



Learning Frameworks

Power and Historicity Framework

Why is thinking about power and historicity important?

Power and historicity permeate all aspects of socio-ecological systems. This framework provides an overview of the ways power and historicity, as well as some routine dimensions associated with power and historicity in a US context, are present in learning environments and shape interactions at individual and institutional levels. This framework is intended to articulate some key concepts, and can support the development of orientations and practice that transform normative forms of power and privilege and engage learner, family, and community agency towards ethical, just, and sustainable forms of learning and being.

Historicity refers to cultural perceptions of the past, the principles, experiences, and values that shape these perceptions, and how historicized practices, tools, and information continually and consequently **shape the present and future**. Importantly historicity is distinct from history—or the concept of clear “fact”—and fundamentally recognizes that positionality is always shaping what is observed, known, or even considered, and further, how narratives and meaning are construed. Central to the idea of historicity is the recognition of systemically constructed power dynamics that structure relations between and among individuals, communities, and institutions (involving humans and more-than-humans). This includes, at minimum, political, social, technological, and industrial dynamics that are intimately intertwined with place, race, class, gender, and sexuality, amongst other dimensions.

Power is ubiquitous in social systems and how power is understood has consequential impacts on what is seen as important to act on. Power is not inherently good or bad, rather it is a question of how it is utilized and why. In our frameworks we highlight two meanings of power: 1) systemic power and 2) individual and/or collective agency.

Systemic power

Systemic power reflects the extent to which specific ways of knowing and being are legitimated, valued, or promoted by formal institutions. This includes peoples' or communities abilities to access, shape or consequentially influence societal structures and governing institutions. Systemic power is also often reflected in who has access to services and goods or how resources are distributed. People who benefit from and have access to systemic power have or are privileged. In social systems, privilege is often determined by race, gender identity, and class within larger social and political structures. Systemic power often determines whose knowledges' are valued, what is seen as important to know or learn about in educational settings and what is narrated as a good way of being or acting. This can mean whose cultural practices and identities are reflected in schools. For example, the systems of knowledge that are reinforced and reproduced in learning settings—such as nature-culture orientations—typically reflect middle class, western european legacies. Power also operates as a mechanism for gatekeeping the presence, participation, and engagement of young people, particularly young people of color (both physically and intellectually) in some educational and scientific endeavors. Importantly, educators are in positions of leadership and thus hold power in learning environments. This is most evident in whether learners are seen through an intellectual or sensemaking lens, or through a behavioral lens. Moreover, educators as adults are often in positions of power when they work with learners who are children and tend to underestimate the intellectual and ethical deliberations children are engaged in. Finally, educators often work within institutions with historicized powered relations with communities and families that affect how - and with whom - they share their power. This is especially important to recognize given that the teaching force in the United States is over represented by white women. This means that the field of education is vulnerable to the implicit and explicit bias and powered dynamics of this dominant population. Educators often forget that education has been a deeply and problematically cultured, raced, gendered, and classed endeavor and has routinely been the site in which harm to non-dominant families has been inflicted.

Individual and/or collective agency

While systemic power is vitally important to recognize, it is also important to recognize the ways in which individuals, families, and communities have continued to create ingenious ways to continue their cultural traditions, pass on their ways of knowing, and thrive despite systemic forms of oppression. An important aspect of agency is to recognize the complexities of peoples' identities and experiences. One important dimension of identity is intersectionality, which refers to the multiple identities that a person can hold, and the ways that power and privilege operate within these identities. Because of intersecting identities, an individual may have privilege in some aspects but not in others. Intersectional identities include: race, culture, gender identity, ability, sexuality, and more. Recognizing both the challenges and well as strengths developed through identity and powered dynamics can be thought about as recognizing collective agency. Individuals and collectives routinely push back on systemic forms of power in overt and implicit ways. This is especially important to recognize in educational settings where families and learners often articulate issues to educators that may explicitly or implicitly trouble normative forms of power and historicity. Further, learners often find ways to express themselves and to explore ideas even when educators do not recognize them as doing such. An important shift in educator sensibilities can be towards always assuming that learners are on task and working to make sense of their ideas. Important to this work is recognizing that there are a wide range of ways to do this that may vary from normative expectations. For example, significant amounts of research has demonstrated that teachers often perceive that learners who are engaged in making jokes or are laughing are not on task however often students are deeply on task and connecting ideas to their everyday life or utilizing everyday ways of talking.

Race and racialization

Race is both socially real and socially constructed. It is not a true biological phenomena. Race began as an idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on inherited physical and behavioral differences and asserted that the white race were superior to the other races. These ideas began in the 15th century to legitimize European conquest and have persisted in various forms until present day. However, contemporary scholars and scientists have found no credible evidence for any biological claims to race, instead contemporary views of race see it as a social construct that consequently organizes people and crassly demarcates cultural communities and historicized experiences imposed because of perceived phenotype. Importantly, the process by which race becomes meaningful - often called racialization - continues to be a predictive social construct as well as a social identity both self-determined and socially imposed. Racial identity is an important aspect of ones' identity and people both develop their individualized racial identity as well as their racialized group identity. This is especially true for students of color. Importantly, and problematically, white students are often not positioned to have to explicitly grapple with their racial identity and group membership.

Racism can and does manifest in individuals as well as the systemically or institutionally. One can not hold racist beliefs but participate and perpetuate racist systems.

Individual racism refers to an individual who believes that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. Often individual racism manifests in patterns of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious, personal prejudice. Individual Racism is connected to/learned from broader socio-economic histories and processes and is supported and reinforced by systemic racism.

Systemic racism includes the policies and practices entrenched in established institutions, which result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups. It differs from overt discrimination in that no individual intent is necessary. It manifests itself in two ways:

1. **Institutional racism:** racial discrimination that derives from individuals carrying out the dictates of others who are prejudiced or of a prejudiced society
2. **Structural racism:** inequalities rooted in the system-wide operation of a society that excludes substantial numbers of members of particular groups from significant participation in major social institutions.

Educational institutions have been and continue to be systemically racist.

Colonialism & settler colonialism

Colonialism can be generally thought about as the processes of a country or group of people seeking to extend or retain its authority over other people or territories, generally with the aim of economic and cultural dominance, often manifesting in espoused racialized supremacies. In the process of colonization, colonizers may impose their religion, economics, and other cultural practices on the peoples Indigenous to targeted territory, often done in very violent ways. The foreign administrators rule the territory in pursuit of their interests, seeking to benefit from the colonized region's people and resources. Often places are founded through processes of colonialism but often is seen as an historical event that ends and a different era emerges.

Settler-Colonialism is a form of colonialism that seeks to replace the original population of the colonized territory with a new society of settlers. Settler colonialism, unlike colonialism, is an ongoing structure in society, not a time specific historical event. As with all forms of colonialism, it is based on exogenous domination, typically organized or supported by a foreign authority. Settler colonialism is enacted by a variety of means ranging from violent depopulation through genocidal policies of the previous inhabitants to more subtle, legal means such as assimilation or constrained recognition of Indigenous identity and sovereignty within a colonial framework. The colonizing authority generally views the settlers as racially superior to the previous inhabitants, which often gives settlers', or what becomes the new nation's citizens, social movements and political demands greater legitimacy than those of the Indigenous peoples.



How to use this framework

Collaborative Practice: Western educational institutions have been set up to isolate educators and learning settings from families and communities, leading to power imbalances that marginalize learners and communities of color. Disrupt these power imbalances by collaborating with fellow educators, families, and community-based organizations to bring heterogenous knowledges and practices into the learning environment.

Planning and Implementation: Guide your planning and implementation by designing learning activities that identify, address, and dismantle power imbalances both at micro and macro scales. Research the histories of places in which you live, in which your learners live, and related to the site where learning is taking place (like a school, museum, neighborhood organization). Plan to incorporate heterogeneous family and community knowledges and practices in the design of tools and learning activities.

Learner Sense-Making: Intentionally draw on learners' family and community knowledges and practices, and make connections between their lived experiences and scientific inquiry and field investigations.

Co-Design and Assessment: Reflect on how the design of your instruction contributes to or actively works to disrupt power imbalances in the learning environment. For instance, whose ideas typically get voiced and heard and why? How are learning activities and resources made accessible and distributed to learners' families? How do you assess what learners know, think, do, and apply? Do you use normative forms of assessment, or do you ensure that learners have choice in how they perform and otherwise showcase what they have learned?

Educator Reflection: Reflect on your own intersectional identities, how these are historicized, and the ways in which you have been afforded power and privilege because of these identities. For instance, if you are a formal (or informal) educator, you are in a position of power when interacting with children and their families due to historicized relationships between learning institutions and marginalized communities, as well as between children and adults.



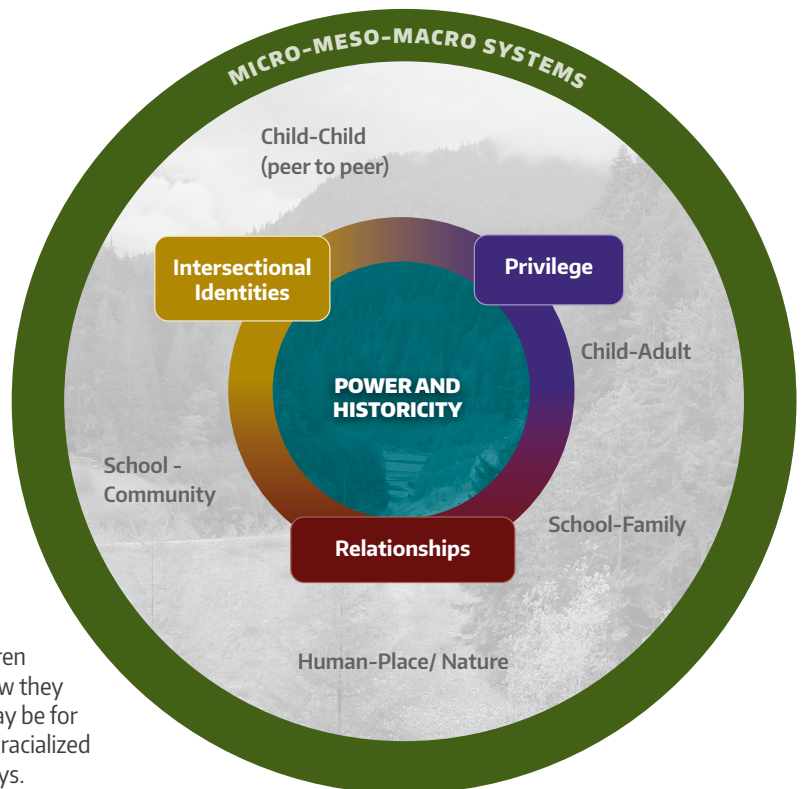
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Key Dimensions of Identity and Relations in Power and Historicity

There are multiple dimensions and scales at which power and historicity operate. These range from power imbalances at institutional or structural levels to day-to-day interactions between children and adults. The intersectional identities of learners, their families, and educators are always interacting with one another, and reflect deeply powered and historicized relationships. There are five dimensions of relations that Learning in Places emphasizes—however please note there are others! These relations are key sites in which power and historicity has and continues to accumulate and are important relations for educators to be intentional about disrupting normative assumptions. These include the following:



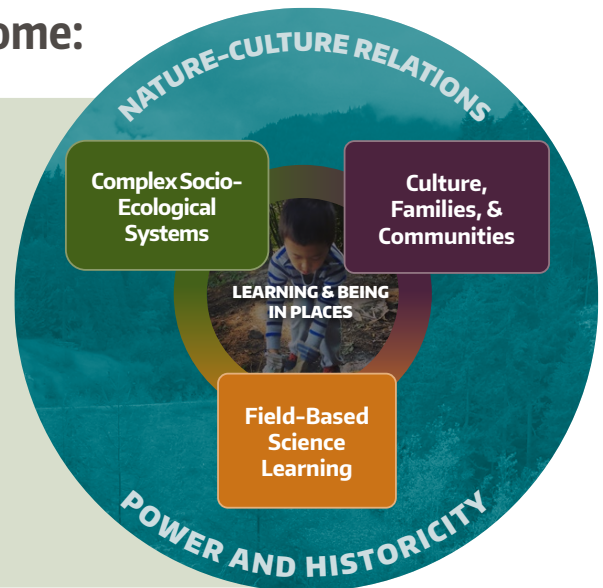
- **Child-Child (peer to peer):** Learners are influenced by adults and systems, and often reproduce these powered dynamics in problematic ways. Educators need to develop ways to disrupt power and historicized assumptions and interactions between learners.
- **Child-Adult:** Powered dynamics between adults and children are ubiquitous. It is important for educators to consider how they are enacting power with children. Some forms of power may be for their best interest, but often educators engage in forms of racialized adultification that treat children of color in problematic ways.
- **School-Family:** Interactions between families and most educational institutions and organizations have histories of power imbalances that are raced, classed, and gendered. It is important for educators to be intentional about learning from and with families to address power imbalances.
- **School - Community:** Families are part of robust communities, which often have central places for learning and cultural thriving, which are rich for learning from community and cultural perspectives. Schools, however, often partner with learning environments that mirror schools or academic-based learning (e.g., field trip to museum), which reinforces dominant forms of knowledge and power. Cultivating relationships with communities means repositioning communal knowledges' and practices as central to learning and identity development in everyday instruction and pedagogy.
- **Human-Place / Nature:** Human relationships with places and the natural world vary by culture and community. However, educational institutions are typically rooted in the dominant model of the west—one of human supremacy and resource extraction. Educators can actively dismantle this powered orientation in their learning settings by learning with and from learners' and their families' relationships and orientations to the natural world.

Micro-Meso-Macro Systems - Power and historicity operate at multiple scales - often simultaneously. The impacts of power are deep and pervasive, and range from the interactions between people, people and institutions, institutions and the environment, and so on.

- **Micro-systems:** This includes day to day interactions between humans, humans and artifacts (such as books, media, tools, etc.), humans and more-than-humans, more-than-humans with one another.
- **Meso-systems:** This includes the family- and community-level interactions. Meso-systems are macro- and micro-systems intermingled. Large-scale historicities and power imbalances are lived experiences that play out in family or community dynamics, and impact (and are impacted by) individuals' intersectional identities and privileges.
- **Macro-systems:** This includes the social, environmental, institutional, and political imbalances of power and dominance. Power imbalances in macro-systems are evident in race- and class-based inequalities such as access to resources and resource distribution.

Connections to the Learning in Places Rhizome:

Complex Socio-Ecological Systems: Socio-ecological systems refer to the interactions between human systems and ecological systems. The underlying premise is that humans are part of the natural world, and all of our systems (e.g. social, political, institutional) are always in relationship with ecological systems. Importantly, the relations within these systems are deeply powered and historicized. For example, in the settler-colonial nation-state, political and institutional decisions based on resource extraction and human-dominance have led to socio-ecological imbalances that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, communities of color, and more-than-human communities.



Nature-Culture Relations, or the relationships between humans and the natural world, vary across cultural communities. The models of nature-culture relations, that is whether humans are construed as a part of or apart from the natural world, structure educational pedagogies and learning activities. Often, in Western educational institutions, and science education more specifically, humans are positioned as apart from the natural world. For example, this is evident in the use of the term “resources” when referring to the natural world. Because of the power imbalances between educational institutions and families—particularly from marginalized communities—learners may not feel comfortable sharing different perspectives of nature-culture relations.

Field-Based Science Learning: Field-based science learning involves learners observing phenomena and conducting investigations in the natural world. However, not all communities have the same relationship with the outdoors. Outdoor learning spaces are often perceived as “white” spaces, and people of color - particularly Black and Brown individuals - often feel unsafe and explicitly oppressed in these places. Creating just, equitable, and ethical outdoor learning opportunities for all learners means educators must first recognize that this is deeply historicized and rooted in a settler-colonial narrative of white supremacy. For example, invisibilizing Indigenous peoples from teaching about the land is and continues to be a settler colonial strategy to increase white power and decrease Indigenous sovereignty. Teaching field-based science, teaching about the Histories of Places, as well as peoples’ varied relationships with the land, is one way to actively dismantle these powered relations. This also means being aware of inequitable policing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) bodies **and** minds, and learning to see the diversity of ways that sensemaking can look and sound like while learning outdoors.

Power and Historicity: Learning about socio-ecological relationships is not neutral, but is complexly tied to learners’ historicized relationships with institutions of place, power and privilege. For example, relationships between educators, students, and families reflect generations of accumulated and disparate power dynamics that shape how learning unfolds across classroom, home, and community. Taking a justice-oriented stance to teaching that disrupts hierarchies of power and privilege requires deliberate sensemaking about social and ecological ethical possibilities for learners and their families and communities, particularly those that have been historically, and continue to be, marginalized.



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