



In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Neda Yousefi Movahed**

will defend her dissertation

**How we wear water:  
creative learning for sustainability**

Thursday March 19, 2020  
9:00-10:30am

Wrigley Hall 323  
[Zoom Meeting ID: 459 166 151](#)

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee  
David Manuel-Navarrete & Liz Lerman (co-chairs)  
Mary Margaret Fonow (member)

## Project Overview

In this multi-media dissertation, water is used metaphorically to equate the process of learning with embracing change. Paradigm shifts needed for sustainability require transformative learning where one is open to being shaped by new knowledge and experience. Properties of water – such as molecular bonding and phase changes – uncover lessons for humans' adaptability. Given that our bodies are comprised mostly of water – what implications exist for our capacity to similarly undergo continuous change?

An arts-based research methodology is practiced to produce a four-chapter project. Artistic methods of data collection and communication retain subjective complexity of lived experiences central to learning processes. Each chapter is prepared for a target audience and addresses widening scales of creative learning for sustainability.

Chapter one is a **narrative ethnography** that examines the role women in my family play in sustaining life. This personal process allows creative exploration of my practice of sustainability – an awareness that I am an ancestor-in-the-making for future generations. Family recipes, stories, and photos are compiled into a creative non-fiction piece designed to preserve and pass on folk knowledge. Chapter one is like a pond that addresses a personal and familial scale of creative learning for sustainability.

Chapter two is a **co-authored journal article** that covers creative learning tools and design principles for sustainable classrooms. "Sustainable classrooms" are described as spaces that are alive, adaptive, and open to innovation. Three years of facilitation experience for a 300-level class on "International Development and Sustainability" are combined with data from student journals and interviews. Design principles of humanity, horizontality, and compassionate facilitation are found to be critical in supporting sustainable learning opportunities. Chapter two is like a lake that invites wider audiences to examine creative learning for sustainability, but focuses on case-specific material within a formal learning environment.

Chapter three is an **open-access and adaptive, [online toolkit](#)** sharing creative methods to cultivate curiosity and critical contemplation. Many of these tools emerge within the context of sustainability education. However, the application of these tools extends to wider audiences interested in both formal and informal learning situations. Chapter three is like a river that supports a flow of tools for continuous experimentation.

Chapter four synthesizes the previous three chapters into a **showcase** exploring how water can inform and inspire individual and collective learning for sustainability. Interactive exhibits and performances examine lessons humans can learn from water's adaptability. Chapter four is like a sea that invites a larger audience into the exploration of how creative learning encourages us to embrace change. The showcase will be held on **Tuesday March 17th** at [The Empty Space](#) in Tempe, AZ. Activities and performances will be ongoing between **4:40-8:15pm** and participants are invited to come and go as they please.

This four-chapter project addresses the power of creative learning for sustainability at the personal, familial, formal classroom, informal online learning community, and public scales. Arts-based methods harness aesthetic power, welcome subjective complexity, and allow multiple meanings to

be interpreted from research results. This multi-media project stretches the conventional structure of sustainability dissertations. The bridge between the arts and sciences is strengthened as this project shows synergies between these two ways of knowing. We can learn from the wisdom of water – to both change and be changed by our circumstances.