

Book Review:

Tim Ingold (ed.), *Knowing from the Inside: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments with Matters of Pedagogy*

(Bloomsbury Alternative | Education, 2022)

268 pp, ISBN: 978-1-350-21714-0

RRP £81.00 (hardback), £64.80 (e-book)

Review by Anne Pirrie*

Cross-disciplinary perspectives are baked into this rich and stimulating book. It is inspirational in the sense that it represents a way of actively and energetically taking things in and exploring them from the inside out. It originated from a research project entitled *Knowing from the Inside: Anthropology, Art, Education and Design (KFI)*, based at the University of Aberdeen between 2013 and 2018. The fundamental premise explored in the eleven chapters that comprise this edited volume is that knowledge grows from practical and observational engagement with the world around us, from thinking *with, from* and *through*, not just *about*, beings and things. In more conventional academic practice, knowledge is generally viewed

as emerging from encounters between minds that are already furnished with a vast array of concepts and theories, and a material world that is populated with objects.

The conceptual richness, the generous spirit and gracious humanity of the book are a testament to the many encounters, productive entanglements and conversations that have gathered pace between the authors and others in the years since the inception of KFI. These conversations extended beyond pedagogy, although the latter is the focus of this volume. Matters of pedagogy are viewed from the varying perspectives of contributors who are practitioners of anthropology, art, architecture, drama, mathematics, education and philosophy. The emphasis throughout is on the heuristic, on *knowing from the inside*, in the company of others from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and at different stages in their lives and careers. All the contributors privilege remaining immersed in the social and material fabric of the world. The basic premise that runs through the volume is that learning is an embodied, experimental and uncertain process that opens up paths of discovery. It is not (merely) a carefully regulated process that leads to a pre-determined outcome. Education is a life-enhancing, companionable process rather than a

form of service provision. It is based upon mutual trust rather than the mere fulfilment of contractual obligations.

The use of the term 'cross-disciplinary' signals a readiness to engage in 'conversations of life' in a manner that is sensitive to differences in personal experience. Among other things, this challenges the celebration of individual achievement and the strictures of highly regulated programmes of professional education. As such, cross-disciplinary inquiry is viewed as distinct from what is referred to as 'interdisciplinarity' within the traditional academic model of knowledge production. The latter operates on a transcendent, free-floating and radically disembodied plane, dividing the academy from other activities that take place in the world and reinforcing traditional boundaries between disciplines. In contrast, one of the contributions presents an account of a symposium that brought practitioners in the craft of basket weaving together with academic scholars, providing an opportunity to explore the interactions between different forcefields of practice. The emphasis throughout is on the reciprocal sharing of enthusiasm. Several of the contributions emerged from residential gatherings that took place outdoors as well as indoors, from an arts-based environmental education project to walks through a deserted university campus at

the height of the pandemic. Common to all the contributions is an emphasis on collaboration and co-operation rather than competition; challenging orthodoxies; the corporeal turn; the haptic; unlearning rather than learning; sensibility rather than pure cognition; the productive co-existence of making and thinking; and resistance to various manifestations of the 'tight-fit-functionalism' that pervades professional education, from architecture to school teaching. Movement often plays a role too, as in the case of the movement workshops that emerged from a collaboration between a dance artist and a scholar. The emphasis on challenging the separation between intellect and practical skills and the process of making are encapsulated in the famous dictum of the Swiss educational reformer Wilhelm Pestalozzi (1746-1827) namely, that 'head, hand and heart' are all implicated in the learning process. The overall message is that the business of 'putting the (he)art back into (Art) schools' is more urgent than ever (an expression attributed to the artist-educator David Harding, co-founder of the environmental art course at Glasgow School of Art).

This is all well and good. Some of it is very good indeed. And yet, and yet...

Perhaps inevitably, given its origins in the KFI project detailed above, the book leans heavily on the work of Tim Ingold and Jan Masschelein, and to a lesser extent Gert Biesta. These authors have mounted a sustained critique of the 'instrumental harnessing of education to employability and of art to expressivity', to cite one of the authors in this collection. All of them have made an invaluable contribution to the field of (anthropology in) education over several decades. Paradoxically, therein lies the problem. (And it does not reside solely in the fact that they are all men.) How do we 'decolonize pedagogy' (the avowed intention of one of the contributors, and one that is implicitly shared by other contributors) if we continue to stand on the shoulders of giants? This lends a peculiar irony to the golden thread that runs through the collection, namely that 'questions of epistemology are inextricable from ontological ones.'

My second misgiving is more prosaic, in the literal sense. It concerns the strictures of conventional academic publishing. These dictate that the delightful, chaotic commensality of the 'KFI kitchen', with its unforgettable shared moments of transformation, is distilled into eleven discrete chapters, each with a separate list of references. How do we resist the siren call of established communities of

practice? How do we ward off the appeal of what we already know and embrace what we don't? How do we counter the forces that drive us to support an academic publishing industry that does not serve our needs or respect our pockets? In short, it appears that the tone and form of the content and the tone and form of the book are out of step. I stress that this is a minor cavil, given the extent to which the time is out of joint. The latter is an issue to which the book does full justice.

There are no easy answers to the questions raised above. One thing is clear, and it seems likely that the contributors to this rather special book would agree. We need to stay in the kitchen and keep stoking the fire.

***Anne Pirrie** is a Reader in Education at the University of the West of Scotland. Formerly a contract researcher, Anne is a generalist with an eye for the particular. Her recent book *Virtue and the Quiet Art of Scholarship: reclaiming the university* (2019) explores the conditions for human flourishing in an environment blighted by managerialism. She considers her role as a teacher in the same terms as Nan Shepherd (1893-1981), the author of *The Living Mountain*: to try to prevent a

The logo for PESGB, consisting of the lowercase letters 'pesgb' in a white, sans-serif font, centered within a solid teal square.

few of the students who pass through the institution from conforming altogether to the approved pattern.