

## Book Review

### ***Reclaiming Education for a Landless Generation***

## *Creative Place-based Environmental Education: Children and Schools as Ecopreneurs for Change*

by Jorunn Baranne, Aksel Hugo and Morten Clementson, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, Glos, UK, 2018, 168pp, price £25, ISBN 978-1-907359-73-6

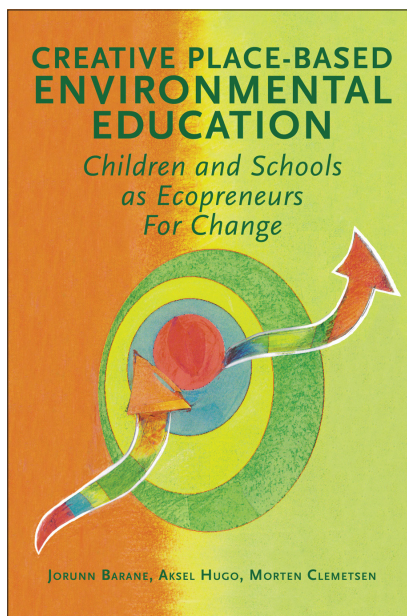
Reviewed by **Roger Duncan**

There is something about Scandinavians. In my experience they often seem to be quieter, calmer and more embodied than many of us who grew up in other European countries. Is this just a national characteristic? Or a result of exposure to the mountains and fjords? It's difficult to be sure.

This book goes some way to giving us an answer, but also points to ways that education, in these uncertain times, might help the young people connect more deeply with nature, giving examples of some ways nature-based education can enrich and enhance both personal and social development.

In the UK, education has long been a political football, relentlessly kicked from one end of the social pitch to the other, shedding skilled teachers and excluded pupils with each kick. An education system which is an unwilling victim of the two gangs of playground bullies, fighting it out in a game of social inclusion against elite privilege, while the teams who play for ecological and social sustainability sleep rough outside the stadium.

The Norwegian education system described in the book under review looks like a completely different social enterprise, more grounded and focused on what types of citizens and social culture we want to see in the future. To this end, the Norwegian primary and lower secondary school education was reformed in 1997, inspired by ideas from the humanistic ideals of the European education philosophy centred on the unfolding



of human potential. The whole school curriculum was restructured into seven areas that focused on how human potential could be enhanced through the following: seeking meaning, creatively knowing, work, collaboration, environmental and nature awareness, and integrity.

However, the social impulse of this book began before that time, with the development of the 'Aurland model' in the 1970s when the new school was built on the site of the old agricultural college. Aurland is a small rural village at the head of the world-famous Sognefjord that connected this small traditional community to the North Sea by one of the longest fjords in Norway. The Aurland project began with the recognition that the traditional connection between land and the people was in decline, like many rural communities

faced with an increasingly globalized world. The project began with the idea of bringing the school pupils back into contact with nature, landscape, culture and community, and started with the establishment of a garden for the kindergarten children.

Outdoor and experiential learning requires quite a different way of working when compared to traditional classroom-based learning, and the authors describe how they developed pedagogical tools that joined up learning tasks within the outdoor work with the place or landscape within which the learning took place. The teachers were then able to make an analysis of learning that occurred in these various different activities. The success and growth of this project led the young pupils beyond

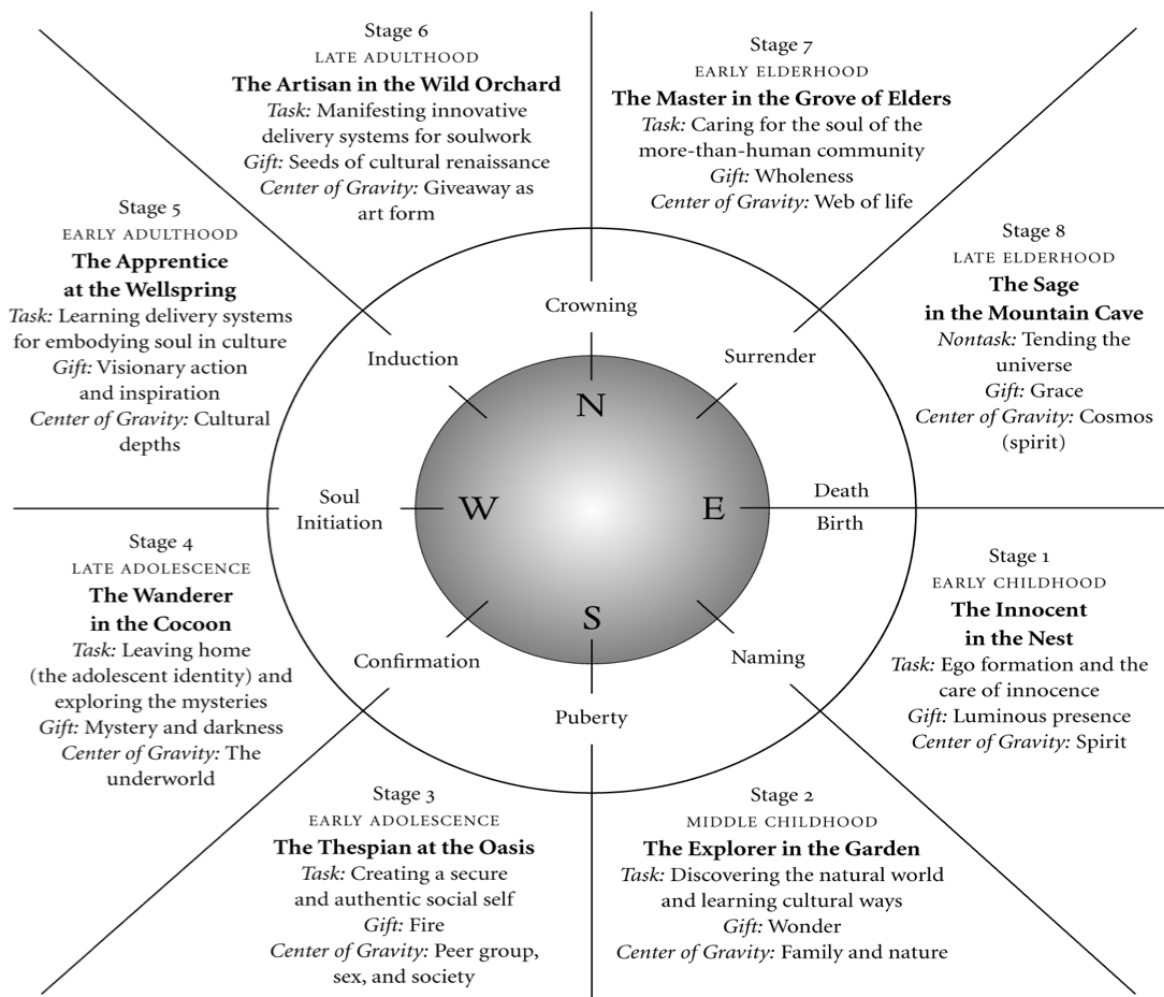
the borders of the kindergarten, and the project expanded along the same lines; and, as the children got older, to include work on a farm, and then out into the local landscape, including the rivers, fjords and mountains. Each of these stages provided an increased learning and environmental awareness for the pupils as they grew up and out into the local community and wider world.

In the second half of the book, the authors go into some of the details of how they have implemented the seven areas of the Norwegian curriculum into their work, and the effect this has had on both the young people and the local Aurland community and culture. They describe how a group of young people in class 3 were encouraged to find experiential meaning in the place they

come from by making a boat journey down the long fjord to the coast, retracing the journey made by an Irish Christian Saint in a story from a thousand years ago.

Stories and regional myths were also used to open the pupils creatively through the use of imagination and imaginative thinking about their sense of place. Human work is also explored in this book, and becomes an integral part of this type of learning process as soon as the pupils step outside of classroom-based learning. The authors use the example of baking, describing how the teenagers were able to transition from the mind-set of passive classroom learning to the more actively embodied, and ultimately more fulfilling, process of learning through meaningful work in the social context of the bakery.

The Eight Soulcentric/ Ecocentric Stages of Human Development  
 From Nature and the Human Soul © Bill Plotkin (New World Library, 2008)  
 soulcraft@animas.org



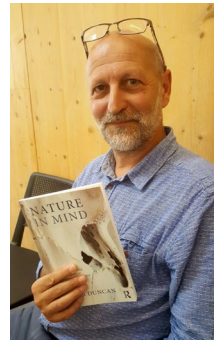
Implicit in the land or place-based learning is the gaining of knowledge from the physical engagement with the world, where the physical materials used in the work are key. Thus, for example, the bread dough becomes the teacher and the teachers moved back to the position of facilitator, or even witness, of the young people's ability to self-reflect on their own changes of perspective.

Once the transition is made from classroom-based learning to the much older, cultural, land- and nature-based learning, it becomes a healing process not only for those involved but also for the community and the local ecosystem. Studies now show that this type of embedded 'bottom-up' learning closely follows the normal path of healthy neural development in children, and can be helpful in healing developmental trauma in adolescents.

Embodied place-based learning cannot really be achieved without cooperation between people, place and environment. This type of approach also engenders an implicit environmental awareness that has a different quality from the gathering of disembodied information, which brings a deep integrity that is very difficult to teach where learning is limited only to the classroom.

This book is an essential practical guide to anyone wishing to free education from its meaningless role as a political and social tool, and to think about what kind of educational experience

we will need for the uncertain future facing young people today. This book gives some practical examples of how this might be achieved, as well as some very useful theoretical models of how to think and achieve affective place-based learning. Although we may not all have access to the kind of landscape accessible to the Aurland project, this book provides a practical and innovative approach to thinking about the kind of practical and experiential education that may well meet the needs of future generations, wherever they are.



**Roger Duncan** is a Systemic Family Psychotherapist and author who has been involved in nature-based practice for 30 years. He studied biology and trained as a Steiner Waldorf teacher before becoming a psychotherapist, and was one of the pioneer tutors of the Ruskin Mill Education Trust in Nailsworth, Gloucestershire. Roger currently works within the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in the NHS and in private practice with individuals, families and organizations. His book *Nature in Mind: Systemic Thinking and Imagination in Ecopsychology and Mental Health* was published by Routledge in July 2018.