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Alistair Stewart

# Developing Place-responsive Pedagogy in Outdoor Environmental Education

A Rhizomatic Curriculum Autobiography

 Springer

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# Series Editors' Foreword

Iva Davies, the lead singer and songwriter with the band Icehouse (1982), conjures images of the Australian landscape in his anthemic song, *Great Southern Land*:

So you look into the land and it will tell you a story...  
Listen to the motion of the wind in the mountains  
Maybe you can hear them talking like I do...

In this book, the fourth in our series, Alistair Stewart looks into the land and tells stories that are unabashedly and unmistakably Australian but that nevertheless demonstrate a more widely applicable principle, succinctly expressed by Andrew Brookes (2006, p. 8):

The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational.

In a previous volume of this series, Brookes (2018) argued that a strict aversion to fatal incidents should be understood as a standard criterion for appraising the defensibility of situated place-responsive curricula (and associated pedagogies) for outdoor and environmental education, that is, of the necessity for outdoor educators to have thorough *local* knowledge and familiarity and to be ‘at home’ in *particular* places in which they practice.

In the subtitle of a previous publication, ‘Attending to Australian Natural History as if It Mattered’, Alistair Stewart (2006) offered another criterion for judging outdoor and environmental education programs, namely, the extent to which Australian natural history informs their design, development and delivery. His article had the distinction of being included in a special 30-year anniversary issue of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (AJEE)* as one of ‘the most significant articles previously published in the journal, in terms of impact, quality and scholarship’ (Cutter-Mackenzie, Gough, Gough, & Whitehouse, 2014, pp. v–vi). The authors of the 13 articles selected for this ‘best of *AJEE*’ issue were invited to provide a short response to, or reflection on, their article as they saw it with hindsight in 2014. Alistair’s (2014, p. 216) response foreshadows the genesis of Extinction Rebellion (XR) as a global environmental movement in 2018:

Have you heard of the White-footed Rabbit Rat, or the Christmas Island Pipistrelle? The White-footed Rabbit Rat was thought to be widespread in south-east Australia but became extinct within three decades of European colonisation (Tzaros, 2005). The Christmas Island Pipistrelle, a micro bat, is probably the most recent species to become extinct in Australia (Flannery, 2013).

Extinction in Australia is not just a historic phenomenon: it remains an ongoing issue for land use, nature conservation, and, I would argue, for education. What educational ideas and methods are employed in Australia to convey the plight of species and landscapes? How have those ideas and methods changed over time? What new ways of thinking and doing are at our disposal to communicate the conditions facing species at risk of extinction, the landscapes in which they live, or the history of species lost? As I have observed elsewhere (Stewart, 2011) for species such as the Speckled Warbler there is significant scientific knowledge within the community regarding what is required to ensure the species survives. The survival of the Speckled Warbler, and many species in similarly precarious circumstances, is likely to be linked to how we re/think, re/create, and enact educational responses to the places where they live.

In the light of the publicity afforded to XR and Greta Thunberg's 'School Strike for the Climate' movement, few readers of this series will need to look beyond current headlines to apprehend the growing acceptance of a widespread view that humanity is on the cusp of natural, cultural and historical crises that involve complexities for which we are poorly prepared. Some see a conservative and controlled state of affairs to be the best action strategy, whereas others are exploring, innovating, experimenting, experiencing, reflecting and laying down many differing paths for knowing, learning, doing, etc.

This book clearly exemplifies the latter disposition. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, p. 25) write, 'the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... and..."' and the figuration of *rhizome* is central to Alistair's project. Alistair also puts a number of other concepts created by Deleuze and Guattari – including *lines of flight*, *deterritorialisation*, *becoming animal*, *assemblage* – to work by demonstrating how such seemingly abstract philosophical concepts can inform (and be informed by) curricular and pedagogical practices that are literally and materially down-to-earth, such as guiding participants in their experiences of canoeing Australia's Murray River or exploring the various ways in which cultural activities in Central Victoria's goldfields during the 1850s have shaped today's landscape.

Readers of this book can expect to be informed not only about Australia's natural~cultural landscape and histories but also to encounter tangible exemplifications of the utility of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual creations. When you encounter *becoming*, *lines of flight*, *deterritorialisation* and *assemblage* in passages concerned with the fate of native animals (Speckled Warbler, Tuan, Murray Cod) and the ecological health of the Murray River itself, they will no longer appear to be abstractions but will, quite literally, come to life.

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**Alistair Stewart** PhD, has worked in Outdoor and Environmental Education at La Trobe University for over two decades. During that time, he has served as Head of the Department and Course Coordinator and has played an active role in the development of the pedagogy and curricula of the OEE programs. In 2014, he was recipient of the national award ‘Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning’ from the *Office of Learning and Teaching*, Australian Federal Government, for innovative approaches to development of place-responsive pedagogy and curricula in the field of outdoor environmental education.

His recent publications include:

Brookes, A., & Stewart, A. (2016). What do citation patterns reveal about the outdoor education field? A snapshot 2000–2013. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 19(2), 12–24.

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