

# Preface

This book is for educators in schools, universities and the community, who are passionate about providing people with the values, knowledge and skills required to face the complex social and environmental challenges that are emerging in contemporary times and will prevail in the future. Socio-ecological approaches have been used successfully for some time in public health, but this book is the first to consider adapting a socio-ecological philosophy and practice to education. This new approach to education considers the personal, social, community, environmental and political dimensions that shape all learning experiences.

It is increasingly difficult to respond to social and environmental challenges from within a singular discipline. Instead, interdisciplinary approaches, forging connections across boundaries and being responsive to community and environmental contexts is an approach more likely to result in success. *The Socio-ecological Educator: A 21st Century Renewal of Physical, Health, Environment and Outdoor Education* presents an argument for a more collaborative and integrated approach within the movement disciplines. These separate subject areas, as they are often presented in schools and learning institutions, will benefit enormously from increased collaboration, cooperation and dialogue. A socio-ecological approach to movement and physical activity will provide students and programme participants with better ways to learn about and respond to real-world issues that impact their lives. Innovations in theory and practice in these subjects already provide rich opportunities to consider what will be required in a socio-ecologically inspired renewal of education. Drawing together these new ways of thinking about and doing sport coaching, physical education, and environmental and outdoor education provides a synergistic and powerful body of work for a futures-oriented approach to curriculum and pedagogy.

In Part I of the book, readers will encounter a discussion and critique of the four foundations of a socio-ecological education. First, the student's lived experience of learning is considered fundamental to a socio-ecological approach. A focus on lived experience reminds educators to educate the whole person where the ultimate aim is to provide a rich and fulfilling encounter with learning. The second foundation is a responsiveness to the learner's context and situation. This reminds the educator that

they are always working with learners and participants in a specific social, cultural and environmental setting. When a young person's learning is responsive to their context, they experience a sense of reconnection to place and the value of building relationships. The third foundation considers what kind of teaching and learning practices are likely to be most successful in a socio-ecologically inspired education that involves movement and physical activity. Experiential pedagogies shift the focus onto the processes rather than the product of learning. The history, values and practices that underpin experiential approaches are examined and considered from a socio-ecological perspective. The final foundation introduces the ultimate aim of socio-ecological educators, which is that learners, through genuine participation in their educational experience, will develop a powerful sense of agency. This sense of agency is the catalyst for young people to engage with educational, environmental and community agendas and issues.

Part II of the book presents a series of case studies that demonstrate the socio-ecological foundations in practice. Readers are taken on a journey through many educational settings in multiple countries. Each case study is presented as a chapter, and they range from early childhood through primary and secondary education to university. Community programmes with both children and young adults are also included. All of the levels of a socio-ecological perspective, from the personal to the political, are explored in depth through real-world examples. These examples take the reader from considering what is required for sport coaches to work with disengaged youth in the UK, to a community building a new school on the Canadian prairie. The story of an alternative approach to outdoor education on the Spey River in Scotland is counterbalanced by a consideration of the social and environmental agenda of adventure education experiences in the USA. Another case study looks at the process of renewal of the Health and Physical Education curriculum in New Zealand, while another goes inside an Australian secondary school to examine how students can gain a sense of agency and control over their learning. These case studies are not intended as perfect working examples of socio-ecological education. Instead, each embodies one or more of the foundations discussed in Part I of the book and requires readers to think across boundaries and to develop their own views about the philosophy and practice of becoming a socio-ecological educator.

The arguments and examples presented in this book do not attempt to provide a simplistic or formulaic model for education. Rather they present discussion, critique and example and aim to provoke and stimulate reflection and debate. Part III consists of the final chapter of the book that concludes with reflections about the socio-ecological journey so far. Despite convention and obstacles, new and alternative approaches to education are constantly emerging. The case studies presented in Part II of the book bare testimony to that fact. What *The Socio-ecological Educator: A 21st Century Renewal of Physical, Health, Environment and Outdoor Education* strives to do is to encourage educators around the globe to build new relationships and forge new learning communities for the benefit of young people.

The Socioecological Educator

A 21st Century Renewal of Physical, Health, Environment  
and Outdoor Education

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2014, XV, 231 p. 8 illus., 6 illus. in color.,

ISBN: 978-94-007-7167-3