



Washington State University

College of Education, Sport and Human Sciences

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Will defend their dissertation on

Date: April 17, 2026

Time: 9:00 A.M.

Zoom: Link by request ceshs.gradstudies@wsu.edu

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend

Title:

MAPPING MULTITUDES: EXPLORING MULTISPECIES SENSEMAKING AND AESTHETIC PRACTICES AMONG YOUTH IN A STEAM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Chair: Molly Kelton

Abstract:

STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) education has often focused on scientific and technological innovations to address the climate crisis, overlooking the rich sensemaking that aesthetics contribute to learning. Despite the name “STEAM,” art remains a tool leveraged to serve more traditional STEAM aims. What opportunities for sensemaking are missed when aesthetic work is used in this way? This study explores youth’s out-of-school sensemaking within the context of cartographic art activities focused on ecological science. Specifically, it looks at the ways youth make sense of their multispecies connections and what aesthetic practices they develop in the process. Over the course of four weeks, I and a team of facilitators implemented a cartographic art educational program in a rural housing development in central Washington with 13 youth (ages 5-14). I asked how youth (1) engage in multispecies sensemaking and (2) develop and exhibit aesthetic practices in the context of cartographic art activities. This study uses a qualitative methodology influenced by grounded theory, interaction analysis, design-based research, arts-based visual research, and ethnography. Informed by my analysis of field notes, video and audio recordings, and youth art, I show the centrality of youth relational work within multispecies sensemaking and aesthetic decision-making. In building this argument, I also expand the concept of cartographic art to include the hybrid forms of map-making youth enacted. I suggest future research into multispecies sensemaking, aesthetic practices, and cartographic art—all with implications for theory, as well as design and programming in diverse STEAM learning environments.