

*Book Review*

*From Bricolage to Métissage:  
Rethinking Intercultural Approaches  
to Indigenous Environmental Education and Research*

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**Abstract:**

Gregory Lowan-Trudeau's book *From Bricolage to Métissage: Rethinking Intercultural Approaches to Indigenous Environmental Education and Research* offers insights into métissage as a research methodology and explores issues of identity and ecology. His book provides a readily accessible understanding of who the Métis people in Canada are, and how taking what he calls *the spirit of métissage*, an approach which weaves multiple cultural perspectives together, can lead to greater and deeper understandings. This practice can also be built into teaching practices and be used to solve problems in various fields. The chapters which introduce Lowan-Trudeau's research participants feel somewhat disjointed with the rest of the text, but provide various perspectives which will be of interest to those working in environmental education.

### Book Review

Lowan-Trudeau, G. (2015). *From bricolage to métissage: Rethinking intercultural approaches to indigenous environmental education and research*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Gregory Lowan-Trudeau's *From Bricolage to Métissage* offers insights into identity, methodology and ecology without feeling like a heavy academic text. For the most part, the book flows from discussion point to discussion point in a way that mimics Lowan-Trudeau's discussion around *métissage*, a practice that sees multiple strands of ideas interwoven in such a way that the various parts are indistinguishable. He not only offers insights from his and others' perspectives as to how a worldview which adopts both Western and Indigenous sensibilities can benefit the areas of ecology, research, and teaching practices, but also invites the reader to engage in discussions around identity and place. He explores what it means to be Métis in Canada and how all Canadians can benefit from reflecting on what it means to be Canadian and how we broach environmental issues. This book, based on the work done in his dissertation and post-dissertation research, provides the reader with deep discussions of "Two- and Three-Eyed seeing" (p. 102) and shares intercultural perspectives of ecology in Canada. Particular attention is paid to how intercultural environmental educators identify themselves in the milieu of ecology in Canada, explore if their perspectives could change how ecology is addressed in a Canadian context, and considers the impacts that these approaches can have on learning.

Lowan-Trudeau begins by situating his exploration of *métissage* through two real-world examples of Indigenous and Western practices uniting to deal with environmental issues. He uses the communities of the Saddle Lake First Nation in Alberta and the T'Sou-ke First Nation on Vancouver Island in British Columbia as examples of non-invasive technology being used to improve the lives of their people without damaging the environment (p. 2). These examples demonstrate how Indigenous sensibilities around environmental issues can shape how technology is used to assist in environmental cleanup, to limit the carbon footprint of communities and, as a narrative device, helps to set the stage for the text.

The first chapter of the book outlines Lowan-Trudeau's positionality as a Métis-Canadian of "Indigenous and European ancestry" (p. 7). In this chapter, he considers what it means to be Canadian and what separates Canadians' ecological identity/identities from other countries. It is here that Lowan-Trudeau begins to weave his personal discussions of identity and Canadian national identity with others' views around the same topics in order to move the text from one that is reflective to reflexive in nature. Lowan-Trudeau uses this technique throughout the text, sometimes with more grace than others. It works particularly well in this chapter as he moves his discussion to Saul's (2008) idea that Canada is a Métis nation whose identity is tied to the Indigenous communities in which it was born (p. 8). Lowan-Trudeau weaves his personal perspectives on identity with Saul's discussion of national identity and connects it to his discussion around Canadians' struggle to find their national identity. He writes that Canadians believe that the environment is important while in reality the country has frequently ranked as "the least environmentally progressive nation in the world" (p13). If Canadians' national identity is unclear, as he indicates, it is not surprising that there is a disconnect between environmental beliefs and practices. This chapter concludes by framing his research questions that will be addressed in the remainder of the text where he explores intercultural identity, ecology, and how

adopting both Western and Indigenous perspectives could provide benefits beyond Canadian borders.

The second chapter primarily focuses on the concept of *métissage* as a methodology and outlines the hybrid methodology that Lowan-Trudeau created which melds aspects of interpretive research methodologies and narrative inquiry. Lowan-Trudeau demonstrates how bricolage and *métissage* differ and how he used *métissage* as a methodology in his research. Berry's (2006) definition of bricolage - where pieces of theory, method and interpretation are combined through a "calculated cobbling together" (p. 18) - was used as a starting point to explain how the pieces naturally blended together in his process to form a *métissage* (which he likens to the Métis flag which incorporates an infinity symbol). The recurring theme of blending where "parts are ultimately indivisible" (p. 20) gives greater depth to his subsequent discussions around ecology from a Métis space which uses both Indigenous and Western perspectives to make decisions and view the world. While the chapter could not be seen as a guide to creating a *métissage*, it contributes to the discussion around *métissage* as a research methodology through the discussion of its origins as a method and provides an exemplar for how this methodology can be employed by others.

The third chapter focuses on exploring what a Métis worldview is and what Métis space means. It focuses on Métis identity in Canada, from origins of the term to how it is being used today to who the Métis people are in Canada. Much to his credit, Lowan-Trudeau does not limit his discussion of the term to a Canadian context, but also explores how the concept applies to people from other nations who embody different cultural and ancestral backgrounds. This chapter is especially impressive as Lowan-Trudeau identifies what a third or Métis space would be, with examples, and cautions against an adoption of a Métis worldview as it is complex and difficult to define (as is shown by the interwoven discussions around Métis identity). He instead champions for an understanding of the "spirit of *métissage*" (p. 31) which is simultaneously open to multi-perspectives from multiple cultures which can come together to create greater understandings. This is the strongest chapter of the text as it provides in-depth discussions of how Western and Indigenous perspectives can come together in ways that are critical, responsible, and practical in addressing problems.

In Chapter Four, Lowan-Trudeau discusses the challenges of blending Indigenous and Western perspectives and discusses Cajete's (2001) concept of "split head" (p. 55) where a person can feel like they are half in one culture and half in another. He discusses how he believes elements of both cultures can co-exist and gives examples of ecological programs which unite the two perspectives, melding Western ways of knowing with Indigenous ways of knowing, and how those programs are effective in teaching students. This discussion moves into Chapter Five which sees a shift in the narrative style that Lowan-Trudeau had adopted in the first half of the text. Here, he introduces the reader to Lowan-Trudeau's original research participants made up of ten environmental educators from multiple backgrounds. In this chapter, the participants share their thoughts on their identities as intercultural educators and if they believe that Indigenous and Western ways could and should be united or if they should remain separate. This chapter will be of significant interest to those teaching ecology or who wish to include more environmental studies in their curriculum. The perspectives range from people of Indigenous and Métis descent to those of mixed-European, Japanese, and Danish heritage and gives greater depth to the previous discussions around identity. The chapter signals a change in the text as Lowan-Trudeau refers back to their stories, adding another layer to the braided chapters. While it should be noted that this chapter has a great deal of merit, this particular chapter

did not feel as interwoven as the previous perspectives and may have worked better had it continued with Lowan-Trudeau's narration and commentary.

Chapter Six sees Lowan-Trudeau sharing the stories of those from outside of Canada and how they view ecology. From a place of the Métis spirit, the chapter focuses on the stories that derived from "[t]hree pilot interviews employing a semi-structured format [that] were conducted with first-generation adults who were born elsewhere, but had experienced some kind of formal schooling in Canada" (p. 103). This chapter illustrates how those from outside of Canada come to the country with additional perspectives that once interwoven with Indigenous and Western perspectives can provide more layers to the complexity of Canadian ecological identity and how Canadians go about dealing with environmental challenges. This chapter gives the book greater depth, but could have been elaborated and interwoven more strongly with the previous chapters. The perspectives of relative newcomers to Canada allows those involved in the conversations around Canadian ecology to step back for a moment and I would have liked to have read more about "three-eyed seeing" (p. 102) and how it can benefit Canadians, but as with the chapter before felt like it could have been integrated with the previous chapter as a stand-alone piece or appendices.

The seventh chapter serves as a reminder that there is no clear answer to the on-going debate around ecological *métissage*, but that an integration of Indigenous and Western perspectives is currently happening. This chapter brings back the voices of the participants who took part in Lowan-Trudeau's two studies. While reading the various perspectives of the participants lends itself well in previous chapters, I once again felt myself longing for the earlier braiding of Lowan-Trudeau's perspectives, historical facts, and citations from well-explored texts. The chapter indicates that there is progress occurring, the stories from the participants confirmed that notion, but the chapter ended with some ambiguity around the complexity of integrating different perspectives and embracing the spirit of *métissage*. In a sense, it leaves the reader with optimism that this notion of multiple perspectives can permeate into the field of Canadian ecology and help to develop Canadian's identity in this regard, but it also leaves one with some uncertainty for the future of this concept.

Despite the uncertainty at the close of the seventh chapter, the final chapter reminds the reader that people across Canada are uniting to defend the environment and are seeking ways to incorporate Indigenous ways to knowing into what has been seen as predominantly Western science-based areas such as ecology. The chapter summarizes the successes of the studies and the book, which delved more deeply into *métissage* as a methodology and made affective arguments around two and three-eyed seeing. It also puts out a call for continued research on Aboriginal and Indigenous perspectives in places outside of Canada so that all cultures may learn from each other.

After reflecting on the merits of the text, I felt that the opening chapters of the text were much more engaging than the latter chapters. While I appreciate the perspectives of those engaging in cross- or intercultural ecology in Canada, I felt like that particular strand was not woven in as strongly as the other facets of the text and could stand as standalone texts. This one aspect does not take away from the text as a whole and those chapters will provide insights for those who are creating curriculum and working in environmental education. The elements that I found the most appealing in this text were the discussions around identity and how cultural identity can and should be integrated into ecology, research, and education. Lowan-Trudeau's discussions around Métis identity, Canadian identity and how the *spirit of métissage* can be harnessed to provide greater meaning and ways of teaching and knowing.

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This book offers in-depth discussions that will appeal to a wide audience. It adds a great deal to the discussions around métissage as a methodology and how it can be integrated into teaching and learning practices. It also contributes to the discussions around Canadian ecological identity and amalgamating perspectives to achieve more for the greater good. Finally, the text speaks to Métis identity and Canadian identity, calling on the reader to become reflective and reflexive in their research and teaching practices. The text makes a powerful call to educators, curriculum developers, and researchers to critically expand their perspectives and to consider what moving outside of Western sensibilities can do for the betterment of students in particular and society in general.

## **References**

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