


REVIEW

A review of ‘(Re)Storying Human/Earth Relationships in Environmental Education: Becoming (partially) posthumanist’

Kathryn, R. (2023). *(Re)Storying human/earth relationships in environmental education: Becoming (partially) posthumanist*. Springer Nature Singapore.

Review Author

Scott Jukes 

Institute of Education, Arts and Community, Federation University, Australia
Email: s.jukes@federation.edu.au

I opened Kat’s¹ book and the words *For Gunnamatta* jumped out at me. Gunnamatta, that pulsing surging maelstrom of a beach is just down the road as I type this review on Boon wurrung/Bunurong Country. Kat wrote her book in Saskatchewan, but as she acknowledges, Gunnamatta has been a place of significance for her. A book is not a separate reality from the conditions of which it is written within, and this little acknowledgement helped set the scene for a book that comes from an embodied and embedded positionality which aims to both work with and resist multiple grand narratives in education, environmental education and the policies that constrain them. Sitting down and working my way into the opening pages, what initially struck me was the ethical intensity inherent in *(Re)Storying Human/Earth Relationships in Environmental Education*. As Bazzul (2023) has recently commented, “education is an intensive ethical journey that moves someone from one way of being to another” (p. 3). This intense ethical journey is present in Kat’s work, as she stories the tensions and ruptures of migrating to another country, living with multiple subjectivities and embracing posthumanist theoretical perspectives in her educational research. These come together in a search for different ways of knowing/being/thinking/doing/feeling in these times of the Anthropocene.

The book looks to grapple with the contemporary conditions we find ourselves in and of. Drawing upon the potential of posthumanist performativity, Kat sets out to “de/reconstruct the globalising, neoliberal, capitalist and colonial master stories in/of environmental education” (p. 9). In other words, the book is an effort of bringing social and ecological justice into environmental education. But what does it mean to de/reconstruct master stories in/of environmental education? As Kat frames in the opening chapter, this involves troubling sustainable development discourses, which she points out are layered with consumptive capitalist values and has vagaries around who and what is to be sustained. Kat affirms that notions of learning *about* the Earth/nature/environment reinforce Cartesian separations where humans are separate from an objective knowable Earth ‘out there’. It is such positions that have enabled the Earth (Earth’s resources) to be mindlessly extracted and consumed (largely for the benefit of a powerful minority in the west). Such Western enlightenment logics have seeped into pragmatic instrumentalist policy-driven

education—even into sustainable development discourses—which remove education from a sensuous felt embodiment *with* the land.

To ground this heavy work, Kat focusses on a collaborative research/teaching project with a Primary School teacher in Saskatchewan. As Kat highlights, the broad scale issues of policy-driven discourses play out in Primary School curriculum in the Canadian context she works. In this curricula, there is a focus on pragmatic and technocratic aspects of land use, which overlooks multi-sensory and embodied engagements with land. This critical take on the growth of sustainable development discourse and resultant policy and curriculum is the platform from which Kat embarks on an alternative path for her inquiry. In doing so, she and her teacher collaborator combine for creative multi-sensory enactments of mindful walking, mapping worlds, eco-art installations and photographic encounters with students and land. They link these practices with curriculum, whilst deconstructing prescriptive curriculum-as-plan, working with the generative lived possibilities that emerge from transdisciplinary approaches. It is these enactments that provoke conversations between Kat and her teacher/collaborator, which further continued researcher/teacher/environmental education worldings. For me, these enactments and resultant discussions do exactly what Kat intends; they (re)story environmental education and aid in (re)thinking the globalising, neoliberal, capitalist and colonial master stories. These stories are rich with depth and rigour, drawing upon postcolonial, posthumanist and new materialist theories. Ultimately, what this does is open possibilities for rethinking human/Earth relationships. As a result, Kat's book is not a logical research report, but rather a thought experiment in not knowing, in feeling, musing and wondering towards capacities for fostering response-ability in the Anthropocene.

The book is presented in three clusters: Inspiring, Performing and Becoming. These clusters build the narrative of the book, with each cluster working together. The first cluster, *Inspiring*, sets the scene for the turn to posthumanist possibilities, the grounded subjectivities that shape the project and the overall intentions of the project. This *Inspiring* section also includes some exacting critiques of the concept of nature, the evolution of environmental education and education for sustainable development in the Canadian context. For me, these critiques are particularly important, both for setting the stage for the remainder of this book and environmental education more generally. Given the climate and extinction crises that are increasingly spiralling into chaos, we need critical and creative thinkers that allows us to sense (and sense beyond) human hubris and business-as-usual ways of thinking.

Cluster two, *Performing*, maps researcher, teacher, environmental education worldings. This section introduces Karen Barad's agential realism and its relevance to the project, and how these ways of thinking consider human agency in non-hierarchical relation to other materialities. The narrative builds into and through the researcher and teacher collaborations bringing empirical layers into the project, which illuminates complexities and challenges hierarchical and dominant modes of thinking which emerge in these settings. I found numerous examples of challenging the status quo and following ethical accountability throughout this section, which offers resistance and ruptures from dominant categories and positions of power.

Cluster three, *Becoming*, involves "becoming (partially) posthumanist" (p. 109). In effect, this final cluster reflects upon the project the book undertakes. Rather than overturning the system, Kat offers a series of breaks from normalising practices in environmental education. Drawing figurative inspiration from the ebbing and flowing rip currents of Gunnamatta beach, the breaks involve ethical movements towards embracing nomadic and entangled subjectivities (over fixed separated identities); movements towards relational agencies and the accountabilities and response-abilities that come with this (as a step away from anthropocentric agencies of domination); and embracing the complexities of emplaced and situated educational contexts, and responding to these with social and environmental justice in mind (in-between top-down policy-driven logics). These breaks offer hope and a potential map for others to think with in these precarious times.

Overall, I found *(Re)Storying human/Earth relationships in environmental education: Becoming (partially) posthumanist* to be a richly layered text, full of honesty, hope and care for the Earth and all its earthly inhabitants. However, the book is not without its challenges. For example, there is a dense array of theory and complex theoretical language deployed throughout the book. But this is countered by numerous footnotes which add depth, nuance and more thorough expansion of particular ideas. And moreover, how are we to think/feel/be different without challenging our conventional ways of thinking/feeling/being? As such, I recommend this book to teachers, researchers and students that are concerned and care for our planet and want a rich toolbox of ideas to help break from dominant discourses and foster relationships with earthly kin.

Note

I refer to Kat by her first name as I have worked with and gotten to know her over the last few years. It felt strange and impersonal to refer to her by her surname. Furthermore, it is important to note this collegial relationship as a contextualisation for this review, as I have appreciated her work, we have researched together (e.g., see Jukes & Riley, *in press*), and she also reviewed my recent book (Jukes, 2023).

References

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Author Biography

Scott Jukes is a lecturer in Outdoor Education at Federation University. Always drawn to the mountains, Scott loves sharing his love for these places in his teaching and his research. His research deploys relational and post-anthropocentric approaches for developing pedagogies which grapple with environmental problems. He has also explored how technology functions in outdoor learning contexts. Scott recently authored the book *Learning to confront ecological precarity: Engaging with more-than-human worlds*. He also recently received a Vice-Chancellor's Learning and Teaching Award for his development of innovative place-responsive curricula which enhanced student learning and experience.

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