


THESIS SYNOPSIS

Enacting more-than-human pedagogies in response to ecological precarity: an immanent praxiography

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Synopsis

Our current epoch is a time of mass extinction, changing climates, socio-ecological inequality and widespread precarity — these are troubling times. Scholars such as Haraway (2016) highlight that drivers of our ecological predicament include the problematic cultural ideas of anthropocentrism, bounded individualism and human exceptionalism. Such problematic ideas and the precarious conditions of the present are what compelled me, an outdoor environmental educator, to explore and confront these issues in the places I work. Thus, this doctoral inquiry was performed from a situated perspective where I asked: How might I, an outdoor environmental educator, address these precarious times in my field and through my practice?

The situated approach to the inquiry was a purposeful strategy. The mess of ecological precarity can be described in broad brush stroke statements; however, my approach to confronting such issues required delving into the nuanced complexity of problems in specific ways, places and times. This approach, influenced by the place-responsive turn in outdoor environmental education (OEE) (e.g., Mannion & Lynch, 2016; Stewart, 2020; Wattchow & Brown, 2011), led me to eschew universal fixes or final solutions, but instead undertake a series of place and context-responsive experiments in practice. The guiding heuristic for these experiments was the notion of more-than-human pedagogies.

The notion of more-than-human pedagogies was provoked by posthumanist (e.g., Braidotti, 2013), new materialist (e.g., Barad, 2007; St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016) and Deleuzo-Guattarian (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) theories. In keeping with such theories, I embraced multiplicity and attempted a pluralistic enactment of more-than-human pedagogical experimentation. I attempted to put such ideas to work by challenging human exceptionalism, individualism and hierarchical anthropocentrism in my everyday practice as an educator. I published the work as I went resulting in a thesis by publication. Through this process, the various chapters emerged in different conditions, with different foci and in relation to different concepts and theories.

The context for the empirical elements of the inquiry included bushwalking and ski-touring journeys in the Australian Alps, remake activities on university campuses and canoe journeys on various rivers in the Murray–Darling basin. Furthermore, other chapters explored more personal elements of my (and others) thinking and life. Through my practice in these contexts, I produced a varied assortment of empirical materials, which I drew upon, analysed and/or put to work in different ways. Empirical materials included a picture-story book created by a student, field-based photographic images and videos, research journal entries, student essays, creative writing and artefact making.

Overall, through these empirical materials, I attempted to avoid normative approaches to conventional humanist qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2011). In doing so, the various chapters, and empirical materials utilised within, explore experiments for engaging with and/or evoking more-than-human worlds.

Each of my published articles from this project were weaved into the thesis, along with other unpublished work, to create the research narrative. To help bring the thesis by publication together, I developed my own take on an emergent methodology, which I called immanent praxiography. Mol (2002) first coined the term praxiography, in an exploration into practices (*praxis*) rather than culture (*ethno*) alone. I deployed praxiography (rather than ethnography or auto-ethnography) as a term to help describe the non-anthropocentric focus on ontological practices and processes. In addition, I described the praxiography as immanent, as it was within and through practices, without a teleological goal, fixed set of methods or pre-conceived image of the final product, that I undertook the project.

In summary, the thesis provides examples of putting post-humanist and new materialist theoretical ideas to work in empirical settings. The two main conceptual offerings from this work include the notion of more-than-human pedagogies for OEE and the emergent methodological idea of immanent praxiography as an approach to educational research.

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Scott Jukes is a lecturer in Outdoor Environmental Education at Federation University, Australia. His research explores pedagogical development and experimentation in outdoor environmental education, inspired by post-humanist and new materialist theories. He is particularly interested in ways we may grapple with place-specific environmental problems and engage with more-than-human worlds. He has a passion for the river, mountain, and coastal environments of south-eastern Australia and enjoys teaching and spending time in these places. Scott was recently nominated for the Australian Association for Research in Education's Ray Debus Award for doctoral research in education. He is also the Media Editor for the Australian Journal of Environmental Education.

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