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**Review: *Earth in Mind:  
On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect***

**By David W. Orr**

Reviewed by [Sandra Meredith](#)  
*Centre for Research in Innovation Management*

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Orr, David W. *EARTH IN MIND: ON EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT AND THE HUMAN PROSPECT*, Washington DC.: Island Press 1994. 213 pp. US \$16.95 Paper ISBN: 1-55963-259-X. Recycled, acid-free paper.

Just as I was struggling to write a conference paper on the subject of the greening of higher education, attempting to strike a radical note, *EARTH IN MIND: ON EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT AND THE HUMAN PROSPECT* appeared on my desk. I had already established a link between education and the future of the global environment, but I was having difficulty finding language strong enough to describe the radical changes I think are necessary in today's learning systems. Fortunately, David Orr's book struck fearlessly at the core of the issues and supplied me with the language I needed.

The first part of *EARTH IN MIND* assumes an ecological perspective and challenges the conventional wisdom that all education is good. Each piece in this set of essays highlights different aspects of education. The first question posed is 'what is education for'? Orr sees it as "no guarantee of decency, prudence, or wisdom" (8), dispelling the myth that with enough knowledge and technology, we can 'manage planet earth.' Recognizing that higher education has sought to extend human domination of the natural world is the first step to changing its direction. According to Orr, it is better to "reshape ourselves to fit a finite planet than to attempt to reshape the planet to fit our infinite wants " (9).

Orr's comparison of 'formal education' to the notion of 'calling' in the example of Albert Speer and Aldo Leopold underscores the dangers inherent in certain educational systems. Speer's apolitical education, unlinked to values, direction, or a questioning of the order of things, left him defenseless against Nazi propaganda. In contrast, Leopold's scientific education, founded on his "calling" to appreciate nature and a profound values system, provided him with a purposeful, productive career.

Part two, "First Principles," belies the complexity of the issues under discussion. In his consideration of the assumptions underlying learning processes, Orr defies the conventional scientific approach of 'objectivity at all costs.' Instead, he focuses on factors such as love, intelligence, virtue, and judgement as necessary for developing our ability to view the human condition in its widest possible context.

Part three of EARTH IN MIND examines the rethinking of current educational systems. Here the author contends that "the standard measures for educational quality will have to be changed to account for how institutions and their graduates affect the biotic world"(87). In support of such a contention, the essays discuss matters of institutional standards, the disciplinary organization of learning, curriculum, and academic architecture.

Part four, entitled Destinations, questions the destiny of our children's education and wonders what type of world they will inherit. The essays suggest an alternative destiny exists. In Orr's words, "something tugs at us that is not explained in theories of rational choice, self-interest and economic maximization" (129). As highly-evolved mammals, we are of the earth (204), but the civilization we have built-up denies our innate biophilia.

The power of this book is that Orr has captured a view of the world that has not been imposed upon us as compartmentalized disciplines. He demonstrates how each diverse area of science has relevance to others. Our educational systems' heavy reliance on scientific principles and emotional detachment has led to some distorted notions of what education should offer. If this book were available to educationalists around the world, perhaps it would sow some seeds of change. My fear is that without massive support, such changes in education will not be achieved for many generations, and the environmental consequences will be disastrous.

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