

Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches

Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts and Alastair McIntosh (Editors) *Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, 2012, 452 pp, ISBN 9780754677680*

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Echoing H.G. Wells' 1934 call for a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of human ecology, editors Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts, and Alastair McIntosh offer readers an ambitious volume of essays, in part to champion this cause. *Radical Human Ecology*, a weighty collection related to Indigenous and intercultural topics, serves as a sort of 'call to arms' in their stated effort to move Human Ecology beyond its scientific shackles to 'reclaim the unitive, depth dimension of being — the Life World that so interconnects us' (p. 1). Arguing that the discipline has been caught in a paradigm driven by Cartesian dualism, with this volume, Williams, Roberts, and McIntosh aim to reclaim Indigenous knowledge implicitly related to the study of humans and reorient Human Ecology.

The text is organised into three main sections, symbolically named for the body — Head, Heart and Hand — inspired by a model designed by Patrick Geddes and referenced in Chapter 2. Each section relates to the topic differently and thus the bodily connection is a smart one that aligns the head with reason, the heart with feelings, and the hand with management and activism, making the work accessible to students and scholars interested only in certain aspects of this topic. The text connects closely to the body in another way, in that each of the essays is written from an autobiographical perspective that welcomes personal narratives and perspectives into the collection. The tangible links made between research and personal experience is not new in many scholarly disciplines such as educational research, though for Human Ecology such forms of research dissemination remain somewhat unique. For example, *Panarchy: Understanding Transformation in Human and Natural Systems* (Gunderson & Holling, 2001) another collection of essays edited by human ecologists that also argues for a more interdisciplinary approach, remains firmly entrenched within a scientific discourse despite stated efforts to move beyond scientific analyses. *Radical Human Ecology*, according to the editors, and supported by the foreword contributor Richard J. Borden, the Rachel Carson Chair in Human Ecology, thus signals a fresh and much needed direction for the discipline.

The first section, 'Head: Theories of Human Ecology', includes four essays closely related to specific theoretical issues and the discipline's place in the academy. Each essay presents a theoretical argument for change. Concluding that new directions of study within the discipline can in-

spire creative solutions to global crises, Ulrich Loening, molecular biologist and human ecologist, contends in his contribution that scientific attitudes must change in order to better fit human activity into nature's rhythms. Alastair McIntosh shares his long experience of teaching Human Ecology, maintaining that a 'premodern' (p. 31) approach that equally combines scientific investigation and metaphysics remains key to the discipline's future. In his argument for holism, McIntosh discredits Modernism and Post-Modernism. Focusing his ire most directly at Post-Modern theory, for McIntosh, is a stark either/or argument with no acknowledgment of the positive aspects of critical theory, which leads him to describe it as a soulless academic pursuit. A realignment with pre-modern indigenous epistemologies makes better sense and he persuasively argues this point. Ethnology scholar Ullrich Kockel follows up on McIntosh's challenge by advancing another aspect of an indigenous approach to the study of culture known in German as *Volkskunde*, or knowledge of the people. The role of the sacred has been ignored in all academic disciplines outside religious studies, in Kockel's estimation, and argues this component must be reinserted into the discourse. Makere Stewart-Harawira combines Maori worldview with global citizenship in her scholarship, and her essay, the last in this section, 'Returning to the Sacred: Indigenous Ontologies in Perilous Times', concisely repositions the arguments of the first three authors to assert that Indigenous ontologies offer a radical new direction forward and therefore cannot be dismissed by human ecologists.

The second section of the text, 'Heart: Radical Epistemologies of Relationship', offers seven essays that shift the discussion to more specific intuitive and emotive ways in which to relate the theoretical premises of the discipline to indigenous ways of knowing. Maori scholar Lewis William's essay, 'The Human Ecologist as Alchemist', introduces this section by utilising intuitive inquiry, arguing that life and our lifework remain part of a transformative process that should continually question our existence and place in the world. Each of the essays in this section fix the concept of inquiry to personal experience in an effort to demonstrate the global importance of this paradigm shift. Scholars from New Zealand, Scotland, Pakistan, Canada and the United States contribute diverse yet similar conceptions in their essays to more fully articulate this

epistemological direction, which the editors argue is necessary in order to solidify the premise that elements of indigeneity exist in all cultures.

The final section of the text amounts to the largest grouping of essays. 'Hand: Human Ecology in Practice' offers readers a broad range of specific cases of Human Ecology at work through nine exemplars. Examples of theory into practice: each essay in this part of the text maintains an autobiographical voice to share specific experiences and examples that reference the diversity of Human Ecology pursuits. The editors of this text believe that indigeneity offers Human Ecology a framework for the future of the discipline. Yet, many indigenous researchers straddle the borders and boundaries of academia, keenly aware that their research does not fit neatly into any single discipline. The holistic nature of such studies often demands that we sit outside the confines of Western-style silos of academia, yet this also allows us to more easily access directions of inquiry from a variety of disciplines. Indigenous researchers, especially those working within the area of educational research, have long embraced indigenous epistemologies, autobiographical, and narrative methodologies that mesh

with traditional ways of knowing and learning. *Radical Human Ecology* clearly celebrates the complexity and diversity of the varied research it assembles in making a contribution to the literature. While one strength of this text lies in its acknowledgement of the importance and application of indigenous ontologies and epistemologies to academic inquiry, its weakness lies in its effort, mostly early on in the text, to maintain links to the established scientific discipline of Human Ecology rather than moving on. Researchers from all disciplines should embrace the advice of contributor Makere Stewart-Harawira, who asks readers to take the 'next great evolutionary leap forward' (p. 85) in considering ways of thinking and researching that embrace empathic and hopeful human relationships to both the sacred and the earth.

Reference

Gunderson, L., & Holling, C.S. (Eds.), (2001). *Panarchy: Understanding transformation in human and natural systems*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education

Quentin Beresford, Gary Partington and Graeme Gower (Editors) *University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 2012, Second Edition, ISBN 9781742583891*

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Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education provides a highly accessible review of current approaches and agendas in Aboriginal education. Its accessibility means that it will have extensive appeal to pre-service teachers. The text is indeed aimed at teachers, educational administrators and policy-makers, with the objective of developing best practice in the field. It is the second edition of a text that was first published in 2003.

The first chapter should be compulsory reading for pre-service teachers across Australia. It documents the experiences of a beginning teacher, Helen McCarthy, on Anindilyakwa country in the Northern Territory, where she lived and worked as a teacher for 12 years. It is beautifully written; the suspense and intrigue associated with the experiences that Helen relates through the privilege of living in an Aboriginal community are a delight to read. After reading a chapter like this, I was left wondering why a young beginning teacher would consider the monotony of a city placement.

Beresford and Gray present an invaluable overview of Aboriginal policy development in Australia. The various

models presented will provide the student reader with a method of interpreting previous government approaches to Aboriginal education, and the ways in which policy development so easily returns to where it began 30 years before, with only slight adjustments to the original model. Indeed, the authors reveal how we have returned to compensatory education. They include the government's *Closing the Gap* policy and Noel Pearson's interpretation of *Direct Instruction* in a compensatory skills model of education. I was also interested by a note from the authors that 9% of Indigenous students do not sit the NAPLAN tests.

Issues of standardising Aboriginal student outcomes against the national benchmark of non-Aboriginal students, and governing by numbers are not explored. Chapter 5 starts with a restrained letter from a mother who is writing to her son's teacher requesting that the teacher 'think carefully about 'how and why you read a Dreaming story to the children ... and why you must ensure it doesn't become a token effort'. This is a pertinent observation of widespread practice, where so many children