connected to other humans is essential to mental and physical well-being and having a sense of connection is associated with longevity. For further information, see “Social Isolation and Loneliness,” The World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness>.

⁵ Among others, Emmanuel J. Francois (2015) also makes this point in *Building Global Education with a Local Perspective: An Introduction to Global Higher Education*.

down roots rather than being “forever rooted” (98). Going a step further, and building from the rootedness that Caruana advocates, it is valuable and important to add the quality of “poise,” offering a concrete way forward in deepening the “glocal” orientation and allows for what Banerjee describes as a response-focused dimension of diversity, or in the case of this paper, “glocal” orientation. With rootedness and “poise,” difference gains a level of presence within the experience rather than a relatively removed and sterile position.

A “glocal” orientation is also needed to mitigate against our increasingly polarized society. Research is unclear, but some studies suggest that this challenge may be particularly unique to the United States. In her article “Polarization, Democracy, and Political Violence in the United States: What Research Says,” Rachel Kleinfeld shared that polarization in the U.S. has and is occurring at “extraordinary rates compared to other countries” and that “no other wealthy, consolidated democracy has been as perniciously polarized for as long as the United States” (Kleinfeld 2023, 30). Other studies suggest that this is not the case, that “A number of peer democracies with multiparty systems had higher levels of affective polarization but were showing much less democratic strain [than the U.S.]” (30). Regardless, given that we live in a world where what happens in one nation affects other nations, we all have reason to be concerned and, therefore, we all have an interest in addressing the polarization wherever it may occur.

Technology makes it easier and faster to connect with others across differences (e.g., race, economic class, gender, political affiliation, nationality, etc.). Despite this, polarization is on the rise across the United States as well as in other multi-party democracies around the globe (Kleinfeld 2023, 30). This is especially the case when considering “affective polarization.”

While some research suggests that citizens are more in sync than we tend to believe we are, i.e., there is less polarization of ideas and values than is perceived (Klein-

feld 2023, 1-3). This perceived polarization is termed “affective polarization” and involves polarization on an emotional level, even when one’s views and values may be more aligned with the other than one thinks them to be. This type of polarization manifests in our attributing positive feelings toward others with shared political affiliations and negative feelings toward those with a different affiliation (Kleinfeld 2023, 3). This can result in a narrowing of experiences (e.g., what media we consume, what groups we socialize with, what neighborhoods we live in, etc.) to those that align with the political views we already have (Druckman and Levy 2021).⁶ Borrowing a concept from George H. Mead’s theory of symbolic interaction, this means that the “generalized others” to which we belong become narrow in scope and number and homogenous in kind and in the values they represent. As a result, and consistent with Mead’s theory, today we are less likely to have experiences and meet people who could introduce novel ideas to us and us to them (Mead 1934, 176-177 & 197-198), limiting our growth as individuals and as a community.

Affective polarization is also of concern because it can erode the ability to imagine and then enact laws and policies necessary to address pressing issues. It compromises citizens’ confidence in the institutions that permit society to function (e.g., legal, medical and governmental institutions) and can lead to social fissures in our personal and work lives (Druckman and Levy 2021). The pragmatist conception of ameliorative actions and growth supports a need to be concerned about this rise in polarization.

⁶ For a fuller treatment of “affective polarization” and the United States see James Druckman and Jeremy Levy’s “Affective Polarization in the American Public” (2021) and Nicholas Dias and Yphtach Lelkes’s “The Nature of Affective Polarization: Disentangling Policy Disagreement from Partisan Identity”(2022). For the purposes of this essay, it is enough to know that polarization is on the rise and, because a rise in polarization diminishes our ability to effectively address issues in our communities through legislation or public policy and erodes the confidence in the practices that support democracy and community cohesiveness, it is an issue that should concern us all.

To address these issues, we must extend the diversity of our circles of affiliations, but we must be careful not to prioritize extending them without also deepening them. As Jane Addams implores in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, when we “consciously limit our intercourse to certain kinds of people [with] whom we have previously decided to respect,” i.e., with whom we share political affiliation, “we not only tremendously circumscribe our range of life, but limit the scope of our ethics” (1902/2002, 8). It is worth noting that one could be very widely traveled but still limited in the depth and the diversity of affiliations. Further, a person may never travel but achieve rich experiences with diverse, differently positioned others within one’s own community. This is the insight that both Addams and Mead embraced and require, as I will discuss below, an embedded or rooted kind of engagement necessitating what Addams called sympathetic understanding, what Mead called reflexivity, and what we today are more likely to call empathetic understanding. Thus, we have a “moral obligation” to choose our experiences wisely because “the results of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life” (Addams 1902/2002, 8).

To fulfill this moral obligation, we must push against polarization and deepen, expand and diversify those with whom we interact. This requires embracing multiple and diverse perspectives while also positioning ourselves so that we learn the particulars of specific situations from different positions. In other words, we need a “glocal” orientation that can engage in deeply local ways, doing, as already discussed above, “rooted” work. Before explicating the necessary commitments below, I will highlight one additional reason why fostering a “glocal” orientation is efficacious in today’s world. This last reason addresses the above-mentioned and widely recognized contemporary health issue of isolation and loneliness.

In May of 2023, Dr. Murthy, the U.S. Surgeon General at that time, declared that the United States is experiencing an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, arguing that

this issue “has been an underappreciated public health crisis that has harmed individuals and societal health.” He asserted, “Given the significant health consequences of loneliness and isolation, we must prioritize building social connection the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues.” This is reinforced by the World Health Organization (WHO), which also highlighted isolation and loneliness as significant health issues, noting that 1 in 4 older adults in the world today experience isolation, and between 5 and 15 adolescents identify with experiencing loneliness on a regular basis (WHO). To address this issue, Murthy advocates strengthening social infrastructure and specifically mentions the “physical elements of the community” (Murthy 2023). Both Murthy and the World Health Organization point to spending time outside as one of the tools that are valuable in addressing this issue. Dr. Murthy’s prescription for this epidemic acknowledges the link between human flourishing and the quality of connection to one’s environment, where “environment” includes other humans and nonhuman beings as well as our natural surroundings. The course I propose below leans into this need for connection, and fostering a “glocal” orientation is central to this.⁷

In the next section, I will argue that, given the above-outlined arguments in support of a “glocal” orientation and given that these align with feminist pragmatist commitments, educators should embrace these commitments as commitments of a “glocal” orientation. Further, by reinforcing feminist pragmatist commitments, this course supports cultivating a “glocal” orientation.

⁷ This proposal – a course I call “Philosophy in the Parks” – is but one option to address this issue. Offering this course has limited in scope since the availability of parks and park-like places is not a benefit afforded to all. For example, those individuals living in affluent communities and nations are disproportionately likely to have access to green spaces and their benefits compared to individuals who do not. Because of the benefits that can be afforded by access to green spaces, e.g., parks and park-like places, there is reason to support efforts to expand the availability of such spaces. Further, the limits on the availability of green spaces also suggest that efforts like the course described herein must not be the limit of interventions offered. Fully addressing this issue requires not just one effort but many that are diverse in nature (specific to the issues, context, and history of the particular location) and should be systemically implemented.

Feminist Pragmatist Commitments⁸ and a “Glocal” Orientation

As discussed above, a “glocal” orientation is deeply local in content and engagement while supporting the development of skills and dispositions necessary for globally engaged citizenship. The “local” focus of the “glocal” orientation is necessary because it is only through an embedded understanding and “on the ground” place-specific connections with others that students develop the skills needed to understand and engage effectively with diverse individuals and communities. This requires developing what Mead calls “reflexivity,” what Addams called “sympathetic understanding,” and what I will refer to as empathetic understanding.⁹ Without these qualities, efforts to effect positive change will be limited. Thus, feminist pragmatist commitments are needed to realize the qualities necessary to be a “global” agent of change, and are also the qualities and commitments of a person embodying a “glocal” orientation. These commitments include a relational conception of existence, a “neighborhood point of view,” empathetic understanding, a conception of growth as lateral progress, and a commitment to the democratic ideal. Below, each of these, in turn, is explained and shows how these commitments support a “glocal” orientation.

To say that we are relational beings is to say that we are necessarily interconnected and interdependent beings, embodied and living in physical, natural and biologi-

cal environments. As Mead explains, “All living organisms are bound up in a general social environment or situation, in a complex of social interrelations and interactions upon which their continued existence depends” (Mead 1934, 228). As such, we are, as Jane Addams said, all “mired in the same soil, bound together for better or worse, in our ongoing growth and development” (Addams 1902/2002, 112). For many pragmatists, those with whom we are “mired” include animals, plants, the land, and other humans.¹⁰ As Scott Pratt highlights in *Native Pragmatism*, a human self is a “matter of interaction”; namely, it is what it is in an ongoing, co-constitutive way with its environment and all that is in it (2002, 24). This realization, “demands recognition and continuity” and, with this, the realization that “organisms such as trees and people are not independent things that occasionally act on others, they are rather constituted by their interactions and so are at once continuous with their environment” (24).¹¹

Also relevant here is Pratt’s concept of the “indigenous attitude” in contrast with the “colonial attitude.” It is the latter that characterizes contemporary society, with a desire to secure all that is within our reach as our property, and, in contrast, it is the former, the “indigenous attitude,” that is helpful in further defining the pragmatist conception of flourishing and growth. Pratt explains that whereas the colonial attitude is most associated with “exclusion, intolerance, and attempts to eliminate difference,” the “indigenous attitude” requires “commitments to interaction, community, and growth” (Pratt 2002, XIV-XV). This is similar to Addams’s distinction between “older ideals of peace” and the “newer ideals of peace” as articulated in her work *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907).

⁸ For an additional account of the feminist pragmatist orientation, see J. Whipps and D. Lake, “Pragmatist Feminism (2025), C. Fischer, “Feminist-Pragmatism,” and B. Lowe and J. Fenton, “Jane Addams, the Settlement Women of Hull House, and the Feminist Pragmatist Orientation” (2023). See also Philipp Dorstewitz, “Imagining Social Transformations: Territory Making and the Project of Radical Pragmatism.” Though not termed as feminist pragmatist commitment, Dorstewitz outlines “four practical commitments” that are consistent with feminist pragmatist commitment including: connecting concepts to lived experience, attending to fringes of social systems, fostering solidarity through sympathetic and imaginative interaction, and strengthening education, communication and participation to facilitate bottom-up emancipation (363).

⁹ For a fuller account of Addams’s concept of sympathetic understanding and why some argue that a better term that captures Addams’s intended meaning is empathetic understanding today, see Whipps 2019, page 319 and Lowe and Fenton, 2023.

¹⁰ For example, see Scott Pratt’s *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (2002) and Erin McKenna’s *Living with Livestock: Food, Fiber, and Friends* (2018).

¹¹ For additional works that take a feminist pragmatist approach to exploring the intertwined and co-constitutive nature of humans, other beings, and the land, see Erin McKenna and Tess Varner. “Backcountry and Backyard Ethics: Pragmatist Prospects for Rethinking Relationships with Wildlife” (2024), Erin McKenna’s *Living with Animals: Rights, Responsibilities, and Respect* (2021), as well as Tess Varner’s “Recovering Wildness: ‘Earthy’ Education and Field Philosophy” (2021).

Whereas the “older ideals of peace” are militaristic and rooted in competition, seeing war as a means to achieve peace, “newer ideals of peace” strive for peace through cooperative social action, insisting that progress requires cooperative and holistically beneficial social reform.

Because of our relational natures, effective social activism requires – borrowing from Addams – a “neighborhood point of view.” With this, we must look to the interconnected relationships and issues entangled in specific social situations to determine what the issues for that community are and how best to address them. We should avoid imposing our visions for community improvement and instead work “with initiatives already adopted by the neighbors or ones the neighbors would like to undertake” (Fischer 2019, 46). As Addams explains,

We are learning that the standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road where we all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another’s burdens (Addams 1902/2002, 7).

To do this well, to be what we might today call a “change agent,” an “engaged citizen,” or, fitting for this paper, a global citizen with a “glocal” orientation, we must strive for what George H. Mead called “reflexivity” and what Addams called “sympathetic understanding,” or what we would call today empathetic understanding. Though it is too bold to say that these terms mean exactly the same thing, understanding the insights of each offers a compelling picture of one quality needed to be in a position to effect positive change.

Focusing first on reflexivity, Mead argues that this quality is the ability to “put [oneself] in the place of the other” or, in other words, “to take on the attitude of others toward oneself” (Mead 1934, 134). “Reflexivity” enables one to imagine, even feel, what it is like to be the other and to imaginatively inhabit the conditions of existence of the other within our shared community. Though our roles and positions in that community – including our relative struggles, privileges, and points of view – are different, re-

flexivity allows one to understand our shared challenges better, imagine and propose better solutions, test these solutions, and revise them as needed. This allows the expanded and deepened understanding required of a “glocal” orientation. Addams echoes this insight as well, highlighting the importance of “sympathetic understanding.” Like Mead, Addams believed this understanding of the other was essential to achieving the orientation needed to make growth and social change possible.

Though necessarily relational, we begin our lives with relatively narrow connections to others. Like a “glocal” orientation, a feminist pragmatist conception of growth and flourishing requires progressively expanding these connections. Social institutions, such as education, should be organized to support this type of flourishing, offering opportunities to deepen, extend and expand our interactions to mitigate the challenge of polarization. With this, we can see that these feminist pragmatist commitments can helpfully inform the “glocal” orientation. This understanding of growth is what Addams calls “lateral progress” (Addams 1902/2002, 69) and involves what Pratt describes as a redistribution of the “direction of progress” from vertical growth to lateral by “widening and deepening connections among members” (Pratt 2002, 37).¹² Lateral progress moves us closer to the democratic ideal, the final commitment of feminist pragmatism that we will discuss in this essay.

The democratic ideal includes but is more than a commitment to democracy understood as a political system. It is, as Addams says, a “way of life” requiring that we take “the betterment of humanity for [our] aim and end” and with this necessarily “also take the daily experiences of humanity for the constant correction of [our] process. [We should] not only test and guide [our] achievement by human experience, but [we] must suc-

¹² Marilyn Fischer’s account of Jane Addams’s evolutionary conception of growth in *Jane Addams’s Evolutionary Theorizing: Constructing “Democracy and Social Ethics”* (2019) offers a helpful and detailed account of the pragmatist roots, especially Addams’s intellectual roots of growth as “evolutionary,” advancing through progressive social reforms.

ceed or fail in proportion as [we have] incorporated that experience with [our] own” (Addams 1902/2002, 78-79). Extending this further, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) asks us to consider what it might mean to embrace a “democracy of species,” recognizing not only our “interdependence” with other humans but also to recognize this with the natural world as well. From this would follow gratitude and reciprocity to nature, which provides us with all that we need to survive and thrive.¹³

We achieve this not by imposing a particular ideology, but instead by providing “channels” through which individuals and groups can expand their circles of affiliation.¹⁴ Expanded circles of affiliation ultimately allow us to understand others better and, thus, better imagine possible solutions for our shared problems.¹⁵ Offering channels through which we can come together or “mix” echoes what Dr. Vivek Murthy, the 19th and 21st Surgeon General of the United States, termed an epidemic in loneliness and isolation.¹⁶ Addressing this epidemic requires that we increase and strengthen social connections through “a whole-of-society approach” (Murthy 2023, 6). In feminist pragmatist terminology, one might say that what Murthy advocates is a “democracy as a way of life.”

In summary, a feminist pragmatist orientation embraces a relational conception of existence, a “neighborhood point of view,” empathetic understanding, growth

as lateral progress, and a commitment to the democratic ideal. Each commitment is consistent with a “glocal” orientation, and together, they define what this orientation requires.

The final section of this essay offers one approach to helping students cultivate a “glocal” orientation; namely, the previously mentioned place-based course called “Philosophy in the Parks.” This course is just one possible tool and is limited, as will be noted below. However, directly addressing this limitation as part of the course design can enhance and reinforce place-based consideration within a global context, further enhancing the “glocal” orientation. Feminist pragmatist commitments inform course assignments and activities and, therefore, offer a model educators might use and adapt to their own course subjects. For example, the assignment could be adapted to any course where place-based issues could be explored through the feminist pragmatist lens outlined above and embedded in the teaching tool described below. This assignment is designed to provide students with an opportunity to consider the world through a “glocal” orientation, positioning students to be effective citizens in our local and global communities.

Placing “Philosophy in the Parks”

In his report proposing the design of Central Park in New York City, Frederick Law Olmsted – the designer of thousands of local and national parks in the United States, including the park system in my hometown of Rochester, New York – declared that in parks, you would find “all classes largely represented with a common purpose... each individual adding by his mere presence to the purpose of all others, all helping towards a greater happiness of each” (Olmsted 1858). Olmsted suggested that public parks could promote democracy and socialization where people gather with “a common purpose... competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride to none, each individual adding by his

¹³ See Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, especially the chapter “Allegiance to Gratitude.”

¹⁴ Addams uses the term “channels” in various contexts and texts. For example, in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), she states, quoting someone else she does not cite, that we must “discover what people really want, and then ‘provide the channels in which the growing moral force of their lives shall flow’” (1902/2002, 69). Similarly, in *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Addams offers, “[i]n the unceasing ebb and flow of justice and oppression we must all dig channels as best we may, that at the propitious moment somewhat of the swelling tide may be conducted to the barren places of life” (1910, 40).

¹⁵ For fuller development of these ideas see Lowe 2022, 138-142.

¹⁶ Murthy’s concern with widespread issues of isolation and loneliness is predated by the highlighting of these same issues by the World Health Organization starting in 2021. While also highlighting this issue for all ages, the World Health Organization focuses especially how isolation and loneliness effects older adults. For additional information on this see the WHO’s “Advocacy Brief: Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older People” (2021).

mere presence to the pleasure of all” (Olmsted 1871, 18). With these statements, Olmsted was not merely sharing an observation but making a normative claim. Namely, since parks offer opportunities to create community, and since community and connection are needed for both humans and societies to flourish, it follows that we ought to create parks, and humans ought to gather in these parks so that the shared experiences that parks can provide may occur. Research supports Olmsted’s prediction. Studies have found that, in addition to mental and physical health benefits, there is a positive link between the mere existence of “nearby nature [e.g., public parks and green spaces] and social cohesion,” resulting in augmented “norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness” within the communities where we find public green spaces and parks (Eisenmann 2013, 290-291).

“Philosophy in the Parks” is a course that works toward Olmsted’s vision and taps into the benefits that may result. Informed by a feminist pragmatist orientation, this pedagogy is deeply local and nature-based in content, designed to provide students with opportunities to practice the skills and dispositions necessary for engaged citizenship. These skills and dispositions are embodied in the feminist pragmatist commitments outlined above and, therefore, also align with a “glocal” orientation.

The primary “texts” for this course are public parks and green spaces. With these as the text, the course encourages what Olmsted called “communitiveness” (Beveridge 2022) and what Jane Addams called a “neighborhood point of view” (Addams 1896, 149). Olmsted coined the term “communitiveness” and considered it the “most important quality” that members of society could and should possess and involves “a combination of qualities that [enable] people ‘to serve others and to be served by others in the most intimate, complete and extended degree imaginable’” (Beveridge 2022). According to the Frederick Law Olmsted scholar Charles E. Beveridge, an essential purpose of the park for Olmsted was to “re-store the energy that people expended” in the “exercise

of their [day-to-day] duties” so that they could engage in and embody the quality of communitiveness. To “read” a park or public green space as a text requires students to “place” themselves and the philosophical ideas in the parks, connecting with the particular space and emerging issues.¹⁷

The course has three sections. The first section (~6 weeks) takes place in a typical academic classroom with nature-based connections blended throughout, including outside activities such as walk-and-talks, small group mini-discussions, and reflective journal writing. The “texts” in this part of the course are more traditional – books, articles, and videos – and these provide a lens through which students will, in the second part of the course, come to understand and engage with the non-canonical “text” - the parks or park-like locations.

The second part of the course, weeks 7 - 12, takes place in the park and in “park-like” places such as playgrounds, cemeteries, parkways, and nature trails, making the heart of the course place-based and park-focused. In small groups, students facilitate dialogue and guide the class in activities specific to their group’s assigned park or park-like location. Common to each facilitation is a “one-sheet.”¹⁸

The “one-sheet” is a tool the groups use to plan and facilitate engagement and dialogue with their peers. Working from the template provided, students design their “one-sheet” specific to their park or park-like location. A standard template (link available here) prompts students to describe their assigned park or park-like location and its history, offer place-based connections, share

¹⁷ A fuller development of this course and treating parks and public green spaces as a text to analyze and to learn from was offered as part of a panel on *Feminist Pragmatist Readings of Non-Canonical Texts* at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy in Boston, March 28-30, 2024. The title of this author’s contribution to this panel was “How to Read a Park.”

¹⁸ The one-sheet format is adapted from the Society of Philosophers in America’s (SOPHIA’s) version of the same. For more information on this tool as conceived of by SOPHIA see “SOPHIA One-Sheets” available here: SOPHIA Meeting Resources | The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA).

and define key concepts or principles important to the facilitation, highlight pressing problems or place-specific issues, point toward local, community and global connections, and offer questions and prompts to frame a dialogue.

Together, the required components of the one-sheet help to cultivate what is, as described above, a “glocal” orientation. In this way, the one-sheet situates students locally while reinforcing a relational conception of existence. This prompts students to consider implications beyond a narrow, primarily local, and individualistically centered position. Similarly, the one-sheet prompts students to make connections beyond the assigned park or park-like location to other places and situations where similar issues are of concern, including situating their analysis locally, nationally and globally. This approach broadens students’ perspectives by encouraging them to consider diverse beings, communities and political contexts beyond a solely human framework, while extending their understanding beyond the boundaries of the United States. In these ways, the course puts into practice a pragmatist and “glocal” understanding of individual and community development, viewing growth as occurring by deepening, extending and widening one’s circles of understanding and affiliation.

One critical aspect that warrants further exploration is the privileged and localized character of employing parks and park-like spaces as “texts” within an academic curriculum. While this topic has been mentioned, it deserves a more thorough examination to understand its implications fully. One consideration is that not all communities have parks, park-like locations, or even greenery from which community members can benefit.¹⁹ In

addition, examining the political and power dynamics associated with land is important. For example, Saskia Sassen, author of *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in Global Economy* (2014), exposes what she calls the “new logics of expulsion,” revealing how, in the last three decades, the world has seen “a sharp growth in the number of people, enterprises, and places expelled from the core social and economic orders of our time” (1). While Sassen does not explicitly discuss parks in this work, her exploration of the “logic of expulsions” related to land and land use certainly applies.

For example, in the creation of New York City Central Park, whole communities of people and the economies previously rooted in what is now Central Park were displaced to clear the land so that the park could be formed. The area chosen for the park, from 59th to 110th Streets between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, was home to several communities, including a predominantly African American settlement that included Irish and German immigrants (Pasquier 2021). This community was established in 1825 and was thriving with churches, schools and homes. However, in the mid-1850s, the New York City government used eminent domain to acquire the land for the park, forcing residents to leave. This displacement disrupted the lives of many families and erased a significant part of African American history in New York City (Pasquier 2021). Further, the construction of Central Park also displaced other smaller communities and individual landowners. The process was part of a broader trend during the 19th century where urban development often came at the expense of marginalized communities (Legg 2021). Here, we see that the tendency to value

¹⁹ For support for this claim see Klomp maker et al., “Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Disparities in Multiple Measures of Blue and Green Spaces in the United States.” This article demonstrates inequality in the availability of different types of green spaces and highlights research finding an inequitable distribution of natural environments and that these differences can partially explain the health disparities between socioeconomic class and race/ethnicity groups in the United States. Researchers Lorien Nesbitt and Jessica Quinton support this claim,

extending and complicating these findings on a global level. See Nesbitt and Quinton’s article, “Invited Perspective: Nature Is Unfairly Distributed in the United States – But That’s Only Part of the Global Green Equity Story.” Nesbitt and Quinton’s article is an overview article, offering helpful references to other studies that address issues of “green equity” on a global level. They draw implications – discussed further below – related to “recognitional justice,” assumption that “green is always good,” and a need for place-based research that examines these issues related to climate change and “green gentrification.”

the creation of green spaces and public parks over the value of communities and economies already in place has roots in the very beginnings of the public park movement in the United States.

The same is true for Indigenous peoples native to the United States. Many of the lands on which local and national parks are now located throughout the United States are previous Indigenous peoples' lands, an injustice that endures today and one that has economic and political implications that stretch from the early days of community (and park) formations to today. Further, as featured by one of my student group's offering a facilitated engagement with a local park, some park lands exist on top of not only indigenous peoples' land but also on top of unmarked graves of individuals who, prior to their death and prior to the formation of the particular park, were residents of a local mental institution.

To address these issues, Sassen advocates for what she refers to as "de-theorizing" and the "before method." Philipp Dorstewitz notes what this requires in his essay "Imagining Social Transformation: Territory Making and the Project of Radical Pragmatism" (2016). Dorstewitz explains that, for Sassen, "de-theorizing" involves a "turning away from aggregated theoretical concepts and toward ground-level human experiences, micro-processes, and actual geographic locations" (367). This practice of "de-theorizing" is accompanied by the "standing before method," which represents a "standpoint of critical incredulity that examines what theory obscures in the penumbra surrounding its focus" (368). This call to "de-theorize" and "stand before" is consistent with what Martin et al. call for in "Justice and Conservation: The Need to Incorporate Recognition." Martin et al. advocate for "recognition-al justice," which requires, among other things, a recognition of different types of knowing, being, perceiving and valuing of nature; a recognition of the political and legal power inequalities inherent in economic systems; and a recognition of the responsibility to address issues and revealed inequalities and discrepancies in who benefits and

who pays for efforts to add or improve green spaces in communities (Martin et al, 254-255, 260). Sassen, Dorstewitz and Martin emphasize the importance of acknowledging past and present injustices that may arise from assuming that the "greening" of a community is inherently positive. As discussed in this essay, they caution against the uncritical application of celebrated design theories and principles. Recognizing that these principles may not benefit everyone equally is crucial, and prioritizing them may not always be ethically justifiable. The values and principles used to support their application should not overshadow other important considerations.

Applying this to the course "Philosophy in Parks," there is a need to discuss theories of design while also interrogating the historical expulsions, displacements and gentrification that have or might have occurred in the creation and the design of the park or park-like location under consideration. Neglecting to "de-theorize" and failing to adopt a "before" perspective leads to the erasure of phenomena such as gentrification and the associated displacement of individuals and groups, both historically and in the present, as part of neighborhood revitalization efforts.

These insights underscore a crucial consideration for any project fostering a "glocal" orientation. This orientation must encompass de-theorizing and the "before method" as part of a "glocal" orientation. Though potentially overlooked, this is inherent to the "place-based" emphasis and empathetic understanding central to the "glocal" orientation. What successful efforts look like will vary based on context and place-based consideration of the project being implemented. In the context of the course "Philosophy in the Parks," place-related work that incorporates de-theorizing must highlight issues related to the expulsion of local indigenous populations and address historical and contemporary gentrification, which often aims to clear space for pristine parks and affluent neighborhoods, effectively pricing out lower-income communities.

An additional consideration is park management, which often prohibits certain behaviors, such as camping, unhoused living, sleeping, alcohol consumption, and the use and sale of illicit drugs, leading to the expulsion of specific groups to benefit others, typically individuals of higher socio-economic status. While management of parks is essential for the vitality of the park and for the benefits that parks offer to be fully realized, it is important, as the feminist pragmatist perspective insists, that the creation of parks as well as their management occur from a ground-up location, emphasizing a neighborhood point of view and recognitional justice in the creation and the management. Doing so is essential to mitigate against the colonizing attitude that Pratt discusses and the problematic nature of expulsions that Sassen and Dorstewitz highlight.

Any course that centers on parks and similar areas as educational tools must critically address the privilege inherent in these spaces and delve deeper into the political complexities and power dynamics related to land use in general. The provided template for the student-created one-sheets used as the guiding teaching tool for the primary assignment in this course offers students opportunities to explore these issues. These opportunities, however, will only be effective if the material preparing students for this assignment is rich and nuanced in content. For this reason, part of this course’s early, more traditional part includes critical consideration of the privileged nature of parks and the insights the research and writings of theorists such as Sassen, Dorstewitz and Martins et. al offer. This theoretical work prepares students to incrementally widen their understanding and critically analyze these issues, informing the “glocal” orientation they develop.

Conclusion

In his introduction to Nan Shepherd’s *The Living Mountain*, nature writer Robert Macfarlane writes,

More and more of us live more and more separately from contact with nature. We have come increasingly to forget that our minds are shaped by the bodily experience of being in the world – its spaces, textures, sounds, smells and habits— as well as by genetic traits we inherit and ideologies we absorb. We are literally losing touch, becoming disembodied, more than in any previous historical period (Macfarlane 2011, xxix).

This reflects a concern that we are not presently living in ways that honor our interdependent relationship with nature and all around us. We need to deepen, extend and expand our connections and do so with empathetic understanding. This will move us in the direction needed to address and ameliorate our shared challenges, increasing polarization, and the feelings of loneliness and isolation experienced by many in our communities. As Robin Wall Kimmerer – a Potawatomi Indigenous Nation citizen, botanist, educator and author of *Braiding Sweetgrass* – reflects,

The circle of care grows larger, and caregiving for my little pond [or garden, etc.] spills over to caregiving for other waters [or parts of nature]. The outlet from my pond [or my greenspace] runs downhill to my good neighbor’s pond. What I do here matters. Everybody lives downstream.... [Caring for my pond (or greenspace)] has shown me that being a good mother doesn’t end with creating a home where just my children can flourish. A good mother grows into a richly eutrophic old woman, knowing that her work doesn’t end until she creates a home where all of life’s beings can flourish (Kimmerer 2013, 97).

These closing insights borrowed from MacFarlane and Kimmerer – two of the texts featured in “Philosophy in the Parks” – offer another way to articulate the need for a “glocal” orientation in our societies today. We can begin by getting in touch with our parks and, through the parks, in touch with place-specific and community-specific issues while also connecting with nature and each other. This requires and fosters a “glocal” orientation informed and defined by feminist pragmatist commitments. “Philosophy in the Parks” offers an opportunity for students to cultivate this orientation, experience connection, and gain the skills to be effective and engaged “glocal” citizens.

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