

Embracing the More-Than-Human

A Review of “Ecological Pedagogy of Joy: On Relations, Aliveness and Love”

Bachar Chbib

E-mail: bacharchbib@gmail.com

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Abstract

This book review is grounded in the philosophical assumptions associated with holistic education, informed by Indigenous and Western thought that are in continuous practical and theoretical flux. Chbib begins this review by briefly introducing the research behind the book, followed by an explanation of the proposed holistic education of joy in ecology pedagogy through weaving and *métissage* proposed by the authors. A critical reflection of the book follows.

Keywords: *book review, interpretive research, holistic education, métissage, ecology, pedagogy of joy*

Latremouille, Tait, and Jardine gift us with a selfless and profound book describing their grounded and adventurous research into the possibility of an ecological pedagogy of joy. They weave together Indigenous ways of knowing and being with Western knowledge in a *métissage* that successfully brings us face to face with a fresh perspective on ecology. This work is one answer to the post-qualitative call for varied, inclusive, affective, sensitive, performative, and holistic research that many recent thinkers in the humanities have proposed (see: Carson, Lincoln, Smith, Harraway, Alexander, Conquergood, Spry, Kovach, Lassiter, Kincheloe, Steinberg, Denzin, Pinar, Honan and many more).¹ This includes

¹ This post-qualitative perspective draws on diverse scholars who reimagine qualitative and humanities research as affective, ethical, decolonial, and performative. Yvonna S. Lincoln's work with Norman K. Denzin challenges

Indigenous and interpretive traditions interweaved in decolonizing *métissage* research. The authors also incorporate Western and Indigenous knowledge, theory, and philosophy into their ecological identities and pedagogical praxis (see:

positivist paradigms and promotes emancipatory research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* critiques colonial research practices, while Donna Haraway's feminist-posthumanist writing redefines knowledge as relational and multispecies. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Dwight Conquergood explore how power, culture, and embodiment intersect in struggles. Tami Spry, Margaret Kovach, and Luke Eric Lassiter advocate for collaborative, dialogic inquiry. Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg's critical pedagogy emphasizes reflexivity and social justice, and Norman K. Denzin's interpretive approach shapes critical qualitative traditions. William F. Pinar's work on *currere* reconfigures curriculum as autobiographical and political. Elizabeth Honan and other post-qualitative scholars experiment with non-linear, anti-hierarchical forms of inquiry focused on entanglement, affect, and relational ethics.

Todd, Tallbear, Lorde, Whyte, Donald, Tomaselli, Zuss, Nakata, Kimmerer and many more).² The authors clearly state their process:

This book invokes a spirit of *métissage* (Cynthia Chambers, Erika HasebeLudt, Carl Leggo, & Anita Sinner, 2012; Dwayne Donald, 2012; Erika HasebeLudt, Cynthia Chambers, & Carl Leggo, 2009) rooted in woven place-stories, poetic interludes, images, life writing, conversations, and scholarly wanderings. *Métissage*, as both a philosophical orientation, a form of inquiry, and an ethical teaching practice, brings together a multiplicity of voices. (p. 5)

This mixing, blurring, blending, weaving, collaborating, mingling, flirting, watching carefully, and engagement with various beings, entities, symbols, and voices allow the authors to construct and deconstruct traditional Indigenous and Western colonizing narratives of life. Relying heavily on poetic remembrance, situated life experiences, Gadamer's hermeneutics, and ethical concepts of understanding and conversation, we discover that the key binding agent for this book is 'relation,' namely, how humans and

more-than-humans dialogue, behave, and deal with each other to co-exist.

Furthermore, the authors propose an 'Ecological Pedagogy of Joy' aimed at living in an ethical and empathetic way with all human and more-than-human entities. In their own words it is about what they as teachers, parents, beings, and more-than-human entities have experienced, witnessed, and appreciated, that is: "Love, affection, curiosity, living fields of living relations and the deep breaths of discovery, care, sorrow and study" (p.4). This is to be a constant life affirming inquiry into relations, aliveness, and love and as Kehte-aya Bob would say to "walk well in the world" (p. 4). Learners are to understand and experience how to walk well in the embroidered fabric that entangles them with the Earth in a reciprocal, ethical, and empathetic engagement with the more-than-human. Ecology pedagogy breaks open under the weight of the *real* and 'the end of the world as we know it' paradigms, compelling the authors to question: "What shall we tell the children? What are they trying to tell us without trying, without telling? What shall we teach? What needs learning? To what shall we aspire? How do we deeply aspire amidst the smoke?" (p. 7).

The authors propose a Pedagogy of Joy that treasures and delves into the repositories of knowledge left by all the ancestors (human and more-than-human entities alike). I understand their proposed pedagogy to teach learners to 'live well' beyond the self-destructive habits, sufferings, anxieties, economies, values, and desires the Western ways of living in pain and joy have provided and implemented. Learners can henceforth explore outside their closed self-centered environments in concert with the more-than-human worlds that embrace them, breaking down the wall of Cartesian duality. This challenges what "counts as knowing, both in schools and beyond the classroom" (p.48). The

² Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, in *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* (2012), challenge settler colonialism in education. Kim TallBear critiques genomic science through Indigenous feminist lenses in *Native DNA* (2013). Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984) addresses interlocking oppressions shaping ecological selfhood. Kyle Whyte's *Indigenous Climate Change Studies* (2017) re-centers Indigenous futures in environmental philosophy. Dian Million, in *Therapeutic Nations* (2013), explores Indigenous health and land pedagogies. Rick E. Donald advocates for hybrid ecological teaching in *Indigenous Knowledge in the Decolonized Science Curriculum* (2016). Louis E. R. P. Tomaselli's *Transculturating Auto/ethnography* (2020) narrates cross-cultural research ethics. Michael Zuss's *The Practice of Speculative Philosophy* (2017) examines speculative inquiry in pedagogy. Martin Nakata theorizes Indigenous-Western knowledge dialogues in *Disciplines of Indigenous Knowledge* (2007). Robin Wall Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), blends Indigenous reciprocity with scientific ecology.

following paragraph in my mind synthesises their proposed pedagogy:

An ecological pedagogy of joy therefore bodes of habitation and the terrains we live amidst (not just surrounded by but made of), airs we breath, more-than-human bee-consciousness and phototropic plant turnings towards the sun, and all the shared and contested knowledge that has been entrusted to us for safekeeping, inside and outside of schools.

Gaudium—the Latinate root of “joy”—is a sensate uprising, feels and forms, and the quick in-breath of finding just that map, or just that formulation, or just the right words, just that solvent resolution to a mathematical knot or the meticulous pin-counts of rings treed in wooden rounds in a Kindergarten class—my birth year, my mother’s and sometimes arcs and arcs before that, fat rings full of growth and skinny ones betraying. (Latremouille et al., 2024, p. 83)

The book is divided into eight parts each having interwoven stories of individual experiences as teachers, memories of childhood, stories about and from ancestors, situated local histories, academic theory, evocative poetry, with several contributions from co-workers, academics, and friends. The weaving is so fine and caring, like a Kimmerer sweetgrass bradding, that one rarely disengages from the deep and thoughtful narrative. Yet at times shockingly bare and poignant each author allows their own voice to comingle in cacophony, repeated fugues and symphonic togetherness. Repetition from various contexts is essential to learning relations, kinship and affective embodiment.

Personally, I was baffled by the inclusion of the detailed methodology and ethics process (chapter three) on the entangled relationship between the co-writers and the academic institutions, as the

chapter could have been an academic journal publication on its own. I nevertheless also have my reservations regarding ‘1967’ theoretical and superficial groundings of holistic education, but this work takes us beyond that hippie, Yoga loving, exhaustingly self-absorbed, composting, recycling, Buddha and vegan embracing hypocritical narratives (in my opinion). This book peripatetically wanders into the next century grounded in more realistic, authentic, communal, inclusive Indigenous and Western weavings, toward an embracing and loving Métissage of human and more-than-human well-being. This research is also a virtuous, creative and complex example of what lies ahead in co-research and multiple author publications.

If there is one more-than-human that needs to be embraced, teased and engaged with, it is this emotional, playful, and scholarly work. I suggest you pick up this delightful and touching gem and quietly, in silence read a text imbued with fearlessness, honesty and integrity - then share it with your friends and kin. It’s a joy to read this poetic venture into the lands of the *Bear*, *Grandmother Mouse*, *Thunder Being* and *Buffalo* with an *Eagle’s* vision – slowly, sharply and repeatedly with deep and focused understanding. I read and re-read their stories under the cover of night, and it turned my eco-nightmares into dreams of a better future.

References

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Author Bio

Bachar Chbib is a grounded researcher with an accumulated knowledge and interest in

film-making for over 40 years and thus engages with his positionality, perspective and academic privileges. His work attempts to enhance ecopedagogic praxis by focusing on more-than-human inclusivity through the use of digital recording devices in early schooling. His work can be accessed by reading his Master's thesis in education published at Bishop's University (2023) and his PhD dissertation in communication published at the Université du Québec à Montréal (2026). His perspective throughout his academic inquiries has informed his work in Critical Radical Ecopedagogies, citizenship, and affective kinship and belonging with the more-than-humans. Chbib was born in Damascus, Syria and grew up on a beef ranch in the eastern townships of Quebec. He later made films in Hollywood for 17 years then concentrated on making local, mundane, personal, amateur films and paintings. He gardens a lot and is a proud grandfather.

bacharchbib@gmail.com

www.oneira.com

www.ecopedagogy.ca