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Place-Based education, Batwa cultural continuity, and reconciliation in everyday school practice in Uganda

Short description / Abstract:

Formal schooling can either sustain Indigenous children's cultural identity or deepen the loss of knowledge, language, and belonging produced by displacement and epistemic exclusion. We examine place-based education as an everyday pedagogical approach for supporting Batwa cultural continuity in Southwestern Uganda, where conservation-related displacement has disrupted relationships among forest, language, intergenerational learning, food systems, and children's sense of self. Drawing on reflections from Batwa communities, local schools, and curriculum conversations, we foreground practical learning activities that can make Indigenous knowledge visible in early childhood and primary school settings without extracting or commodifying it. These include elder guided storytelling, seasonal calendars, ecological vocabulary in Indigenous languages, learning about forest foods and honey, children's use of natural materials in play and observation, and classroom discussions on Batwa narratives of coexistence with gorillas. We argue that such practices help children encounter sustainable development through relationships, responsibility, coexistence, and care for land. It also highlights the need for community-owned curriculum co-design, teacher support, language inclusion, and safeguards for sacred or collectively governed knowledge. Reconciliation in education is therefore approached as an everyday practice of restoring dignity, protecting memory, and enabling Indigenous children to learn from the manifold value systems that shape their worlds.