

## **(Re)Storying Human/Earth Relationships in Environmental Education: Becoming (Partially) Posthumanist**

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## **(Re)Storying Human/Earth Relationships in Environmental Education: Becoming (Partially) Posthumanist**

**Kathryn Riley**

Environmental education today faces immense challenges, as it grapples with the profound and complex environmental damage experienced in the Anthropocene era. Traditional approaches often fall short, as they tend to prioritize humans as the most important species, leading to a detached understanding of nature. This book offers a fresh and critical perspective, proposing that we fundamentally redefine human and Earth relationships. Kathryn Riley argues for seeing these relationships as deeply interconnected and mutually influential, rather than separate entities, emphasizing an entangled, co-constitutive existence.

Addressing these critical concerns, the book delves into various important points for educators. Riley discusses how teachers can cultivate more relational, respectful, and meaningful learning experiences that transcend conventional boundaries. She explores shifting educational practices away from detached, textbook-style instruction toward activities that engage students physically, emotionally, and ethically with the Land. Furthermore, a significant aspect of her work involves critiquing dominant systems like capitalism, colonialism, and standard curriculum policies, which often inadvertently disregard Indigenous ways of knowing and marginalize alternative learning approaches that foster genuine connection and understanding.

The book is divided into three main clusters, guiding the reader through the re-storying of human/Earth relationships. The first, *Inspiring*, talks about the fundamental need for change in environmental education and introduces the complex idea of posthumanist performativity as a lens for reimagining these connections. Chapter 1 sets the stage by delving into the author's background and motivations for undertaking this critical inquiry, establishing her positionality within the field. Chapter 2 then provides a comprehensive explanation of how environmental education has evolved, meticulously detailing its historical trajectory and current state, with a particular focus on the Canadian context.

The next part, *Performing*, focuses more deeply on practical application and collaborative methodologies. This section details Riley's direct collaboration with Lily, a Grade 4 and 5 teacher in Saskatchewan. Together, they meticulously design and implement four distinct hands-on activities aimed at fostering deeper human-Earth relationships. *Mindful Walking* invites students to physically engage with their surroundings, paying close attention to their bodily connection with the land. *Mapping Worlds* encourages a creative and sensory exploration of place, enabling students to represent their environment through an embodied process rather than a purely visual one. The *Eco-art Installation* prompts students to forage for natural

and human-made materials from the land to create art that reflects human-Earth connections, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. Finally, Photographic Encounters uses disposable cameras to encourage students to capture images that reflect emotions felt about the environment, promoting a nuanced understanding of their interactions with the world. Each of these projects is explained clearly, accompanied by reflections on how the students responded and the broader implications for learning.

In the final cluster, *Becoming*, Riley reflects profoundly on how the entire project changed her understanding of herself and her evolving role in environmental education. This section discusses the critical importance of moving away from traditional, binary oppositions (like human/nature or teacher/student) and instead recognizing the deeply entangled and dynamic relationships that continually shape both learning processes and life itself. It explores the transformative potential of embracing uncertainty and fluidity in our understanding of existence.

Kathryn Riley's "(Re)Storying Human/Earth Relationships in Environmental Education" redefines environmental education through a posthumanist lens, advocating for an entangled human-Earth relationship. The book uses the author's collaboration with teacher Lily and practical "enactments" to demonstrate how relational agency and anticolonial praxis can be fostered. It emphasizes "Thinking Through Land" from Indigenous perspectives and challenges traditional educational norms like the indoor/outdoor binary. Riley argues for dynamic, co-constituted "worldmaking practices" and highlights the importance of embracing "moments of rupture" for a more just and sustainable future.

The book, while insightful, has areas for improvement, particularly concerning its complexity and lack of detailed evidence. The theoretical language can be challenging for readers, and there's limited detailed evidence or data from classroom examples, especially student voices or reflections. Future work could include more structured qualitative data collection from student reflections or interviews. Additionally, a glossary of key terms or a simplified introductory overview would enhance accessibility.

Kathryn Riley's book offers significant strengths, providing valuable ideas and inspiration for teachers aiming to make environmental education more meaningful, inclusive, and connected to real life. The described teaching activities are practical, adaptable, and can be applied in various educational contexts, depending on local culture and environment. It presents a strong theoretical foundation, effectively applying posthumanist and new materialist theories to offer a fresh, ethically profound perspective beyond mainstream discourses. The engaging and critical content integrates personal stories and critiques dominant Western educational norms, fostering deeper connections with the environment. Furthermore, its relational and decolonial focus, with a commitment to "relational care ethics" and "anticolonial praxis," provides a crucial decolonial perspective often missing in

environmental education.

I strongly encourage teachers, lecturers, pre-service teachers, and education practitioners to explore "(Re)Storying Human/Earth Relationships in Environmental Education: Becoming (Partially) Posthumanist." The book presents three main ideas for designing inclusive environmental education: ethics and legality in using learning materials, inclusive teaching strategies, and a commitment to equity. In short, this book challenges us to rethink how we teach and how we live together with the Earth in more responsible and connected ways.

### **References**

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